



Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation: Final Report of the Project

A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation 2014

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www.uws.edu.au/latstandards



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www.uws.edu.au/latstandards

Referencing details:

This report may be referenced as follows:
Krause, K., Scott, G., Aubin, K., Alexander, H., Angelo, T., Campbell, S., Carroll, M., Deane, E., Nulty, D., Pattison, P., Probert, B., Sachs, J., Solomonides, I., Vaughan, S. (2013). *Assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university peer review and moderation*. Available online: www.uws.edu.au/latstandards.

1. Note: Griffith University was the lead institution in Year 1. The Project Leader moved to UWS in October 2011 when the institutional leadership was transferred to UWS, as negotiated with the institutions and OLT.

Funding for the production of this report has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Acknowledgments



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2014

ISBN-978-1-74361-253-8 [PRINT]
ISBN-978-1-74361-254-5 [PDF]
ISBN-978-1-74361-255-2 [DOCX]

The project team would like to thank the many colleagues and universities who contributed to the project in a range of ways.

Many thanks to our university project partners:



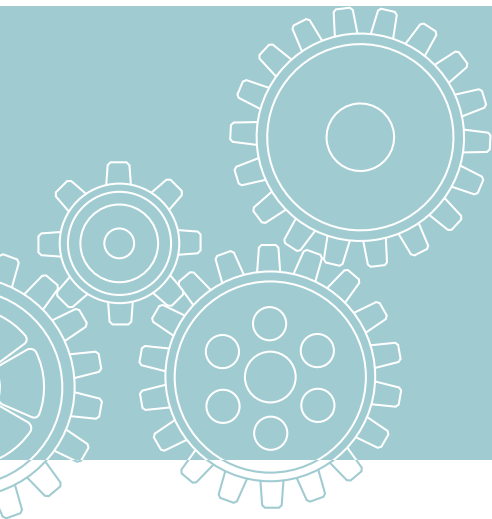
On behalf of the project team, we acknowledge the invaluable work of our Project Steering Committee: Emeritus Professor Christine Ewan, Dr Peter Ewell (National Council for Higher Education Management Systems, USA), Associate Professor Mark Freeman (University of Sydney), Mr Ian Hawke (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency) and Professor Royce Sadler (University of Queensland).

Special thanks go to our evaluator and critical friend, Emeritus Professor Adrian Lee, for his wise advice and commitment to supporting the project team and its work.

During the course of the project we have benefited from the expertise and advice of many colleagues across the sector. In particular, we gratefully recognise the contributions and partnerships of the following people: Dr Sara Booth (University of Tasmania), Professor Sally Kift (James Cook University), Dr Brad Millard (Queensland University of Technology), Ms Heather Sainsbury (Deakin University), Dr Anna Wilson (The Australian University) and Ms Lynn Woodley (University of Wollongong).

We express our deep gratitude to our academic colleagues who participated in the project and who contributed their time, disciplinary expertise and suggestions for improvement of the methodology piloted in this project. This project was initiated out of a strong commitment to, and belief in, the fundamental value of academic judgements about standards within disciplinary contexts. Throughout the project we have received invaluable advice, questions and suggestions from academic colleagues involved in the project.

Finally, we acknowledge with gratitude the support of the Office for Learning and Teaching in the Australian Government Department of Education.



List of acronyms used

AACSB	Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business
ACBD	Australian Council of Business Deans
ACER	Australian Council of Educational Research
ACPET	Australian Council of Private Education and Training
AHELO	Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council (now OLT)
ANU	Australian National University
AMA	Achievement Matters
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ATN	Australian Technology Network
AUQAA	Australian University Quality Assurance Agency
CAUL	Council of Australian University Librarians
CAUDIT	Council of Australian University Directors of Information Technology
CADAD	Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development
CDU	Charles Darwin University
CHERD	Centre for Higher Education Research Development (UK)
CLA	Collegiate Learning Assessment
CLO	Curriculum learning outcomes
COPHE	Council of Private Higher Education
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
Go8	Group of Eight (Universities)
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council of England
IAU	International Association of Universities
IRUA	Innovative Research Universities Australia
JCU	James Cook University
L&T	Learning and teaching
LaTS	Learning and Teaching Standards
LO	Learning outcomes
LTU	La Trobe University
MQ	Macquarie University
NCHEM	National Centre for Higher Education Management (USA)
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OLT	Office for Learning and Teaching
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency (UK)
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
QVS	Quality Verification of Standards
SLOs	Student learning outcomes
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TLO	Threshold learning outcome
UA	Universities Australia
UQ	University of Queensland
UTAS	University of Tasmania
UWS	University of Western Sydney

Abstract

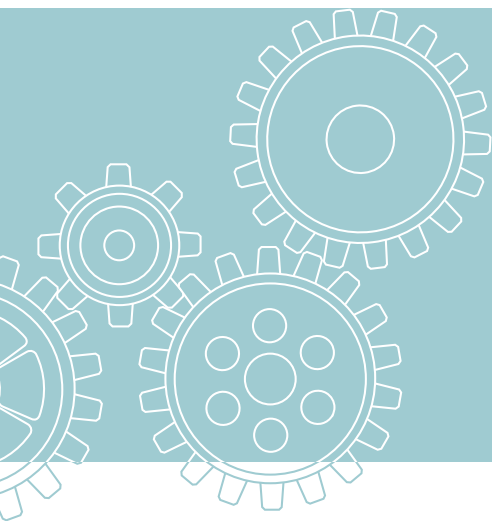
Australian higher education requires a relevant and feasible way to assure the validity, reliability and comparability of assessment outcomes and achievement standards in equivalent university programs, subjects/units of study across the nation. This project addresses the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) imperative to demonstrate sector-level, self-regulated, robust approaches for assuring quality and standards and highlights the role of peer review.

The project tested an inter-institutional blind peer review methodology using a broad, representative range of university partners. In the approach, groups of academics teaching equivalent units of study in two partner universities undertook a blind review of both the assessment inputs (subject outlines, assessment tasks and marking criteria) and assessment outcomes (de-identified samples of assessment at different grade levels) from a partner university teaching a similar final year subject.

The project has successfully achieved its aim of developing a validated, robust approach for assuring subject achievement standards through inter-university moderation in common final year subjects across disciplines. The project not only developed a viable approach to inter-institutional moderation of assessment inputs and outcomes but also found high levels of broad agreement amongst peer reviewers on assessment standards and grading in 12 discipline areas, thus establishing that the process used is a powerful professional development tool in its own right. Key implementation strategies have also been identified to enable institutions interested in using the approach to adopt or adapt it sustainably and effectively.

The project has delivered: a user guide; a peer review template; a sample policy for inter-institutional peer review; guidelines on how best to respond to areas for improvement identified through the peer reviewer process; strategies for publishing selected inter-institutional peer review outcomes; and recommendations on how to improve national and institutional policy and practice. The project website and all information and resources related to the project is available at: www.uws.edu.au/latstandards.¹

1. During the course of this project the terms 'learning standards' (referring to outcomes) and 'teaching standards' (referring to inputs or processes) gained prominence in Australian higher education. This terminology is reflected in the name of the project URL and is used from time to time in this report.



Executive summary

This report documents the outcomes of a sector-wide project focused on assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation supported by the Australian Government's Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT).

Need and rationale

Australian higher education requires a relevant and feasible way to assure the validity, reliability and comparability of assessment outcomes and learning standards in equivalent university programs across the nation. This project addresses this need. It builds on the higher education tradition of robust peer review and tackles the associated Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) imperative to demonstrate sector-level, self-regulated, robust approaches for assuring quality and standards.

The specific rationale for this project is threefold:

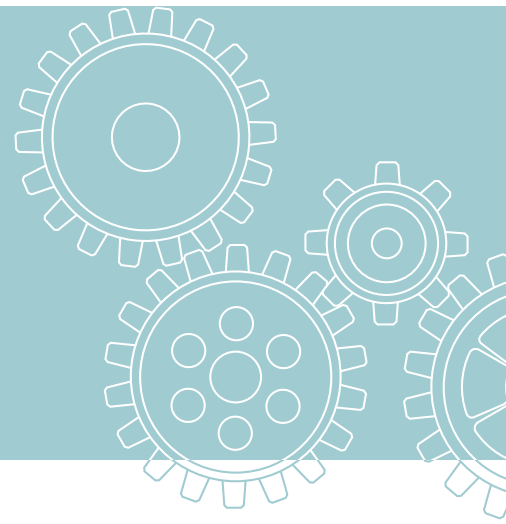
- a. It addresses ethical and educational imperatives to ensure that Australian universities have demonstrably effective processes in place to assure the quality and comparability of assessment processes and outcomes for students across the sector.
- b. It supports social and economic imperatives associated with demonstrating to key stakeholders, such as industry and community members, that universities have robust approaches for assuring assessment quality and standards that are aligned to agreed, whole-of-program graduate capabilities and learning outcomes.
- c. It takes account of the current higher education policy and regulatory environment which requires the sector to make explicit its processes for assuring the quality of assessment processes and outcomes through a combination of institution-level systems and policies, as well as inter-institutional benchmarking and assessment validation practices. Explication of this kind adds value to the Australian tertiary sector, both nationally and internationally, as student mobility increases and as credit transfer arrangements in the context of processes such as Bologna become increasingly important.

Approach

This 'proof of concept' project tested an inter-institutional blind peer review methodology developed earlier by the University of Western Sydney (UWS) with a wide and representative range of university partners. In the approach, groups of academic staff undertook a blind review of both the assessment inputs (subject outlines, assessment tasks and marking criteria) and assessment outcomes (de-identified samples of assessment at different grade levels) of equivalent final year units in two partner universities.

Eleven Australian Universities representative of the sector were involved in the project with extensive feedback nationally and internationally on what emerged from a wide range of additional higher education institutions, academics and leaders. Each partner university identified common final year subjects covering twelve discipline areas. They then provided the subject outline, assessment tasks, marking guides and a de-identified sample of a fail, pass, credit and distinction assessment item in the subject to a trained review group of colleagues in two partner universities teaching a similar final year subject. The review groups did not know the universities from which the assessment inputs and outcomes came and the assessment samples were cleaned of all comments and grades. The process unfolded so that all partners both provided assessment materials for review and undertook a blind review on two partners' materials.

The project team was particularly interested to refine the original UWS pilot project guidelines and to determine if, through a process of action research and user-centred design, the whole approach was seen by those who participated to be both a feasible and constructive way in which to assure comparable standards in common assessment areas across the sector whilst maintaining sector diversity and the higher education tradition of peer review.



Outcomes

The project has successfully achieved its aim of developing a validated, robust approach for assuring subject achievement standards through inter-university peer review and moderation in common final year subjects across disciplines. It has also identified a feasible way to assure program achievement standards through the use of final year subjects, building on the OLT (formerly Australian Learning and Teaching Council) discipline standards; producing a range of practical, user-tested resources, support materials and procedures to enable others interested in the approach to implement it consistently and effectively.

Specifically it has established:

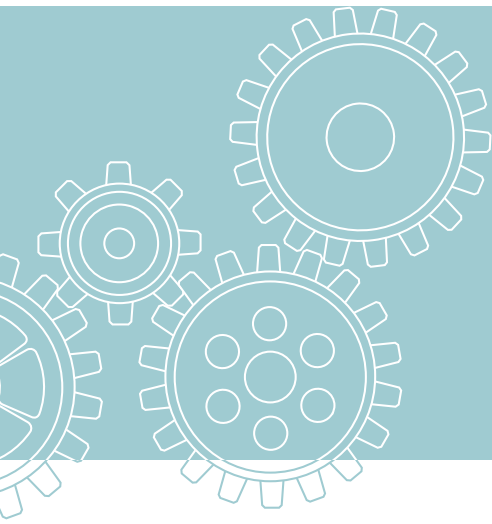
- That it is feasible to develop a robust and validated inter-institutional peer review and moderation strategy that contributes to the need for universities to demonstrate self-regulated approaches for monitoring and maintaining standards across disciplines.
- That general consensus can be reached on assessment input (e.g., assessment focus, criteria, valid assessment tasks and guidelines) and outcome standards (i.e., student achievement in subject-level assessment as evidenced in assessment samples) in a comparable final year subject being taught in different universities.
- The processes and resources necessary to engage academic staff in final year subject level peer review and moderation across universities and disciplines.
- The nature of disciplinary and institutional differences in processes for managing inter-institutional moderation at subject level and the implications for accommodating such diversity in ongoing implementation.
- An initial, feasible way to assure and test program level assessment outcomes on the basis of final year and capstone subjects across discipline areas.

Importantly, the project has identified broad agreement among peer reviewers from a range of university types on the comparability and standards of the assessment inputs being used in common units of study and on the grading of the assessment outputs, particularly concerning the assessment judgements made about ‘threshold’ (Pass/Fail) grades.

Deliverables and dissemination

The project has produced the following, user-tested resources

- a website – www.uws.edu.au/latstandards – which includes all of the user-tested materials produced by the project;
- moderation guides, step-by-step strategies and user guidelines for reviewing subject-level assessment quality and practices in the context of program-level outcomes and standards;
- recommendations on how to improve institutional and national policy and practice;
- suggestions on capacity building for academic staff;
- investigation of the potential to use IT-enabled systems to gather, discuss and review sample assessment items to assist in the standards-setting process and capacity-building for academic staff across disciplines;
- evaluation of user views on the utility, feasibility and validity of the proposed inter-institutional moderation model in assuring quality in different fields of education. Key motivators have been explored through a survey of participants including their views about the connection between inter-institutional moderation activities and leadership in learning and teaching;

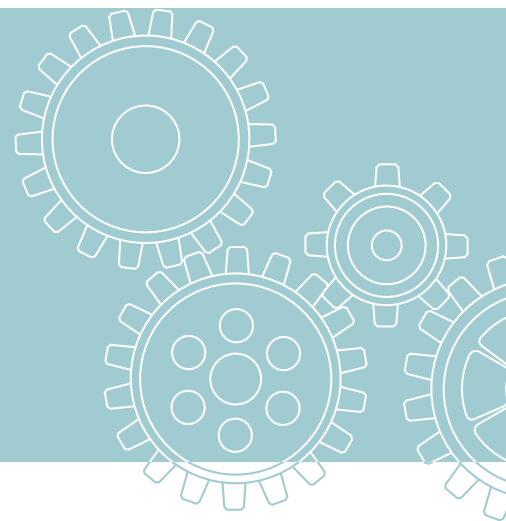


- a report on key findings, with recommendations for systemic implementation. This report includes an overall framework within which to locate this project and shows how it links to and complements parallel projects and initiatives including OLT-funded projects, TEQSA developments, institutional consortia moderation activities and Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) developments;
- two national Assessment Quality and Standards (AQS) Summits, involving senior university leaders, state and national government policy makers, OLT, Australian Universities Quality Assurance Agency (AUQAA) and AUQA/TEQSA representatives, school and vocational education and training (VET) representatives. The AQS Summits discussed the following elements:
 - models for assuring quality and standards in assessment and program-level outcomes across the sector;
 - issues relating to operationalising these models and their implications for cross-sectoral collaborations; and disseminating examples of good practice.

Referencing details

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Recommendations



Based on the findings and outcomes of this project, it is recommended that:

1. The Chair of Australia's Higher Education (HE) Standards Panel advocate for the use of the project's 'blind' peer review methodology as a means to efficiently monitor and objectively assure the quality and comparability of disciplinary learning and assessment standards across Australia's HE system.
2. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) endorse the process tested in this study as an efficient and effective way in which to externally assure the assessment standards of Australian higher education at the disciplinary, subject and, over time, the institutional level; further, that this endorsement apply to both self-accrediting and non self-accrediting institutions of higher education.
3. The Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) create a position for a National Assessment Quality and Standards Fellow/Advisor to
 - a. assist the HE sector to establish the policy and practice frameworks to embed inter-institutional peer review of teaching and learning standards and
 - b. identify and disseminate the most effective assessment practices identified through peer review in each professional or disciplinary area.
4. Higher education providers collaborate with peak disciplinary and professional bodies, under the coordination of the proposed OLT Advisor/Fellow (see Recommendation 3) to ensure that academic staff develop skills in articulating and using the full range of reference points now available for the purpose of monitoring and assuring learning outcome standards and relevance.
5. Higher education providers ensure that their assessment policies and quality frameworks are reviewed to include requirements for regular inter-institutional peer review of standards for final year undergraduate units, including review of unit inputs and assessment; further that priority be given to ensuring that academic staff, including sessional staff, have appropriate professional development to normalise consensus moderation and calibration activities within academic departments.
6. Higher education providers review academic workload policies and role statements for academic staff with teaching, coordination and assessment responsibilities to reflect expectations regarding regular involvement in consensus moderation and calibration activities.
7. The project team liaise with the OLT and experts across the sector to discuss establishing a national resource bank of validated assessment items by discipline, based on positive ratings from peer reviewers involved in peer review activities across the sector, that could be used as a resource by academics.
8. Further investigation be undertaken to determine if the use of final year capstone units of study and assessment tasks are a valid and feasible way to evaluate graduating students' capability to integrate and appropriately apply to real world problems what they have learned in individual units of study in their selected discipline or profession.

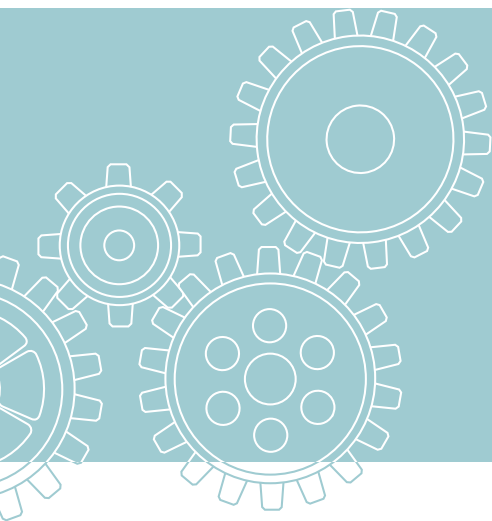


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Chapter 1

Introduction

This project has been developed within a context of increasing attention being given to the assurance of standards in higher education both in Australia and internationally. Much work has been undertaken in recent years in Australia and globally in the area of defining and articulating standards, with implications for both policy and practice (Krause, Barrie, & Scott, 2012). Consistent with international trends, in March 2013 Australia's National Higher Education Standards Panel (2013) gave specific focus to Learning Outcome Standards in a sector discussion paper.

For the past few years there has been rising global interest in academic quality and the development of valid indicators.

1.1 Background

For the past few years there has been rising global interest in academic quality and the development of valid indicators. Although Learning and Teaching quality tracking systems give focus to student feedback and satisfaction surveys, including self-reported learning outcomes, their relationship to educational outcomes is questionable (Deane & Krause, 2012).

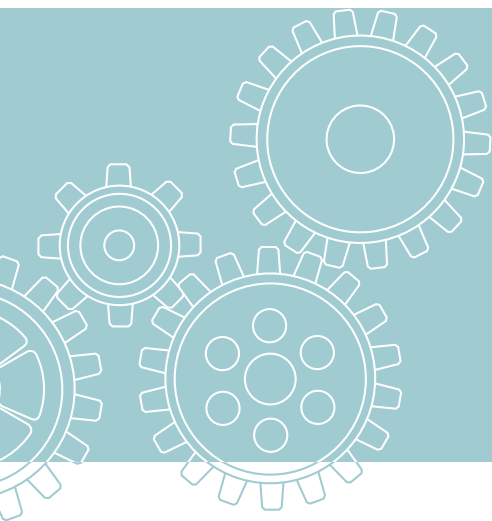
For many years attention has been given to proxy measures of the quality of graduate outcomes like graduation rates, employability and success in further higher education study. However, little attention has been given to the standards and quality of assessment itself. More recently though interest has been expressed in the exit testing of graduates. In particular, attention has turned to the more complex and nuanced area of determining and evidencing the learning outcomes of final year undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students where there is typically no assessment of the graduating student's ability to integrate and apply what has been learned in individual subjects to the real-world, multi-dimensional problems about to be faced in his/her professional or disciplinary career (Deane & Krause, 2012).

Internationally, this new focus on quality, validity measurements and standards of learning outcomes is evident in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) project. In the two program areas, engineering and economics, investigated so far, the project has explored the feasibility, utility and validity of standardised exit testing and assessment of agreed, complex learning outcomes as well as discipline knowledge and its application. The Tuning Project is a further example of a cross-national approach to establishing consensus regarding descriptors for intended learning outcomes in undergraduate degrees. It has now been deployed in Europe, South and North America.

In Australia there has been little support for standardised exit testing of generic skills among graduating cohorts using instruments like the Collegiate Learning Assessment test (CLA). The majority of academic effort has focussed on developing agreed discipline-based approaches to determining student learning outcomes (SLOs). An initial step along this path was the establishment of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council/ Office for Learning and Teaching Discipline Scholars. These scholars have been working within and across their disciplines to develop agreed threshold learning outcomes (TLOs) or learning standards for graduates in respective discipline areas. To a significant extent this consultative, collegiate approach mirrors that undertaken in the UK Subject Centres of the previous decade.

1.2 Purpose of the present project

The current project addresses the need, on the one hand, to ensure that Australian Higher Education Institutions use a robust approach to demonstrate that their graduates have the capabilities and competencies necessary for effective professional and disciplinary practice and leadership in the 21st century; whilst, on the other hand, ensuring that this is managed in ways that build on the long-standing tradition of objective peer review used in research.



The project has built on and refined a methodology to promote and use an inter-institutional peer review and moderation process.

In doing this the project seeks to locate the validation of learning outcome standards and their valid and feasible measurement within a broader learning standards framework that enables the higher education sector to consistently and successfully implement self-regulated, robust approaches for assuring quality and standards, particularly in final year undergraduate subjects. The project has built on and refined a methodology to promote and use an inter-institutional peer review and moderation process across disciplines piloted earlier by the UWS with internal funding. From this, the larger project has developed and validated a user-tested system that is applicable to the wide range of disciplinary and operational contexts in the sector.

Funded by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) and managed by the OLT, and under the leadership of Professor Kerri-Lee Krause and Emeritus Professor Geoff Scott from the UWS, 11 universities (three of which joined the project at a later phase) participated in this two year project. The core university project partners were: the University of Western Sydney (UWS, lead organisation), the Australian National University (ANU), Charles Darwin University (CDU), Griffith University, La Trobe University (LTU), Macquarie University (MQ), Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and The University of Melbourne (MU). The project team was guided by a steering group made up of representatives from the National Council for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS, USA), the University of Sydney, University of Queensland (UQ), TEQSA and the OLT.

The project team was comprised of senior learning and teaching leaders in each of the partner institutions. This team gave conceptual oversight to the project and fostered local engagement, implementation and review. A wide range of operating contexts and disciplinary areas were covered as the methodology piloted by UWS was expanded, tested and refined. The 12 disciplinary areas included in the project ranged from Chinese, Civil Engineering, Economics and Environmental Science to History, Journalism, Law, Marketing, Music, Philosophy and Physics.

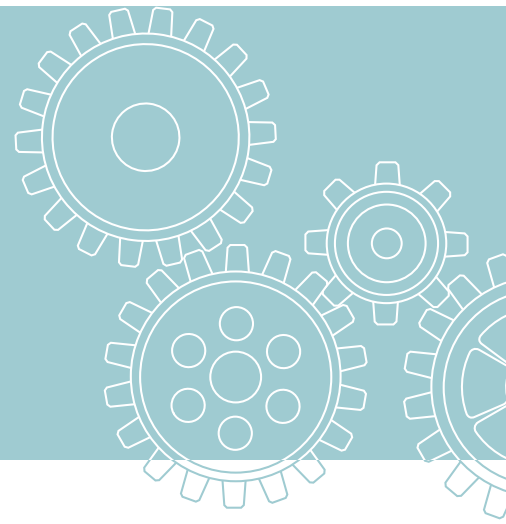
1.3 Importance of the project

The development of robust, collegial methods for assuring subject and program assessment and achievement in higher education has important implications for students, academics, and employers (Coates, 2010). Clarity around intended learning outcomes and how they will be graded will allow students to better understand the goals of their study, to understand why they receive the grade they do and to have confidence that they have achieved the capabilities and competencies necessary for successful early career professional or disciplinary performance on completion of their study. Academics will be able to provide evidence to stakeholders and the public that they are engaging in academically rigorous, peer reviewed practices that result in the achievement of standards. Further, evidence of the assurance of academic standards in higher education will enable employers to have confidence in the standard of graduates as they enter the workforce (Sadler, 2012). These outcomes will contribute to strengthening academic standards. From the start, however, the focus of this project was on the testing and validation of an inter-institutional process to clarify intended learning outcomes, rather than on the findings per se. Thus the processes involved in the project are as important as the outcomes.

1.4 Definition of terms

It is important to clarify the terms used when any higher education change is discussed. International research and work on effective higher education change and leadership (Fullan & Scott, 2009) has repeatedly found that practitioners involved in the same change effort are often using common terms with quite different meanings.

These outcomes will contribute to strengthening academic standards.



Appendix B provides a glossary of the key terms as they are used in this study. These terms include *academic standards, assessment, assurance, capability, capstone subject, competence, coursework, evaluation, management, moderation, program/course, quality, reliability, standard, standards framework, strategy and validity*. The definitions used in this project have been discussed and confirmed at a range of national and international conferences, most recently at the April 2013 National Higher Education Quality Forum in New Zealand (Scott, 2013).

There is a degree of ambiguity in the higher education environment around what is understood by the term 'academic standards' in particular. The term may apply to inputs: academic programs and curricula, teaching quality, rates of student progression through degree programs, as well as to academic achievement outcomes (Harris, 2009). Thus, despite explorations of the definition of academic standards (see, for example Moodie, 2004), the need to clarify the use of the term as it is used in this report is necessary.

In this review, 'academic standards' are taken to refer to both learning and teaching standards.

In this review, 'academic standards' are taken to refer to both learning and teaching standards. 'Learning standards' refers to learning outcomes – the level of attainment of the capabilities, knowledge and skills (competencies) expected of graduates, along with the validity (fitness for purpose) of the assessment tools used and the accuracy and reliability of the grading of achievement. 'Teaching standards' refers to the inputs that lead to the achievement of outcome standards. This includes inputs such as course design, quality of teaching, quality of learner support, quality of provision for online learning and other factors that impact on the delivery of standards. The European Higher Education Area standards and guidelines for quality assurance (ENQA, 2009) highlight the importance of focusing on both input and outcome standards. Scott (2011, 2013) notes four interlaced components of learning and teaching quality where standards apply: design, support, delivery and impact. While the distinction between the quality and standards of learning and teaching inputs and outcomes in higher education is acknowledged, the two are treated here as closely connected and complementary, in line with the conceptualisation of teaching and learning standards espoused by Krause et al (2012).

1.5 Report overview

In the Report which follows, Chapter 2 provides a brief review of existing literature and pertinent research. This is followed by details on the approach adopted in the project and a summary of the outcomes and impact of the project. Chapter 5 summarises the findings against the project's key research questions. The next chapter identifies key factors necessary for the effective implementation and sustainability of the approach tested, and Chapter 7 presents the conclusions and recommendations of the study. The *User Guide* validated in the project, along with a glossary of the key terms used in this report are provided as Appendices.



Chapter 2

Setting the context: A review of the literature

How best to assure educational standards and determine their impact is a more complex and less agreed-upon issue.

Over the past decade there has been a growing global focus on the assurance of academic achievement standards (Salmi, 2009). This is part of a general shift from giving focus mainly to the quality and standards of the inputs to higher education towards giving more attention to the quality of its outcomes, especially the quality of its impact on graduates' capabilities as professionals and future leaders. This shift can be seen in Australia with the launch of the discussion paper on learning outcome standards by the National Higher Education Standards Panel (2013) in March 2013 and the interest of the previous Labor Government in introducing a learning outcomes exit test in the sector (Fielden, 2008).

While there are a number of approaches to evidencing the quality of academic research and a degree of consensus amongst the academic community around these measures, how best to assure educational standards and determine their impact is a more complex and less agreed-upon issue (Coates, 2010; Deane & Krause, 2012). Many universities have implemented mechanisms to verify educational standards – including continuous improvement, benchmarking, monitoring, risk assessment, and auditing – however, there continues to be a lack of clarity around the meaning of 'standards' and agreement on how to best determine, articulate and assess standards (Coates, 2010; Krause et al., 2012, Scott, 2013).

In this chapter we set the context for the project, review the literature on this area and identify how this review has helped shape our overall approach and the interpretation of the project findings.

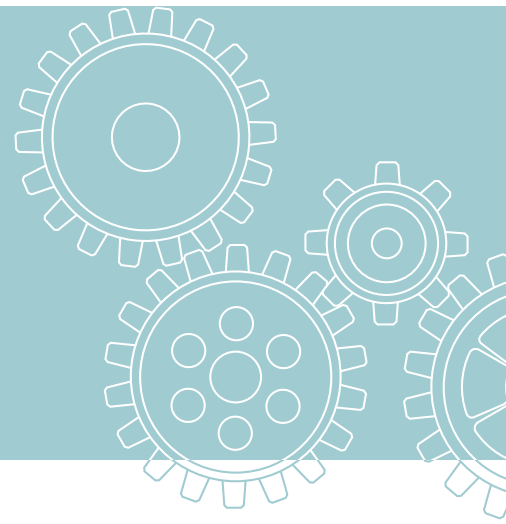
2.1 Assuring academic standards in higher education – international and national contexts

The focus on conceptualising and assuring standards in higher education is not new. However, as governments around the world have opened up access to higher education, this issue has attracted increased attention. Universities, along with governments, have been confronted with the dilemmas of how best to balance access with excellence, growth with quality and mission with market in a context of reduced per capita funding. These issues have been exacerbated by rapid, concurrent developments in information and communication technology-enabled learning, global competition and the rise of a new consumerism in higher education as 'user pays' funding systems have been expanded (Fullan & Scott, 2009).

The new demands of mass systems of higher education and the increase in global academic competition have been accompanied by increased pressure on higher education providers to be accountable for assuring education quality (Dill & Beerkens, 2012). Where, previously, considerations about higher education quality were concentrated mainly on institution-level inputs and teaching processes, more recently there has been a shift towards giving more direct focus to the standard and quality of graduate outcomes. Determining and evidencing valid graduate outcomes is increasingly considered to be a key responsibility of institutions (Coates, 2010).

The emphasis on assuring the quality of graduate outcomes is reflected in developments and activities in higher education globally. In the United States, the Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), a standardised exit test of generic skills, has been used by over 400 institutions for approximately a decade (CAE, 2009). Cross-nationally, the OECD's international AHELO study (OECD, 2009) is investigating the feasibility of assessing discipline-specific graduate learning outcomes as well as standardised exit testing. At the same time, the Tuning Educational Structures project has been carried out in Europe, South and North America, Africa, and Russia. This is a further example of a cross-national approach that gives emphasis to the development and articulation of learning outcomes statements (Gonzalez & Wagenaar, 2008).

Determining and evidencing valid graduate outcomes is increasingly considered to be a key responsibility of institutions.



In Australia, significant activity is also occurring around validating and evidencing the consistent achievement of academic standards. A number of projects funded by the OLT or its predecessor are investigating approaches for assuring outcome or learning standards. For example, Barrie and colleagues (2011) are investigating assessment task types and processes, while Freeman (2013) has led a project on calibration of markers and assuring subject-level standards (see Appendix D for a comprehensive list of these projects). In addition to academic work around standards, a range of policy initiatives and frameworks have been put in place. These include the establishment of the TEQSA which is intended to regulate and assure the quality of Australia's higher education sector, along with a separate National Higher Education Standards panel designed to develop standards.

2.2 The need for robust approaches to assuring higher education subject and program achievement standards

Concerns in a number of countries have been expressed over the past five years about the inconsistent application of academic standards.

Although benchmarking between universities, at both a national and international level, is increasingly being used, there are indications that initiatives to date have generally not been focused, systematic or effective (Stella & Woodhouse, 2007, p. 22). Concerns in a number of countries have been expressed over the past five years about the inconsistent application of academic standards. For example, when discussing assessment reliability, the UK Quality Assurance Agency (QAA, 2008) has observed:

Worries include doubts in some cases about the double-marking and/or moderation of students' summative assessment; continuing difficulties with degree classification; departures from institutional practice in the way staff in departments and schools work with external examiners; and generally weak use of statistical data to monitor and quality assure the assessments of all students and degree classifications. The papers also find weaknesses in the arrangements of some institutions for detecting and dealing with plagiarism and for providing feedback on students' assessed work, including feedback to international students.

In another comprehensive review, Yorke (2008) identified five main problem areas: variations in regulations and practices between and within institutions; lack of technical robustness, especially reliability; concerns about grading including the inappropriate use of arithmetic manipulations to produce an overall grade for a student's achievements; lack of clarity about expected performance even where learning outcomes are specified in some detail; and the communication of assessment outcomes including insufficient appreciation of the 'fuzziness' of assessment judgements and the limited reliance that can be placed on them.

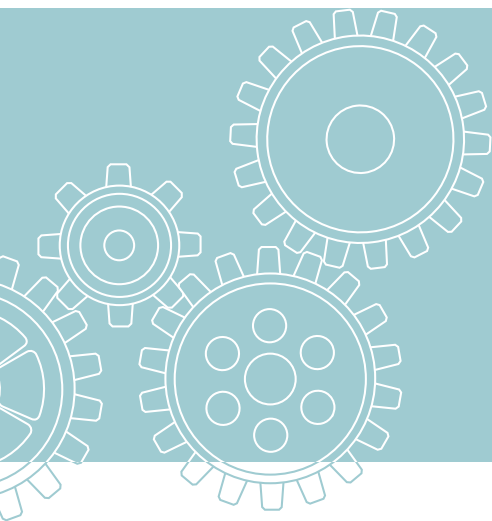
A series of Australian case studies of universities (Anderson, 2001) observed that none of the vice chancellors and deans interviewed on the subject of quality assurance

had any reliable or valid means of knowing how good their degrees were, for example, how intellectual standards might change over time, vary between fields or compare with other institutions (p.1).

Similarly, James and colleagues (James, McInnes & Devlin, 2002), in their submission to the *Crossroads* review, observed that Australia "lacks adequate and explicit mechanisms for knowing about the standards of degrees" (p.2).

Others have noted, inter alia, evidence of inconsistent standards and significant variations in the levels of achievement of graduates (see: Atkins, Beattie & Dockrell, 1993; Bloxham & Boyd, 2007; Brown & Knight, 1994; Cox, 1967; Elton, 1989; HEQC, 1994; Heywood, 2000; Holroyd, 2000; Knight, 2006; QAA, 2006a, 2006b; Sanders, 2004; Warren-Piper, 1994; Williams, 1979).

The lack of clear national reference points compounds the problems which arise from a lack of consistency and transparency on how academic standards are determined, applied, monitored, and maintained in Australian universities (McInnis, 2010).



Scott (2013) has noted the need for much greater clarity about the way in which a wide range of reference points might best be used in different professional and disciplinary areas to assure the validity and quality of the learning outcomes to be developed. He notes how any one or mix of the following can be used with varying weights in this process, depending on the profession or discipline at hand:

- professional accreditation requirements (when applicable);
- the requirements of employers;
- the University's particular mission and desired graduate attributes;
- subject and course disciplinary benchmarks;
- the views of academics;
- the results of studies of successful early career graduates in the profession/discipline concerned;
- government requirements;
- the Australian Qualifications Framework;
- the requirements of the National HE Standards Panel and TEQSA;
- input from external course advisory committees;
- the results of external course reviews; and
- current student expectations and input on their learning needs and interests.

Scott goes on to note the need for each institution to determine if this list is complete and to be clear on how much weight each reference point is to be given when seeking to validate learning outcomes and standards in different professions and disciplines.

The current study seeks to address each of the above gaps in provision and their associated challenges in a way that is collegial, evidence-based, collaborative and feasible – in other words, implementable.

A wide range of approaches and mechanisms is currently used to measure and assure academic achievement standards.

2.3 Current approaches to measuring and assuring subject and program achievement standards

A wide range of approaches and mechanisms is currently used to measure and assure academic achievement standards. They include measures of graduate outcomes, self-report systems, external benchmarking, standardised exit testing, and tuning processes. Each has its advantages and disadvantages.

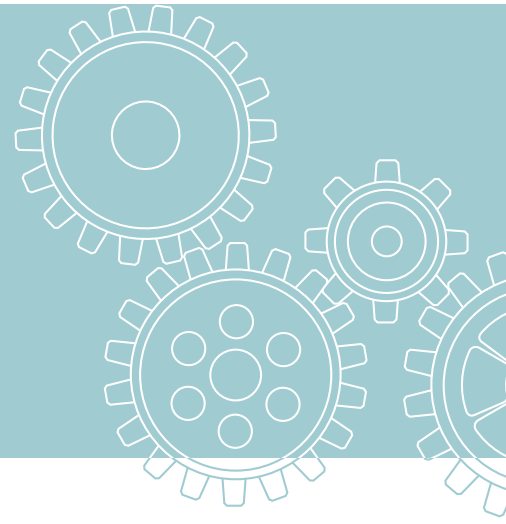
Measures of graduate outcomes

Current measures include rates of employment and/or further study. These broad measures are subject to the influence of confounding variables including the state of the employment market, levels of employment nationally and by state or territory, and the extent to which there are controls over entry into the profession or in further study for the area in question.

Self-reported outcomes

Current measures include student ratings on the generic skills scale of Australia's Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ), what students say in the Learning Outcomes domain in *CEQuery*, and importance and performance ratings on learning outcome items in a range of internally used student feedback surveys.

As these measures are self-reported and, as they are given in isolation from performance assessment of actual practice, it is hard to verify their validity or reliability.



External subject benchmarks

The UK's Higher Education QAA has established a suite of subject benchmark statements which "set out expectations about standards of degrees in a range of subject areas. They... define what can be expected of a graduate in terms of the abilities and skills needed to develop understanding and competence in the subject".

These measures bring together subject experts' views but do not necessarily triangulate what they agree is important against the other multiple reference points identified by Scott (2013).

In a 2009 paper, the AUQA (2009) points out that "ensuring the comparability of assessment processes is not sufficient to ensure the assessment of achievement against specified standards. In the UK system, external examiners operate individually in relation to the institution, and not explicitly within the authority of the discipline" (p.14).

Standardised exit testing

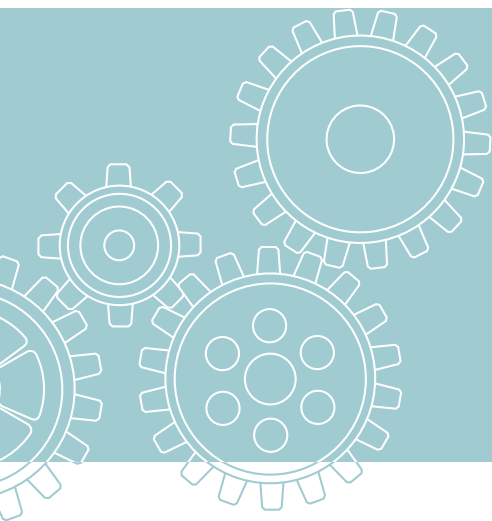
There have been several initiatives aimed at introducing standardised measures of generic graduate skills extending back to the 1990s in Australia. One of the first of these was the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER) Graduate Skills Assessment Test which gives focus to problem solving, critical thinking, interpersonal understandings and written communication. Subsequent generic tests of a similar nature include the U.S. Collegiate Learning Assessment (Ewell, 2012) and the recent interest in developing more profession-specific tests as part of OECD's AHELO Project (2009).

Each of these tests faces the challenge of ensuring full and valid coverage of all of the capabilities that count for successful early career professional performance, an issue which has been addressed in a series of studies of successful early career graduates in nine professions (see, for example, Vescio, 2005). There has also been recent critique of these generic instruments as driving students and staff away from diverse approaches to learning and teaching to a concentration on 'teaching to the test' and criticisms of their methodology (Possin, 2013). Braden J. Hosch (2010), the Director of Institutional Research and Assessment at Central Connecticut State University notes that performance on the CLA is directly associated with the amount of time students spend writing the open-ended tasks it uses and that, in its current form, it would be unwise to use it as a public accountability instrument. Others have confirmed that this was never the purpose of such tests.

As Douglas, Thomson and Chun-Mei (2012) observe:

The CLA results are also sample-dependent. Specifically, there is a large array of uncontrollable variables related to student motivation to participate in and do well on the test. Students who take CLA are volunteers, and their results have no bearing on their academic careers...recent findings suggest that CLA results are, to some extent, discipline-specific... It seems to ignore how students actually learn and the variety of experiences among different sub-populations. Universities are more like large cosmopolitan cities full of a multitude of learning communities, as opposed to a small village with observable norms.

There has been recent critique of these generic instruments as driving students and staff away from diverse approaches to learning and teaching.



The epistemological characteristics of the discipline shape assessment practices.

In order for grades to be considered reliable, they should be reasonably stable across courses in the disciplines concerned.

AHELO tuning projects

These international projects give focus to the capabilities specific to a particular profession and, therefore, address some of the criticisms about using generic skills tests as valid measures of what constitutes a capable university graduate. Their validity, however, depends on the extent to which they use a proven graduate capability framework and take account of the particular local ways in which, for example, a professional must approach work in order to be effective. They also give limited focus to the use of multiple reference points, achievement standards and valid methods of assessment:

AHELO's project leaders admit the complexity of developing learning outcome measures, for example, how to account for cultural differences and the circumstances of students and their institutions? (Douglas et al, 2012)

2.4 Assessment and grading: A social, discipline-based practice

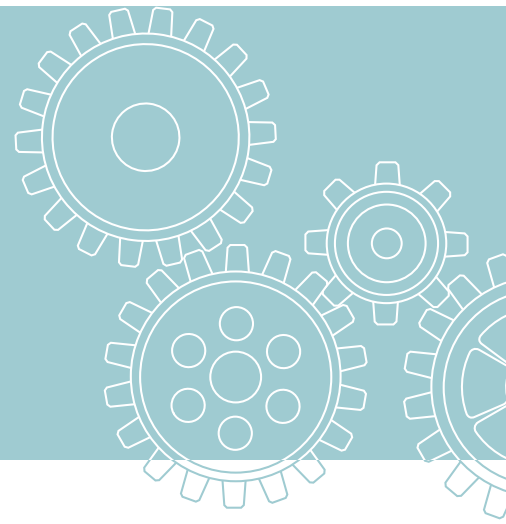
Assessment and grading are acknowledged as social practices into which “new colleagues are inducted” (Yorke, 2008, p. 6). The epistemological characteristics of the discipline shape assessment practices (Kreber, 2009; Trowler, 2009), hence the importance of attaining disciplinary representation in this project in order to ensure that the guidelines and resources emerging from the project are sufficiently responsive and flexible to accommodate disciplinary differences.

Academics undertake relatively little developmental work in the area of assessment (Rosovsky & Hartley, 2002, p. 14), yet there are significant technical considerations and skills underpinning effective assessment practices. For instance, the principles of validity (Messick, 1989) and reliability (Feldt & Brennan, 1989) are core features of assessment practices and they underpin the theoretical framework for this project. Reliability, in the sense of replicability of performance, is particularly problematic, for universities typically do not have the resources to conduct assessment on a scale sufficient to ensure reliability (Yorke, 2009). Yorke (2008) found that a majority of academic staff develop their understanding of marking students' work from talking with and observing colleagues, while some said they adopted assessment practices based on their experience as students, also acknowledging that grading of student work is subject to considerable variability that may result from the assessor's interpretation of the assigned task and grading criteria. Knight (2006) also observed that grading is a ‘local’ process which means that grading in one institution may not be replicated in another. Such variability poses considerable risk to the sector for, as Smith (1992) argues, in order for grades to be considered reliable, they should be reasonably stable across courses in the disciplines concerned.

2.4.1 Assuring standards in disciplinary communities: Consensus moderation and peer review

Inter-institutional moderation is recognised as a valuable strategy for addressing the challenges involved in developing effective and rigorous assessment practices (Brown & Knight, 1994). Moderation is a peer review process for developing consistency or comparability of assessment judgements.

Sadler (2010) argues for the value of consensus moderation for assuring grading standards and academic achievement standards to attain quality assurance of the summative grading process. He notes that such calibration exercises may take place in collaboration with other universities, professional accrediting agencies and employers (2010). Likewise, international assessment experts like Boud and associates (2010), emphasise the importance of assessing student achievements that are judged against “consistent national and international standards that are subject to continuing dialogue, review and justification within disciplinary and professional communities” (p. 3). Boud and associates also argue for the value of “ongoing collaboration and dialogue to determine, review and moderate academic achievement standards” (p. 3).



A commitment to within-subject moderation practices is a central feature of assessment policies across the Australian higher education sector. However, as *Striving for Quality* (DEST, 2002), a national issues paper on higher education observed, “there is not a strong tradition of systematic moderation of assessment and evaluation of performance within Australian universities ... either between different markers in the same subject, across subjects, across courses or across institutions” (p.28).

While institution-level moderation at the subject and program level is important, Sadler (2009) emphasises the value of ‘calibrating’ standards across universities in common subjects and programs, using first-hand, primary evidence of academic standards in the form of assessment samples within the discipline. The UK QAA (2008) also supports the use of student achievement data to allow cross-institutional and inter-institutional comparisons of student performance.

This project adopts such an approach by using Sadler’s notion of ‘calibrating’ academic staff as markers, graders and standards-keepers, to calibrate standards at subject and program level and in assuring academic achievement standards or ‘grade integrity’ (Boud, 2010; Sadler, 2009). This approach is further supported by Maxwell (2002) and Harlen (2005) who show that the development of a standards framework is not sufficient to ensure comparable judgement; moderation techniques, such as face to face meetings, are an essential support for the calibration of these judgements (Klenowski, 2007). Thus, while academic achievement standards and associated grading standards are of primary interest in this project, it is also informed by the valuing of other forms of standards, including input, process and delivery standards in the form of subject outlines, assessment tasks, grading rubrics and the like.

Standards should be based on the judgements of disciplinary experts using a method that provides examples of student achievement.

2.4.2 Standards and standards setting

Empirical research supports the need for ‘standards-setters’ to be knowledgeable and credible, with a range of stakeholders across universities collectively engaged in the process (Yorke, 2008). Standards should be based on the judgements of disciplinary experts using a method that provides examples of student achievement, and the method of setting standards should be supported by research (Norcini & Shea, 1997). Similarly, the 2009 AUQA discussion paper on standards argues for the value of a “standards-referenced system of moderation” requiring “moderators within a discipline to work together and to make reference to the specified standards in addition to grading processes and outcomes” (p.13). While the UK external examiner system has been seen to provide assurance that students are performing at an appropriate level, as noted earlier, the AUQA paper points out that:

ensuring the comparability of assessment processes is not sufficient to ensure the assessment of achievement against specified standards. In the UK system, external examiners operate individually in relation to the institution, and not explicitly within the authority of the discipline.

The use of multiple reference points by those setting achievement standards has already been noted in Section 2.2 (Scott, 2013).

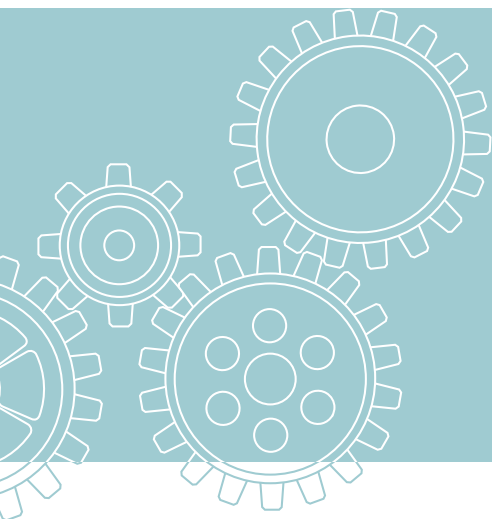
2.4.3 Leading and managing change in relation to standards and quality

Two key themes emerge from research on effective change leadership and implementation in higher education over the past 30 years (Fullan & Scott, 2009):

Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas
and

Change doesn’t just happen but must be led, and deftly.

In the ALTC program leaders project, Krause and colleagues have highlighted the pivotal role of program leaders in assuming responsibility for whole-of-program standards and quality. This



project builds on the ALTC/OLT *Learning Leaders in Times of Change* study of 500 effective higher education leaders, from Deputy Vice Chancellor to program coordinator, which found that program leaders were pivotal to effecting change and improvement at the discipline level (Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008). The current project has been informed by the outcomes of this research, along with that of Fullan and Scott (2009) and Lillis (2007) who argue for the importance of steered engagement in which “top-down and bottom-up approaches are used together” (p.85). As such, this project seeks to identify a way in which to effectively combine national and institutional imperatives (top-down) to assure quality and standards at subject and program level with bottom-up strategies that engage academic staff in disciplinary communities (Radbourn & Nulty, 2002) in self-regulatory processes that are at once robust and sustainable, and owned by those responsible for enacting curriculum and assessment processes (Nulty, 2011).

2.4.4 Importance of using a collegial, discipline-based approach

An analysis of new state policy instruments and research on effective change implementation in higher education (Fullan & Scott, 2009) suggests that a major focus should be on providing incentives and support for collective actions of all academic staff within a program to develop valid, direct measures of learning outcomes at the subject level within universities (Dill & Beerkens, 2012).

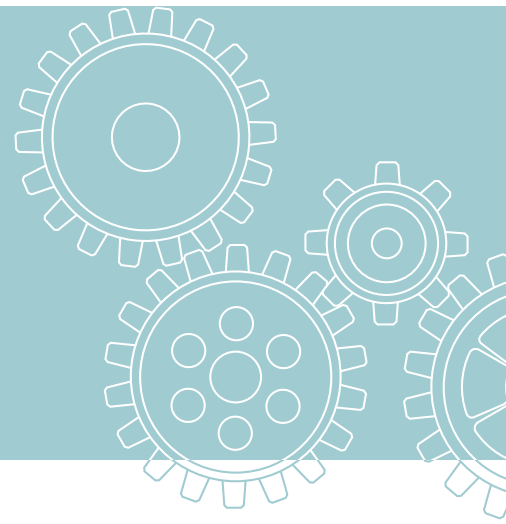
Assessment of department-specific learning outcomes can be a useful vehicle for change. Evidence-based, criterion-focused, assessment plans and activities developed and approved by faculty can provide an empirical foundation of systematic and ongoing rethinking, redesigning, and restructuring of programs and curricula. For faculty members, trained to be sceptical about claims, evidence is the gold standard in the academy, and they are unlikely to adopt new ways of thinking or behaving without first being convinced that the new pedagogies, approaches to assessment and organisational structures are better than the old – that the benefits of engagement outweigh the costs. In addition, it has been found that the findings of assessment studies specific to faculty members’ academic units may generate more interest and action than general or institution-wide evidence (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Because of their close proximity to the site of delivery, it is at the subject level that academic standards are best assured and improved. At the same time, effective external quality assurance processes can promote compliance with state mandates and reinforce internal accountability, creating incentives for collective actions by the university to assume ongoing responsibility for assuring and improving academic standards in all academic programs through close monitoring and active experimentation (Shavelson, 2010). For this to occur, the university’s core academic processes for assuring standards must be externally evaluated by competent peer reviewers. These evaluations must also include an assessment of the impact of these processes at the subject or program level.

2.4.5 Importance of considering both validity and reliability when seeking to assure subject and program achievement standards

It is critically important to ensure not only that what course and subject achievement standards and assessment processes give focus to is relevant and desirable (i.e., valid), but also to ensure that how performance on valid assessment tasks is assessed is fair, transparent and replicable across markers (i.e., reliable). Both dimensions are necessary if a higher education system is to assure consistent achievement standards.

Assessment of department-specific learning outcomes can be a useful vehicle for change.



The key resource for enabling staff learning and capacity building is having access to a colleague in the same area who is addressing the same challenges effectively.

Capacity-building of staff in assessment

Rosovsky and Hartley (2002, p. 14) found that academics undertake relatively little developmental work in the area of assessment.

The *Learning leaders in times of change* study (Scott et al., 2008) and studies which have preceded it (Tough, 1997) and proceeded it (Scott, Tilbury, Sharp & Deane, 2012) have identified that the key resource for enabling staff learning and capacity building is having access to a colleague in the same area who is addressing the same challenges effectively. It is for this reason that the present study has given focus to peer review, not only as a means of assuring the quality of achievement standards in common subject areas, but also as a learning resource in its own right.

The findings of the project (Chapter 4) confirm that all those involved in the project's collegial review process found it to be a significant learning experience. The process was also identified by academic staff participants as an important source for critical reflection on their own assessment practices as well as a key mechanism for situated capacity building.

Issues surrounding assessment regulation

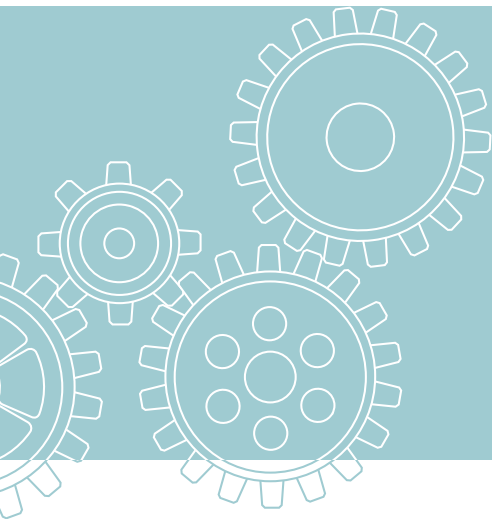
This involves the challenge of setting a balance between establishing overall sector parameters to assure consistent standards and quality on the one hand whilst, on the other hand, ensuring sufficient self-regulation to promote sector diversity, active engagement of academics, prompt action and local responsiveness.

Self-regulation has predictable strengths and weaknesses (Baldwin & Cave, 1999). Advantages include access to greater expertise and technical knowledge that can lead to more engaged academic staff and greater voluntary compliance, lower cost to the public, and more rapid adjustment of self-regulatory approaches to changing circumstances. Disadvantages include the potential for regulatory "capture" in which self-regulation comes to serve the private interests of the professional members rather than the interests of the public, a charge that has been made in the USA with regard to the resistance of traditional academic accrediting agencies to the emergence of distance learning and/or for-profit higher education institutions. Professional self-regulation may also be insensitive to the needs of less influential but still affected groups, such as students.

The public accountability or transparency of self-regulation is a source of further concern. The technical challenge of designing effective external assessments of complex academic outcomes, for example, may lead to over-regulation by the state. This may suppress curriculum innovation and impose high opportunity costs on academic staff, while reliance upon self-regulatory instruments may yield a too-lenient approach to assuring and monitoring academic standards (Gugerty & Prakash, 2010). These tensions between academic autonomy and accountability arise in many areas of the academy.

2.5 Summary

The literature reviewed in this chapter has identified a general shift of focus in higher education around the world from looking mainly at the quality of the inputs to university learning and teaching towards giving more focus to the quality of its outcomes and impact. It has identified the existing, often limited, approaches to setting and measuring learning outcomes; the need for a project like the current one which tests out a relevant, robust and feasible approach for assuring achievement standards; the important role which peer review and consensus moderation can play in this process; along with the optimum way in which such an approach might best be shaped and implemented. It has also identified what types of staff capacity-building strategies and resources will be most helpful.



Chapter 3

Project approach

We placed a premium on collegial peer review processes that built trust.

The focus of the study was on validating and refining a process of self-regulation through peer moderation that would enable universities and other higher education providers to assure final year subject and program achievement standards, by applying a proven user-centred approach to design and testing.

We placed a premium on collegial peer review processes that built trust, were evidence-based and encouraged academic staff participants to engage in a process that could be applied within their departments and across universities in order to contribute to continuous improvement in the quality of assessment and monitoring of outcome standards.

The ALTC funded eight universities, to undertake the project (University of Western Sydney (lead), Charles Darwin University, Griffith University, La Trobe University, Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology, The Australian National University, and The University of Melbourne). An additional three universities asked to join the project in Phase 2 (Deakin University, University of Tasmania (UTas), University of Wollongong).

Oversight and quality assurance for the project was provided by a high level national steering committee; leadership was provided by Professors Krause and Scott from UWS; design and implementation was supported by senior leaders from each of the participating universities and day-to-day management was provided by the Project Manager, Kate Aubin. The overall approach to project management and implementation built on a series of earlier Carrick, ALTC and OLT projects undertaken by the two project leaders.

3.1 Background

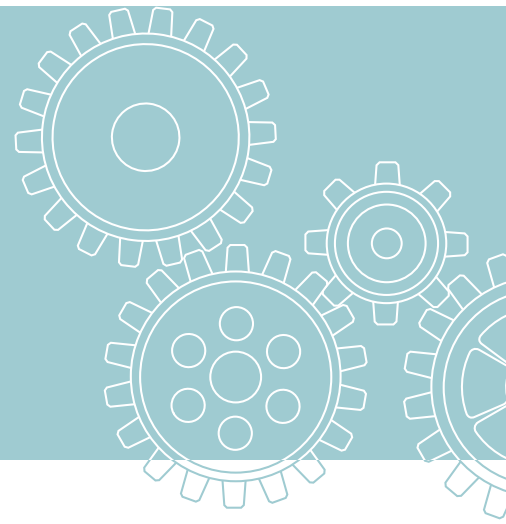
The methodology adopted in this project was piloted during 2010 by Professor Scott in an initiative funded by the UWS Vice-Chancellor involving six of the project universities. The pilot project compared and evaluated the validity of a range of assessment inputs (subject outlines, assessment items, marking guides etc.), along with the reliability of marking for the outcomes at the final year level and across a range of Fields of Education (FOEs). The present project has expanded upon, validated and sharpened the 2010 pilot by including subjects that do and do not have external accreditation and areas with varying levels of employability. It has also included performance-based subjects in the creative arts, along with common final year subjects in Education as well as in the more traditional disciplines.

3.2 Project methodology

Underpinning the methodology is the process of 'steered engagement' (Fullan & Scott, 2009, pp. 85-88), a proven approach for managing change in higher education. The senior university leaders on the project team provided top level direction for project implementation, while academic staff in the disciplines were supported by linking them up with 'fellow travellers' who were teaching and assessing the same subjects in different universities. In this way the project combined a focus on summative assessment of standards and outcomes along with practice-based learning and development opportunities for the staff involved. The core focus of this project was on the testing and validation of an inter-institutional process, rather than on the findings per se.

The methodology used involved a form of external peer moderation. In this approach groups of academics teaching the same named unit of study in another university undertook a blind review of both the assessment inputs (subject outlines, assessment tasks and marking criteria) and assessment outcomes, (de-identified) samples of assessment (at different grade levels) from a partner university teaching the same final year subject.

The project combined a focus on summative assessment of standards and outcomes along with practice-based learning and development opportunities.



3.3 Research questions

The following research questions gave focus to the project implementation, data gathering and analysis. They were derived from the original project application and the review of literature (Chapter 2).

1. To what extent can a robust and validated inter-institutional moderation strategy effectively address the need for universities to demonstrate self-regulated approaches for monitoring and maintaining achievement standards across disciplines?
2. To what extent can consensus be reached on achievement standards in terms of input (e.g., assessment focus, criteria, valid assessment tasks and guidelines) and outcomes (i.e., student achievement in subject-level assessment as evidenced in assessment samples) in different disciplines?
3. What processes and resources are required for engaging academic staff in final year subject level moderation across universities and disciplines?
4. What disciplinary and institutional differences are evident in processes for managing inter-institutional moderation at the subject level and what are the implications for accommodating such diversity in ongoing implementation?
5. In developing a proof of concept for assurance of program-level achievement standards, how might inter-institutional final year subject level moderation practices contribute to peer review of whole-of-program threshold learning outcomes in different disciplines?

3.4 Key stakeholders and how they were involved in the project

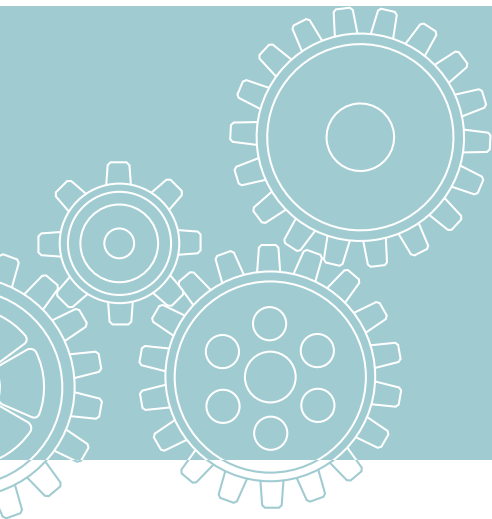
The collaborative approach taken by the project team involved wide engagement with different stakeholders across the Australian HE sector. This was given focus by the use of the research questions identified in Section 3.3 and a proven set of 'steered' engagement strategies tested in earlier Carrick, ALTC and OLT projects which have built upon 30 years' research and practical experience with effective change management and engagement in higher education (Fullan & Scott, 2009).

3.4.1 Key stakeholders in Australian higher education

Key stakeholders and the nature of the various 'fit-for-purpose' ways in which they were engaged with the project are as follows:

- OLT – were kept informed of project progress.
- TEQSA Commissioner Ian Hawke – Steering Group member.
- Chair, Higher Education Standards Panel – was involved in the consultation on this project, received information about the outcomes and the two discussion papers arising from the project.
- Partner Universities – 11 universities were involved in the project, in the ways outlined in the report.
- Members of the Innovative Research Universities (IRU) secretariat – were provided with the project outline and user guide.
- Universities Australia (UA) – information about the project was provided to Dr Gavin Moodie who prepared a UA position paper on the role of peer review methodologies in assuring learning standards. The project leadership also consulted with the UA Conference Organisers to coordinate a forum on assuring achievement standards as part of the UA conference 2013. A follow up forum is also scheduled for the 2014 UA Conference.

The collaborative approach taken by the project team involved wide engagement with different stakeholders across the Australian HE sector.



- Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) – we have liaised with ACER regarding the AHELO project and to determine the connections between this project and the assessment framework adopted in the AHELO project.
- ALTC/OLT Fellows – a presentation on the project was given at a Fellows Forum. Ongoing updates on the project have been presented to the Fellows by Associate Professor Mark Freeman, a member of our Steering Group along with Associate Professor Heather Alexander, a project team member, both of whom are members of the Fellows network.
- Private provider representatives have been involved in discussions about adopting the methodology used in this project. These include representatives from the Australian College of Physical Education, Think Education Group, Avondale College, Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE) and Tabor College.
- Technical and Further Education (TAFE) NSW Higher Education representatives have been consulted and a benchmarking partnership has commenced with the University of Western Sydney. The project *User Guide* developed during the project has been shared with the TAFE NSW Higher Education Advisory Group.

3.4.2 Involvement of a representative sample of Australian universities in the project

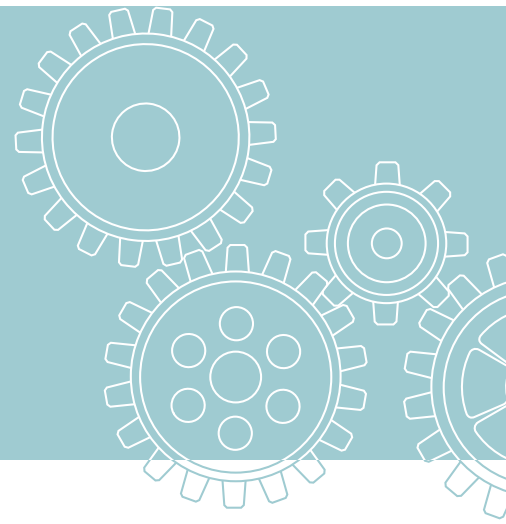
The project has ensured that a representative sample of Australian Universities of all types and locations has been involved in the project. The final sample of institutions involved is:

- 5 non-aligned universities: University of Western Sydney (lead), Macquarie University, Deakin University, University of Tasmania, University of Wollongong
- 3 Innovative Research Universities: Charles Darwin University, Griffith University, La Trobe University
- 2 Group of Eight universities: Australian National University, The University of Melbourne
- 1 Australian Technology Network university: Queensland University of Technology

Twelve disciplines were reviewed by 52 reviewers, and the review response rate achieved was 93.5%. The number of reviewers in each discipline area is listed below. It should be noted that there were never two reviewers from the same university, thus the number of reviewers is a proxy for the number of universities involved in peer reviewing the respective discipline areas.

- Chinese (4 reviewers)
- Civil Engineering (7 reviewers)
- Economics (3 reviewers)
- Environmental Science (3 reviewers)
- History (3 reviewers)
- Journalism (2 reviewers)
- Law (7 reviewers)
- Marketing (7 reviewers)
- Music (6 reviewers)
- Nursing (4 reviewers)
- Philosophy (3 reviewers)
- Physics (3 reviewers)

Criteria informing the choice of disciplines included the need for representation from: inter-disciplinary fields (e.g., Environmental Science); creative arts (e.g., Music); languages (e.g., Chinese); sciences (e.g., Physics); and accredited areas (e.g., Engineering, Business).



More than 150 academic colleagues involved in the project have given in-depth feedback on the process.

More than 150 academic colleagues involved in the project have given in-depth feedback on the process during the discipline roundtables, focus groups, and interviews which took place after Phase 1 and 2 respectively.

3.4.3 Additional partner institutions

Three universities with existing benchmarking partnerships (Deakin University, University of Tasmania, and University of Wollongong) approached the team, expressing an interest in applying the peer review methodology as part of their own benchmarking framework. This initiative was led by Dr Sarah Booth from the University of Tasmania. The moderation and peer review activities of this group have focused on Environmental Science, Nursing, and Economics. Feedback from these additional partner institutions on the usefulness of the project's moderation methodology has been very positive and it is expected that they will continue to apply it in their benchmarking activities in 2013.

3.5 Ethics

As part of the ethics approval process, participants signed ethics consent forms as well as participant agreement forms to ensure that all participants understood the sensitive nature of the project. Participant peer reviewers had the opportunity to see student scripts and internal marking guidelines that typically may not be shared beyond institutions. As part of this process participants were assured that the details of feedback on individual units and student scripts would not be published, other than in an aggregated, de-identified form.

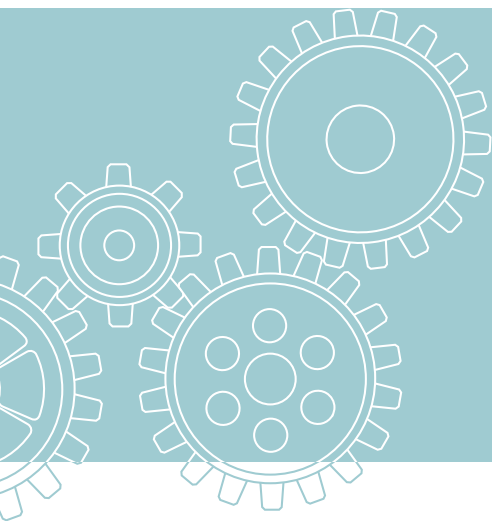
We also undertook to protect individual institutions by keeping the identity of units where there were discrepancies in feedback from peer reviewers confidential. All feedback was provided to partner institutions through the unit coordinators and project team members (i.e., Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC)/Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC)) as part of the 'closing the loop' aspect of the project and for the purposes of assisting the process of continuous improvement within departments and universities.

In order to identify the resource implications of the blind peer review methodology, feedback was sought from participants regarding the time involved in the peer review tasks. The following feedback represents the average number of hours per task.

Several participants commented that this time was well invested and that it would 'save time in arguing student appeals'.

The project officer took approximately three hours per university, per discipline, to gather, collate and distribute the materials (i.e. subject outlines, assessment tasks, grading criteria/guidelines, and de-identified samples of assessment tasks) to peer reviewers. On average, academic peer reviewers reported that it took them between four and five hours to review one set of unit materials, including reviewing the inputs (unit outlines, program learning outcomes, assessment tasks and marking guides) and marking the four de-identified samples of student work. They allocated a further 3-4 hours for pre-review and post-review debrief meetings. Peer reviewers commented that it was "*much quicker the second time round*", once they understood the process. Several commented that this time was well invested and that it would "*save time in arguing student appeals*".

Technology assisted the process considerably. The project officer developed an online set of forms and editable PDF documents to assist collection and aggregation of individual reviews. The average turnaround time – that is, time taken for academic peer reviewers to submit their review of materials and for the project officer to process responses and send them to the originating universities – was approximately four weeks; though this varied considerably in some cases where individuals were on leave or unable to complete their submission by the due date due to personal circumstances.



3.6 Project implementation

3.6.1 A multi-level tiered approach

Rather than suggesting an either/or binary approach to peer review methodologies, an alternative is a multi-level, tiered approach that uses a suite of approaches according to the purpose of the peer review process. This is summarised in Table 1 below and is further articulated in the discussion paper *Towards a Learning Standards Framework* (Deane & Krause, 2012. see Appendix E).

The approach tested and refined in the current project is represented at level 4 in Figure One.

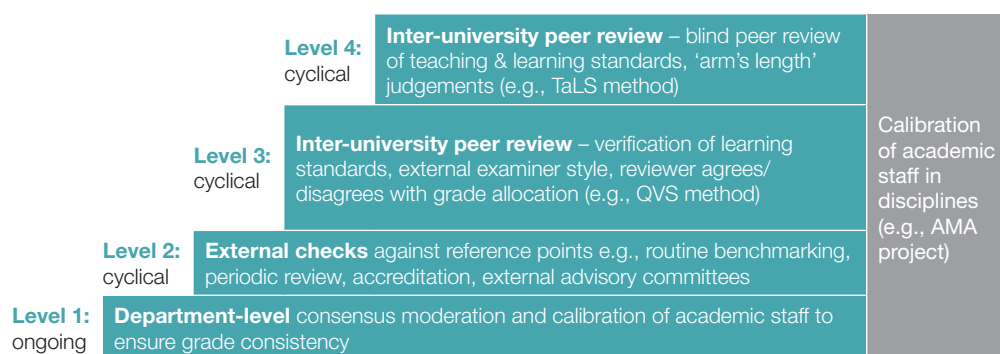


Figure 1: A framework for monitoring and assuring learning standards in the disciplines

Questions covered the review of unit/subject outlines, grading guidelines, assessment tasks, and the peer review process itself.

3.6.2 Peer reviewer feedback on unit level inputs

As part of the peer review process, reviewers were asked to address 11 questions which related to their review of the partner university's assessment and achievement standard input materials. The questions covered the review of unit/subject outlines, grading guidelines, assessment tasks, and the peer review process itself.

A peer feedback form, already field tested for ease and clarity of use in the earlier UWS pilot, was used to support this process. It was comprised of three sections:

- Part A: feedback on the unit outline;
- Part B: feedback on grading guidelines; and
- Part C: feedback on assessment tasks.

Part A: Peer reviewer feedback on subject/unit outline

In this aspect of the peer moderation process peer reviewers were asked, from their perspective as a subject expert, to address five questions regarding the unit/subject outline provided for review.

1. To what extent does the curriculum content cover all that a final year undergraduate unit on this topic should cover?
2. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain how the assessment tasks relate to the unit learning outcomes?
3. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain how the assessment tasks relate to the overall graduate outcomes of the degree program?
4. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain clearly the requirements for achieving at various grade levels?



5. What are the best aspects of the unit outline? What suggestions would you make for further enhancement of this subject outline?

Part B: Peer reviewer feedback on grading guidelines

Peer reviewers were asked to comment on the adequacy of assessment grading guidelines provided to students for the assessment task they were marking. They were asked two questions in this regard:

1. To what extent is it clear how student work will be awarded grades at different levels?
2. To what extent are the grading criteria at an appropriate level or standard for a final year undergraduate unit of study in this field of education?

Part C: Peer reviewer feedback on validity of assessment tasks

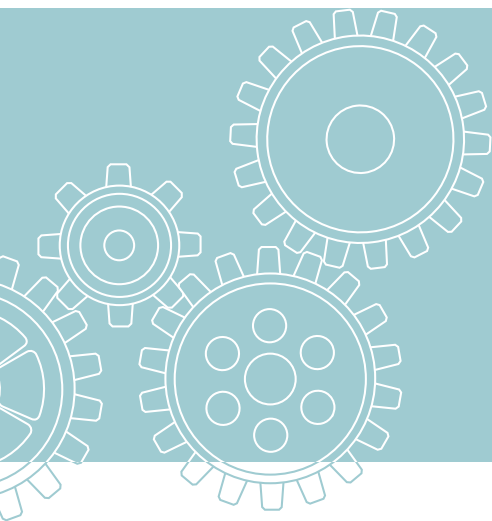
In this section, peer reviewers were asked for feedback on the assessment task and the extent to which it linked to unit learning objectives (i.e. was 'fit for purpose').

3.6.3 Assessing program as distinct from subject level outcomes

In October 2012 the project focus was extended to consider the implications of the project methodology for monitoring and assuring academic standards at the overall program level, using discipline level learning outcomes. Using Law as a case study, 18 legal academics and colleagues convened for a one-day invitational roundtable. Universities represented were: University of Western Sydney, James Cook University, Deakin, Wollongong, University of Tasmania, and the University of Sydney. An OLT representative was also present.

The primary aim of the roundtable was to consider implications of the OLT Peer Review and Moderation Project for monitoring and assuring academic standards at the whole of program level, using Law as a case study. The Roundtable involved collegial peer review in a face-to-face setting and in the context of relevant national academic standards projects, including the Law Discipline Standards project (ALTC/OLT), and the Achievement Matters project (Mark Freeman, University of Sydney).

An address on the project was also given by Professor Scott to a meeting of the Australian Council of Business Deans Teaching & Learning Network on 'national approaches to consensus moderation' in February 2012. At this meeting there was strong endorsement of the use of capstone subjects focused on real-world professional problems as one feasible way in which to test program level achievement standards; the use of the inter-institutional peer moderation process of the present project as a way in which to sharpen them was also endorsed.



Chapter 4

Findings: Outcomes of the peer review process

This chapter summarises the key findings of the empirical phase of the project. The reviewer feedback on unit outlines, grading guidelines and assessment tasks is synthesised in the first section. This is followed by feedback from participants on how productive, feasible and useful the peer moderation process was.

As mentioned earlier in this report, a total of 52 academic colleagues participated as reviewers in the blind peer review process of subject inputs and outcomes in the form of assessment items across four grade bands. Unit information, grading guidelines, and samples of student work were shared amongst colleagues. Across disciplines, reviewers reported allocating an average of 16-20 hours of time to this process, including:

- collecting their own subject/unit materials;
- de-identifying their materials;
- reviewing two partner universities' materials; and
- Participating in a pre-review briefing and a post-review teleconference for the purposes of feedback with other discipline-based colleagues who took part in the project.

It took an average of four weeks for reviewers to process and submit their reviewed materials. More detailed analysis of the findings follows.

4.1 Peer review processes

4.1.1 Part A: Peer reviewer feedback on subject/unit outlines

As noted in Chapter 3 the external peer reviewers were invited to give feedback on five areas:

- i. To what extent does the curriculum content cover all that a final year undergraduate unit on this topic should cover?
- ii. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain how the assessment tasks relate to the unit learning outcomes?
- iii. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain how the assessment tasks relate to the overall graduate outcomes of the degree program?
- iv. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain clearly the requirements for achieving at various grade levels?
- v. What are the best aspects of the unit outline? Suggestions for further enhancements?

1. Appropriateness and validity of unit curriculum content for the given topic and level of study

Response rate: 100%

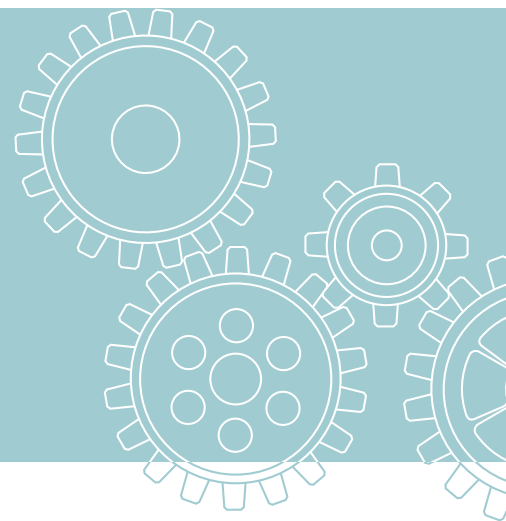
The vast majority (89.4%) of reviewers considered unit outlines to cover what a final year undergraduate unit on the topic should cover, with the remainder (10.6%) seeing coverage as being somewhat appropriate.

Positive feedback on the best aspects of the unit curriculum content included:

It rationalises the structure of the unit (as self-directed, etc) and illustrates the benefits of these modes of learning.

Very clear communication in regards to key issues such as topics covered, assessment tasks, learning outcomes/graduate attributes.

Students would be able to assess the requirements of them, the expectations, timelines and realistic workload judgements from the outset of the course.



The “Previous Student Feedback” does a great job of framing expectations for the course, and applying peer norms to the expectations of performance in the subject.

Reviewers who identified some areas for improvement suggested issues related to unit coverage of material, content, and the nature of assessment tasks.

Table 1: Appropriateness and validity of unit curriculum content for level of study

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency	0	9	17	54	5
Percentage	0.0%	10.6%	20.0%	63.5%	5.9%

2. Explanation of the relationship between assessment tasks and unit learning outcomes

Response rate: 100%

Three out of four (76.5%) reviewers reported that explanations of the relationship between assessment tasks and unit learning outcomes were adequate, very adequate or completely adequate. A further 15.3% saw the explanations of the relationship as being somewhat satisfactory, with just over 8% assessing them as requiring further work.

Positive reviewer feedback on this criterion included comments on the following best aspects:

Both the essay instructions and the marking rubric sheet contain grading criteria that are completely suited to the final year of an undergrad History major, covering things such as research skills, analytic skills, and essay-writing skills.

Provides plenty of information to students about what is expected and the approach that this subject adopts. Gives clear directives on assessment tasks.

Excellent relationship between stated aims, espoused outcomes and assessment strategies.

Table 2: Relationship between assessment tasks and unit learning outcomes

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency	7	13	17	35	13
Percentage	8.2%	15.3%	20.0%	41.2%	15.3%

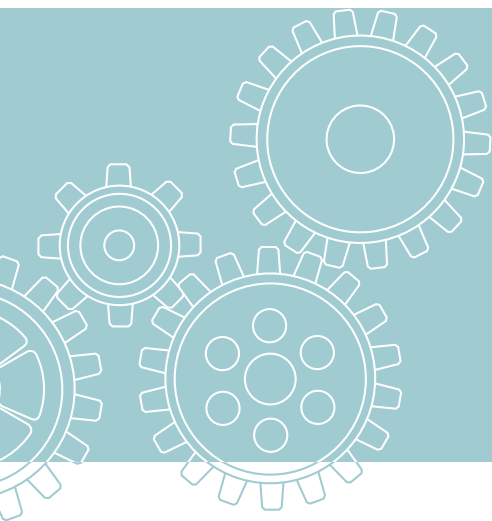
3. Explanation of the relationship between assessment tasks and graduate learning outcomes at the program level

Response rate: 100%

Almost two thirds (63.5%) of peer reviewers reported that the explanation of the relationship between assessment tasks and overall graduate learning outcomes in the unit outline they reviewed was adequate, very clear or completely clear. A further 17.6% saw that it was somewhat helpful whereas 18.8% saw room for improvement.

Table 3: Relationship between assessment tasks and graduate learning outcomes

	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency	16	15	18	24	12
Percentage	18.8%	17.6%	21.2%	28.2%	14.1%



Positive reviewer feedback on this criterion included comments such as the following:

There are five key graduate attributes listed, and all five are covered by the assessment regime (including several key learning outcomes being incorporated into multiple assessment tasks).

Reviewers who rated the explanation of the relationship between assessment tasks and graduate attributes or learning outcomes as requiring further enhancement suggested the use of rubrics that more explicitly align assessment tasks with learning outcomes at the unit and program level.

This finding points to the importance of ensuring that unit level outcomes and assessment tasks are framed in the context of course/program level outcomes and are clearly communicated to students. Reviewers and the project team suggest that this be a focal point in the professional development of both full time and sessional staff who, otherwise, may give focus just to their own unit without communicating to students how it fits into the overall program's achievement objectives and standards. Taking a more coordinated approach to course level curriculum mapping is another strategy that will help address this issue.

4. Clarity of explanations about how different grade levels are determined

Response rate: 100%

Just over half (55.1%) of reviewers said that the explanation of how different grade levels were determined in the subject outline reviewed was adequate, very clear or completely clear. One quarter (25.9%) of reviewers said it was somewhat clear, while 18.8% of reviewers identified this as an area for improvement.

Table 4: Clarity of explanation of requirements for achieving at grade levels

	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not at all (1)</i>	<i>Somewhat (2)</i>	<i>Adequately (3)</i>	<i>Very (4)</i>	<i>Completely (5)</i>
Frequency	1	16	22	20	20	6
Percentage	1.2%	18.8%	25.9%	23.5%	23.5%	7.1%

Those reviewers who spoke positively about this criterion highlighted areas such as the following:

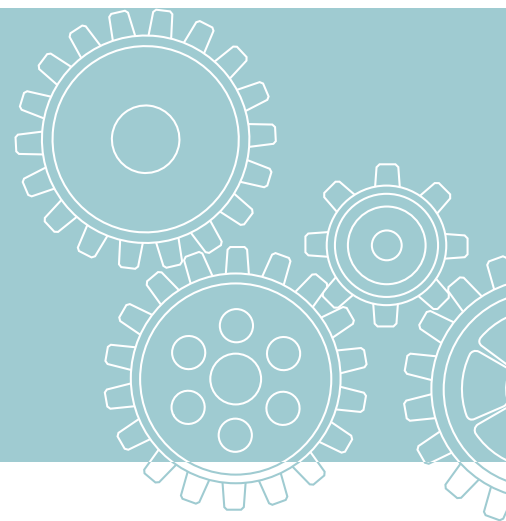
Considerable detail available to help students judge what is required of them.

Clearly denoted standards of achievement for each grade.

The guide gives relevant marking criteria, and the rubric gives a strong indication of what the marker is looking for.

Excellent to see links to sample assessment items and excerpts to demonstrate the standards required.

Reviewers and the project team agree that this is an area for further enhancement across the sector. One successful approach is to make unit outlines assessment focused and, after providing the grading rubrics for the tasks identified to provide examples of what a fail, pass, credit and distinction looks like in that subject. Only after this is clarified in the unit learning guide are students alerted to all of the learning strategies and resources built into the subject to enable them to succeed at the assessment tasks specified. UWS has adopted this approach with its assessment focused learning guide system with high levels of student satisfaction and a decrease in assessment appeals.



4.1.2 Part B: Peer reviewer feedback on grading guidelines

Peer reviewers were asked to comment on the adequacy of the assessment grading guidelines provided to students for the assessment task they were marking. They were asked to address two questions:

- To what extent is it clear how student work will be awarded grades at different levels?
- To what extent are the grading criteria at an appropriate level or standard for a final year undergraduate unit of study in this field of education?

1. Clarity of grading guidelines

Response rate: 100%

More than two-thirds (68.3%) of reviewers reported that the explanation of how different grades were to be awarded in the subject reviewed was adequate, very clear or completely clear. One in five (22.4%) saw the explanations to be somewhat clear, while a minority (8.2%) of reviewers identified this as an area for improvement.

Table 5: Clarity of grading guidelines

	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not at all (1)</i>	<i>Somewhat (2)</i>	<i>Adequately (3)</i>	<i>Very (4)</i>	<i>Completely (5)</i>
Frequency	1	7	19	19	29	10
Percentage	1.2%	8.2%	22.4%	22.4%	34.1%	11.8%

One reviewer observed:

Makes it clear what an essay that meets the threshold would look like, maybe could do more to spell out the common errors that students make.

Another commented:

The requirements for achieving various grade levels are set out in a separate document that accompanies the assessment task (assignment). However no examples are provided.

A key suggestion by some reviewers for enhancing this area included giving practical examples of what different grades look like in the distinctive context of the subject at hand. Another suggestion was to provide clearer explanations of terminology used in grading guidelines. One reviewer observed that, while the unit outline did not contain clear explanations of assessment requirements, these were contained in the separate guidelines provided for each assessment task.

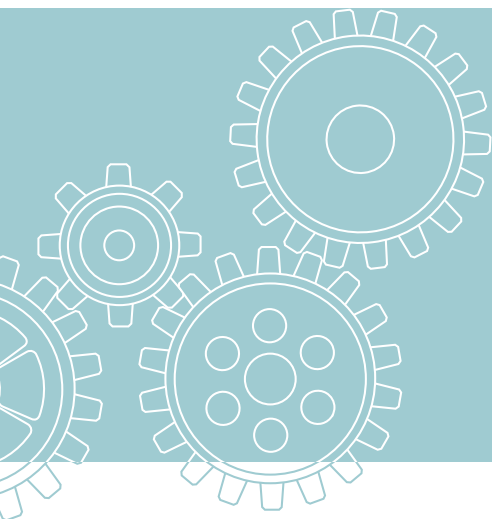
2. Appropriateness of grading guidelines

Response rate: 100%

Almost three quarters (74.1%) of reviewers reported that the grading guidelines provided for their review were adequate, very appropriate or completely appropriate with another 12.9% concluding that they were somewhat appropriate. A small minority (4.7%) of reviewers saw this as an area for improvement.

Table 6: Appropriateness of grading guidelines

	<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not at all (1)</i>	<i>Somewhat (2)</i>	<i>Adequately (3)</i>	<i>Very (4)</i>	<i>Completely (5)</i>
Frequency	7	4	11	26	22	15
Percentage	8.2%	4.7%	12.9%	30.6%	25.9%	17.6%



Positive feedback in this regard included:

Very good criterion reference assessment spreadsheets.

Requirements for achieving at various grade levels are well explained in rubric form. No examples are provided but students are able to know in advance the standards that are sought.

Suggested ways of improving grading guidelines made by reviewers included: checking the weighting between different forms of assessment is balanced, ensuring that grade descriptors are operationally clear to students and checking that the weighting is clearly on key skills. A number of reviewers noted the need to ensure that not all the focus is on exams.

4.1.3 Part C: Peer reviewer feedback on validity of assessment tasks

Peer reviewers were asked to provide feedback on the extent to which the assessment tasks used in the subject reviewed were valid (i.e. 'fit for purpose' as a measure of the learning outcomes they were to measure). The response rate from reviewers on this question was 100%.

A substantial majority (84.6%) of reviewers reported that assessment tasks reviewed were adequate for assessing the learning outcomes they were to measure, very valid or completely valid. 14.1% of reviewers said the tasks they reviewed were somewhat relevant for measuring the learning outcomes set down for the unit.

Table 7: Validity of assessment tasks

	Not applicable	Not at all (1)	Somewhat (2)	Adequately (3)	Very (4)	Completely (5)
Frequency	1	0	12	15	41	16
Percentage	1.2%	0.0%	14.1%	17.6%	48.2%	18.8%

Positive feedback included:

They (assessment tasks) encapsulate key skills of the degree and are clearly achievable and comprehensible for students.

The size of the requirement for this assessment item is commensurate with that of a final year work.

Covers all significant aspects of a music graduate in this area.

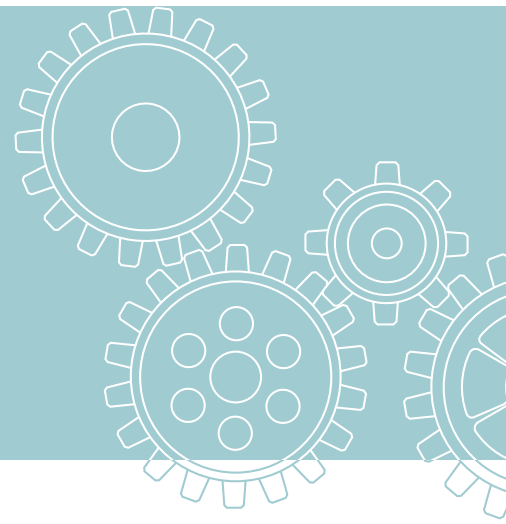
Demonstration of integrated skills in a holistic assessment task is appropriate at this level.

Overall this is a comprehensive set of activities. I particularly like the self-assessment opportunity included in each assessment task.

A number of reviewers noted the importance of assessing higher order capabilities at this level not just information and basic skills.

4.1.4 Provision of results to participants

In addition to this global feedback, each discipline group was provided with the reviewer feedback for their area. Discipline-based breakdowns were distributed to peer reviewers and project members in each participating institution for the following disciplines: Civil Engineering, Chinese, Economics, Environmental Science, History, Journalism, Law, Marketing, Music, Nursing, Philosophy, and Physics.



Overall, there was broad agreement among peer reviewers from a range of university types on disciplinary teaching and learning standards, particularly in judgements about threshold Pass/Fail grades. The majority of assessments reviewed by peer reviewers using the blind marking methodology showed strong agreement with the original score and grade. Reviewer comments and grades were returned to each home university for the purposes of internal department-level discussion and review. Participants commented on the value of this feedback for informing intra-university discussions of the importance of peer review and calibration of academic staff, particularly during the grading process.

4.1.5 Summary

In terms of Research Question 1 the project has identified that the inter-institutional moderation strategy of the type tested in this project is a feasible and productive way in which universities can demonstrate self-regulated approaches for monitoring and maintaining standards across a wide range of disciplines and operating contexts.

The project has identified high levels of consensus around the appropriateness of focus in common subjects across universities (see Research Question 2), the validity of what is addressed for the level of study concerned, the relationship between assessment tasks and unit learning outcomes, clarity about how grades are allocated and the quality and validity of the grading guidelines provided to students. However, the study has also identified some areas for further enhancement in each of these areas.

The findings reinforce the value of the peer review and moderation methodology as a viable way in which to take into account disciplinary differences whilst, at the same time identifying a way in which consistency in achievement standards can still be assured within this diversity (see Research Question 4).

In terms of Research Question 5, the study has identified that one viable option to measure program level outcomes is to explore further the use of capstone subjects which required students to bring to bear insights developed from different subjects studied to a real-world professional problem which has both interpersonal and technical dimensions.

The next section highlights the benefits of the process for academic staff participants, along with the suggestions they made for improving the process and for further follow-up on this important area.

4.2 Engaging academic staff in peer review across universities and disciplines

This section provides strong evidence that the strategy tested in this project is not only a viable way to assure sector achievement standards but that it is a powerful, peer-supported professional development strategy in its own right.

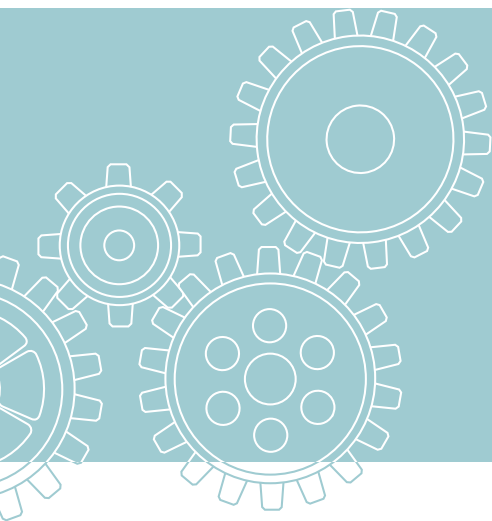
The section also specifically addresses Research Question 3.

What processes and resources are required for engaging academic staff in final year subject level blind peer review and moderation across universities and disciplines?

Academic staff capacity building was one of the most significant and unexpected successes of the project. This section summarises some of the feedback gathered from participants during the course of the project and during debriefing sessions aimed at 'closing the loop' and in focus group interviews undertaken towards the end of the project. Key themes in participants' feedback are highlighted, along with their suggestions for further improving the inter-institutional peer moderation strategy.

The findings reinforce the value of the peer review and moderation methodology as a viable way in which to take into account disciplinary differences whilst, at the same time identifying a way in which consistency in achievement standards can still be assured.

Academic staff capacity building was one of the most significant and unexpected successes of the project.



The development of this methodology is a high priority and very timely.

4.2.1 The value of the project's approach to assuring achievement standards

Participants expressed a range of reasons for engaging with the inter-institutional, peer-supported approach used in this project:

For example, a participant from Physics observed:

I was motivated to be involved simply because I'm interested in keeping the standard up. I'm not particularly interested in government requirements, but I do care about the discipline and the maintaining of a broad standard across Australia, and genuinely knowing where we stand compared to other places.

Another participant, also from Physics went on to say:

I'm very interested to know if other people thought we were marking easier or hard or whatever on our things because that's genuine information. I would hope that we would all rate in the same bands at least because we're sending students to each other at higher levels as well.

A Philosophy academic said:

It was interesting to see the standards moving fairly close to one another in relation to the marking practices across three or four quite different universities, so I think that was a good thing to come out of this.

And an academic from Music concluded:

I just want to applaud the whole concept and the whole process. I think it's been a really worthwhile exercise.

A second Music interviewee observed that:

The development of this methodology is a high priority and very timely.

4.2.2 The value of blind peer review

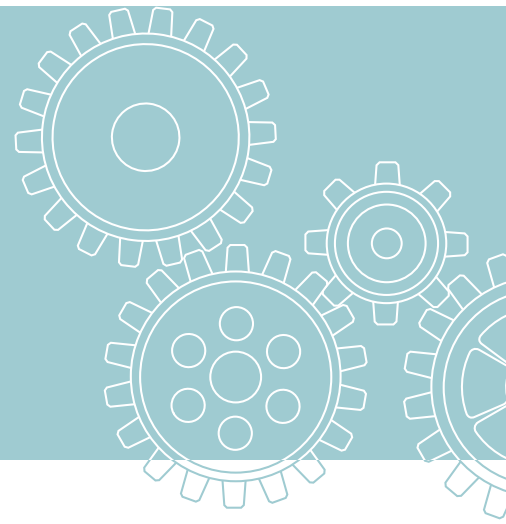
The following comments are indicative of the strong support given by all participants for the process tested in this project:

You know, even if verification had been the task I think I'd probably want to approach that by looking at it [blind/unmarked] first and marking it and then deciding whether I agree or not... I'd just be concerned that what you see in terms of a mark actually influences the opinion that you then give, you know, if you pick up something and it's got 90 on it, you think "oh this is going to be a good piece of work." (Environmental Science)

I prefer to do a blind assessment. I think if there were already marks that might force me to think a certain way or to agree more with them than to give quite a different mark based on my own judgement. (Engineering)

I think this blind marking has a lot going for it. Where you can comment on other people's view it can colour your approach and your opinion...much better to start with a blank sheet of paper, as it were. See if you come out with the same result as other people. (Engineering)

I believe that we need to maintain anonymity because I think we are actually ensuring that there is not secrecy as much as anonymity about face-saving of these staff members and also getting staff members to participate in a way that's non-threatening and non-judgemental. (Economics)



I think the blind marking is a very important step in this.

I think the blind marking is a very important step in this... But the blind marking process is costly so we certainly can't do it on a particularly frequent rolled out scale, but I think it's an important step. (Physics)

I think the system we've been involved in [blind peer review] is much more useful for everyone involved and encourages the assessor to really engage more with the work rather than just skim it and go, "yeah". (Music)

I liken it to how we review a journal article. It is anonymous to avoid some preconception of judgement about a person. So I find that anonymous is better practice. (Chinese)

(The process was) the least disruptive it could have been... sure there was a little bit of effort involved, it was a little bit time consuming getting everything together and actually reviewing, but that's just the nature of the process. (Marketing)

I'm not sure that anonymity is actually necessary for a continuing process but certainly at this stage it was. (Music)

4.2.3 The role of reference points in guiding academic judgements about standards

One of the findings from early site visits was that the majority of academic staff participants were not familiar with the notion of using a range of 'reference points' to test, validate and guide academic judgements about standards. For example, one academic staff member asked if reference points concerned "assessment criteria sheets". Another observed that reference points included the AACSB accreditation requirements and the discipline standards in Law:

Certainly the discipline standards...[they] would influence me...on another level, industry standards and what's actually expected in course and in practice...at some level creativity... I'm judging them on creativity in the upper levels.

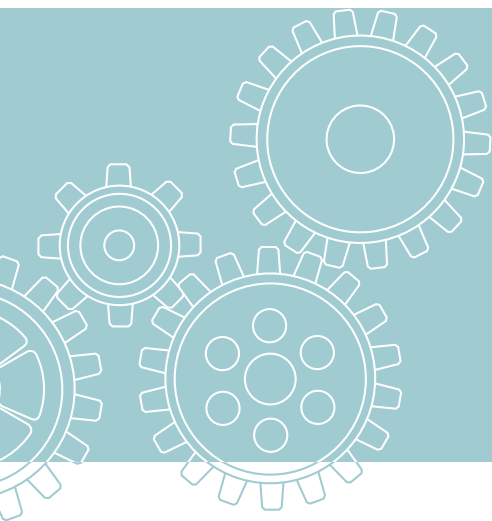
In summary, it was clear that the language of reference points in relation to forming academic judgements was not familiar to the majority of participants but that, once explained, most saw considerable merit in exploring how the various reference points outlined in Section 2.2 might be used to validate achievement standards in ways specifically appropriate to different disciplines. It is recommended that this issue is addressed as part of the sector wide capacity building process in relation to the proposed new Higher Education Standards Panel's academic standards framework.

4.2.4 The value of peer review and partnerships in a 'non-threatening' environment

Participants commented on the value of having the opportunity to share work and discuss their experiences with assessment in a common course and subject area and to see what colleagues in other universities were doing in their curriculum. They also valued having the opportunity to receive feedback on the assessment samples that they shared with peers. Indicative comments include:

Participants valued having the opportunity to receive feedback on the assessment samples that they shared with peers.

I would benefit and my practice would benefit from having a benchmark against other universities...(It was useful) have a wider or broader view of other people's assessment and think about other ways of doing things...there were at least a couple of things I picked up... it made me reflect on my standards...our teaching team may be a little bit too strict or a bit too harsh on some students when I looked at some of the other work. (Law)



I think we all appreciated the non-threatening, non-judgemental framework in which we were framed.

It was actually interesting to see what was going on in other institutions and just to see where we sort of fit in the grand scheme of things. (Environmental Science)

I think we all appreciated the non-threatening, non-judgemental framework in which everything was framed. (Engineering)

It was fantastic to actually be able to look at someone else's unit and have an idea of how someone who's in a similar position to me might be teaching this particular subject. We've had a number of people make changes to the way that they teach their course based on seeing a good idea from another colleague. That's been a particularly good outcome. (Chinese)

The cross marking followed by the dialogue is ideal because that way we can form a view and then we can engage with colleagues from other institutions to share those views and perhaps modify them on the basis of the conversation that ensues. (Music)

We have never had such an experience before where you have cross-university marking. This is very good, really worthwhile. I would like to see in the future a group where we can support one another or sit together to have a face to face discussion about what we have learned, what we can improve for the future. (Chinese)

In the Marketing focus group, colleagues reported using the opportunity to share examples of good practice in their own institutions. For example, one institution peer reviews marking criteria sheets in the following way: "we have what we call a speed dating on criteria sheets and we swap them amongst each of our unit coordinators...and we look at those and give them constructive comments."

4.2.5 The value of focusing on inputs as well as outcomes in disciplinary contexts

The following comments are indicative of participant feedback on the value of moderating the quality of the inputs to assessment not just the more usual process of moderating the marking:

In terms of the curriculum design and the curriculum adaptability to the conditions because there are a lot of pressures on people to actually try to adapt and change the way in which we deliver our ordinary business education. (Economics)

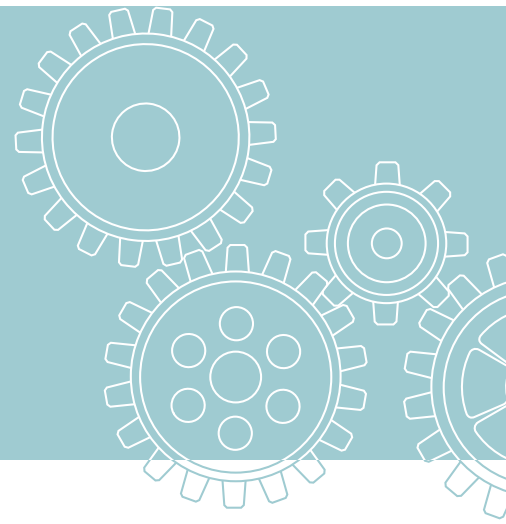
I was really pleased to see the disparity in the programs being offered. I thought it was very good. I don't want to see that lost. (Physics)

Getting hold of other people's exams was insightful; it was interesting. Having a look at other student's work was typically painful, but worthwhile. I wouldn't want to do it very often... but just kind of having a faint tab on our standards, or at least agreeing on our bands, is worthwhile. Just getting a look at each other's syllabuses and the assessment is the most efficient way to get at the heart of that.

Just seeing the overall syllabus, looking at the assessment task, that's the important thing... seeing what they [the partner universities] are doing is exactly what we're going to try to do in the future. (Philosophy)

I found it a really interesting project because you don't often or you just never really get to see how other people do what you are doing in your institution, so it was great. (Marketing)

We have never had such an experience before where you have cross-university marking. This is very good, really worthwhile.



4.3 Linking subject/unit level blind peer review of standards with whole-of-program threshold learning outcomes in disciplines

This section addresses Research Questions 3 and 5.

Research Question 3: What processes and resources are required for engaging academic staff in final year subject level blind peer review and moderation across universities and disciplines?

Research Question 5: In developing a proof of concept for assurance of program-level achievement standards, how might inter-institutional final year subject level blind peer review and moderation practices contribute to peer review of whole-of-program threshold learning outcomes in disciplines?

4.3.1 Extending the project in the Law discipline

In October 2012 the project focus was extended to consider its implications for monitoring and assuring academic standards at the overall discipline level, using discipline level learning outcomes. Using Law as a case study, 18 law academics from around Australia were brought together for a one-day invitational roundtable. The universities represented were: University of Western Sydney, James Cook University, Deakin University, Wollongong University, the University of Tasmania, and the University of Sydney. An OLT representative was also present.

The primary aim of the roundtable was to consider implications of the OLT Peer Review and Moderation Project for monitoring and assuring academic standards at the whole of program level. The Roundtable involved collegial peer review in a face-to-face setting and in the context of relevant national academic standards projects, including the *Law Discipline Standards* project (ALTC/OLT), and the *Achievement Matters* project (Mark Freeman, University of Sydney).

The day started with an overview of the outcomes and implications of Professor Sally Kift's Discipline Standards work, as well as that of Associate Professor Mark Freeman with his focus on calibration of academics in discipline-based moderation activities. Professor Liz Deane then led a discussion of the connections between peer review of disciplinary learning standards and the AQF.

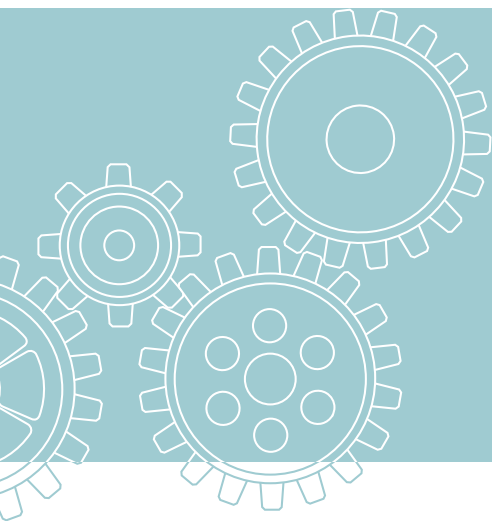
Calibration is seen to be an essential component of the process and is a core element.

After lunch, the group engaged in a peer review and moderation activity coordinated by Associate Professor Mark Freeman and using the academic calibration methodology which complements the approach taken in the peer review and moderation project. In order to ensure that academic staff are appropriately prepared to engage in peer review, calibration is seen to be an essential component of the process and is a core element in the *Achievement Matters* project.

4.3.2 Linking unit learning outcomes and assessments to Law discipline standards

Prior to the roundtable, participants received: de-identified unit learning outcomes and details of one assessment item for a final year Law unit in civil procedures/dispute resolution. Two de-identified samples of student work for the unit were used, with permission.

Participants were asked to read through the samples of student work ahead of the roundtable and to consider how they would rank these samples based on the AQF descriptors and the Bachelor of Laws Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs). Participants were also asked to consider what grade they would award each sample of student work and why they would award the particular grade.



During the course of the roundtable, participants:

- worked in groups to:
 - discuss their judgements of the samples of student work and come to consensus on the standard of student work;
 - achieve consensus on a further two samples of student work from a comparable unit from another university partner attending on the day. This necessitated the consideration of the relationship between unit level learning outcomes in the context of the Bachelor of Laws Threshold Learning Outcomes – i.e., how does one judge standards at the unit level in the context of discipline-level learning outcomes/standards?
- discussed the relative merits of the methodology used in the peer review and moderation project;
- provided advice on the implications of this approach for inter-university benchmarking of processes and outcomes; assessment policies; areas of good practice; areas for improvement and collaboration; benchmarking organisational structures and processes.

4.3.3 Law academic staff perspectives on calibration and peer review of standards

At the end of the roundtable, participants were asked to provide feedback on the utility of the process in their own institution. Key responses from those attending are summarised below.

- *With the well-developed TLOs for Law, it's clear we can do this.*
- *It would be useful for Mark to do this exercise [calibration/moderation exercise] in every Law school.*
- *(Hold) a national event that shows that the sector is capable of implementing standards.*
- *I'd want to know the real impact on ... the current and dynamic emphasis on research (\$), with a concomitant reduction in teaching staff and money everywhere makes this effort problematic.*
- *There were so many opinions on one piece of work. My colleagues at my own institution would be the same. Getting them on the same page is not easy, but it is important and there are ways to do it – or at least get them reading the same chapter!*
- *We're working on trying to get some consensus on assessing class participation. This has given me the incentive (plus a few tools) to keep this going and expand.*
- *It was so valuable to take part in that activity and to see firsthand the real outcomes/learning that came of the task.*
- *I will, without doubt, plan descriptive workshops that will utilise this approach.*
- *I am so sold on the mapping of unit LOs plus assessment to CLOs but I am looking for impactful (and efficient) ways to show the critical importance of this at the 'back end'...We are all so focussed on the front end of course design and alignment to AQF, but we need to focus academic teams on the ways they design and enact curriculum and assure themselves (and, of course, others) that they are meeting the threshold standards.*
- *consider a framework to ensure that assessment is appropriately structured at an institutional level as mapped against learning outcomes.*
- *The task reinforced my belief that sometimes it is the way assessment is written that leads to disappointing outcomes.*

But we need to focus academic teams on the ways they design and enact curriculum.



One Law academic noted that, as a result of the emphasis on framing unit-level assessment within the context of program outcomes, s/he would: *Consult TLOs when drafting assessment tasks to ensure that my assumptions match explicit articulation of task.*

Practical take-away messages identified by participants included:

- *Continue with idea to implement exam-writing standards and a workshop with peer review for ALL academics in the Law School!*
- *Bring key colleagues together to share updates on what is happening and galvanise action within the university.*
- *The message about integration and calibration was a strong one. It needs to be driven internally.*
- *We can include this discussion at the unit level and course level with our unit/course reports.*
- *Verifying standards goes from the unit level to the institutional level.*

Several participants reflected on the value of peer review and implications for their own institution:

- *Peer review is critical for verification and validation of standards.*
- *What we already know but do not practise (enough) – how important the conversation and the understanding it generates is to effective, valid and reliable assessment practice.*
- *(I will) encourage this type of conversation to happen in my institution amongst subject teams.*

The following observation from one participant highlights the critical importance of engaging in professional development activities of this kind:

Brilliant day. Absolutely thrilled to have been involved as a junior academic. Today has assisted me in understanding the various qualification frameworks from a practice perspective. Mark's exercise was invaluable in demonstrating the many assumptions we make as academics in the assessment tasks that we set. Sally's presentation was a clear articulation of what the TLOs are aiming to achieve and just how important they are in ensuring quality in the legal discipline.

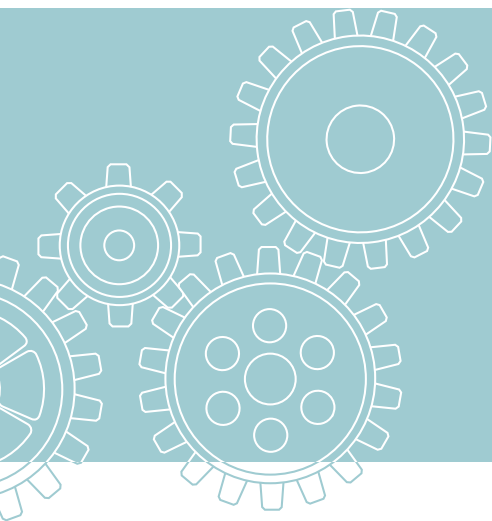
4.3.4 Connecting unit and program-level outcomes

The process outlined above provides an example of how inter-institutional final year subject level blind peer review and moderation practices can play a constructive role in fostering peer review of whole-of-program threshold learning outcomes in disciplines.

This event, along with the parallel participant feedback sessions on the project, have drawn attention to the importance of ensuring that academic staff are adequately briefed, motivated and then supported to engage in the peer review of learning and teaching standards through professional development and calibration opportunities. The way this event was managed provides a model for other institutions and discipline groups on how best to engage and support staff in this area. Such opportunities may be facilitated at department and institutional level, but there would be merit in also sponsoring a national approach to building academic staff and institutional capacity across the sector.

Participants reflected on the value of peer review and implications for their own institution.

Inter-institutional final year subject level blind peer review and moderation practices can play a constructive role in fostering peer review of whole-of-program threshold learning outcomes in disciplines.



4.4 Participant suggestions for further improvement of peer review methodology

Various suggestions for improvement were provided by participants, along with a few notes of caution. These are summarised below.

4.4.1 More information

There were several suggestions for improvement, regarding provision of more detailed information about the context and place of the unit/subject within the degree program:

It would've been very useful to know what has been done in previous units because often that will give some notion of pre-requisite subjects. Looking at one unit in isolation can be quite difficult. (Economics)

Another suggestion was to share the lecture notes as part of the peer review process:

If you know what kind of lecture material is being given, then you know the kind of paradigm that we're working in. (Physics)

In the Music area, one participant asked to be able to provide a:

Short paragraph about the philosophy of our department and discipline...I think that would help the assessors to know that this is where we're coming from in terms of what we want our students to be producing.

Other Music academics also noted the need to have information about the approach to assessing performances in the home institution, including the number of assessors used and whether:

Markers mark completely independently and then collate at the end, or do they mark independently then collaborate on a collective view, is it acceptable for people to adjust their marks in the light of what the other assessors have said?...that sort of stuff.

Academic staff participants from the Chinese language discipline group suggested that the provision of more information about teaching materials such as textbooks would be useful.

Other comments identified a range of different disciplinary perspectives and priorities.

4.4.2 Timing of feedback

A number of participants noted the importance of providing the peer feedback on assessment and achievement standards at the time when it can best be acted upon:

The feedback is extremely important but I think it's also a question of the timing of the feedback. If we want to be effective in terms of quality enhancement perhaps the feedback should come not at the end of the grading but during semester...I am suggesting the timeliness of the feedback will become very important to us in the years to come and also in terms of actually looking at the points of difference between institutions. (Economics)

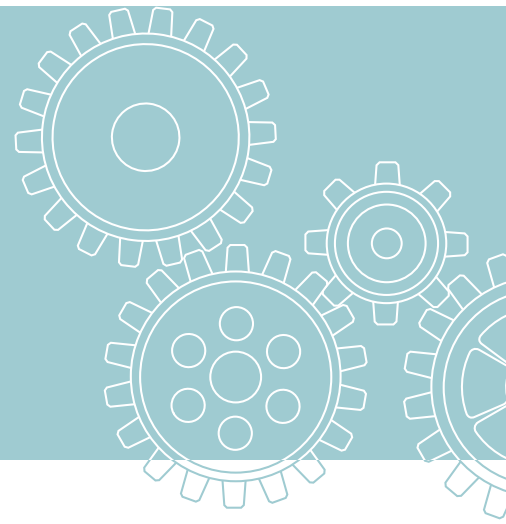
4.4.3 Clarity of the project and its purpose

A small number of participants suggested making much clearer what the context and purpose of the peer moderation system is: As one participant said: *"I thought it was reasonable once I understood what the task was."* (Law academic)

4.4.4 Logistical matters

The participants from the Music discipline highlighted the importance of 'generic file types' as a way of sharing samples of work for peer review purposes. They also suggested the establishment of a searchable, online repository for the sharing of work samples.

Participants noted the importance of providing the peer feedback on assessment and achievement standards at the time when it can best be acted upon.



Respondents were very clear about the need to guard against 'standardisation' when peer-reviewing standards.

In the discipline of Chinese, the participants observed the need to “compare apples with apples” in terms of the unit comparisons. They commented on “the complexity of Chinese teaching” and the need for background regarding the students and their skill level in order to making judgements about standards. One suggestion was to compare first year, second year and third year Chinese offerings rather than particular units.

4.4.5 Caution against standardisation

Respondents were very clear about the need to guard against ‘standardisation’ when peer-reviewing standards, with many emphasising that there is a profound difference between ‘standards’ and ‘standardisation’. A number of respondents emphasised that this sort of approach needs to avoid the temptation of establishing a ‘one size fits all’ approach. The following comment from a participant from the Philosophy discipline is indicative:

I don't know what power the report's going to have in terms of laying down some sort of law about what the discipline should be doing...with philosophy it's just that it's harder to think about...I mean we agree on these very general principles of content but the notion of having a set threshold ... seems a bit hard.

4.4.6 Scepticism about consensus moderation

Some participants noted the challenges that can arise in consensus moderation processes. As one observed: “One of the worries about consensus marking, for me at least, is sometimes it can be a pressure to reach agreement with your colleague and it can occasionally disadvantage the students.”

4.4.7 The need to focus on not just units/subjects but the program as a whole

As one peer reviewer in Marketing observed, when raising the issue of having too much of a ‘siloed’ focus:

One of the problems is that most institutions still have pretty much a unit focus. I don't think we really look very well at where things fit together in the overall program yet. We're still in a bit of a silo mentality. Unless you've really got a champion at departmental level to keep reflecting on that [the program level], and to keep that in front of everybody's face, people just sort of forget it, become too focussed on their own things because that's just the nature of how work goes.

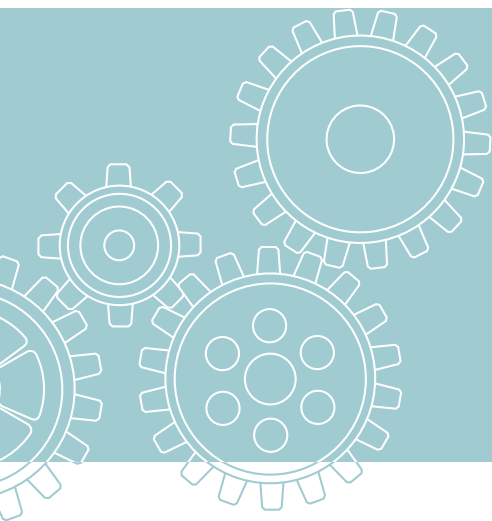
4.4.8 Anonymity as a potential limitation

A number of participants observed that:

In some sense, attempting to de-identify some of the submission materials...actually worked against the effectiveness of the process because ... if you're assessing somebody in that kind of multi-faceted submission, you really need to know specifically what they contributed...so the anonymizing actually worked against an effective appraisal from my perspective.

The participants from the Music area saw value in being able to talk to one another during the process, rather than only at the end. In many cases they were sharing digital files that required some discussion or clarification. As one participant said:

There would be a lot to be said for us being able to talk with each other...cause sometimes it's not really clear in words... there's embedded knowledge ...so it would be really helpful to be able to just sort of talk directly to the other convenor...to get that sort of handle on the unsaid stuff.



This raises the important issue of how best to balance anonymity and the identified benefits of blind peer review.

Again, a participant in the Chinese discipline area thought it might be “*better if we share one sample assessment with comments and grades ...because the reviewer will have a better idea of what the teacher does*”; while a colleague from another university disagreed saying they would “*prefer ungraded papers...that would be better*”.

This raises the important issue of how best to balance anonymity and the identified benefits of blind peer review (Section 4.2.4) against the potential benefits of direct dialogue with colleagues in other institutions about assessment and related issues in a common teaching area.

4.4.9 Embedding this process into a broader approach to quality enhancement

A number of participants noted that this approach would fit well into a broader, peer-supported quality enhancement strategy. As an academic staff member in Economics observed:

Putting my neck right out there...I would suggest that it's a quality enhancement process that we're after, that we are actually looking at the link that exists in the process of doing a moderation, doing peer review as an integral process of looking at staff exchanges, staff development across the board. I would like to work with X (name of peer reviewer from another university), for example, in terms of some of the units and have discussions, put some money into the various ways in which we can actually collaborate across the board in terms of, for example, getting some concessions at the Economics Education Conference for people to actually participate and exchange their ideas.

Similar suggestions were made by a number of the Philosophy participants:

It wouldn't necessarily be cheap but if you could get everyone in the same room for three or four hours and have the various bits and pieces de-identified and then have a sort of discussion about any differences there and then, more immediate type of feedback might be useful.

4.4.10 Sustaining the use of this approach beyond the life of the project

A number of participants highlighted the importance of establishing an accountability and coordinating system if the approach tested in this project is to be sustained. As one academic commented:

My question is if we were to be sending this information in every semester or once a year, where do you think we would be sending it? Who's going to take on the administrative role of collecting and distributing the information...There needs to be something in place. (Marketing)

4.4.11 Workload issues

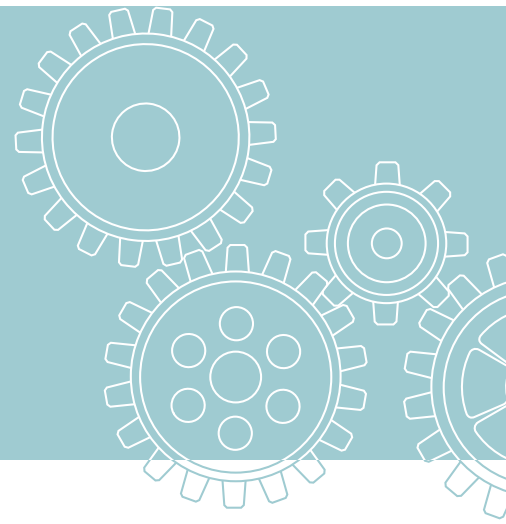
A recurring theme from the academic staff interviewed was that they appreciated the opportunity to take part in the project, but it had not been easy to find the time to engage in the process. Comments such as the following summarise many of the sentiments in this regard:

I'm frantically doing stuff for my intensive that's coming up so there hasn't been a lot of opportunity at present.

I suppose it's really a work minimisation sales pitch where you can say look, this is being done elsewhere and they're having good results with that...you'd know the pressures on full time staff ...if you say to them “oh here's another teaching initiative”, oh no, they just collapse under the weight of what they have to do.

In the Marketing focus group, one colleague raised concerns about the resource implications and a colleague proposed a possible solution, as outlined in the following excerpt.

This approach would fit well into a broader, peer-supported quality enhancement strategy.



I wouldn't change the process. The only thing is the resource implications, it does take a long time and that's the one thing you have to think about...we've got papers we're doing, we're teaching subjects and we're doing all that, and you have to fit these other things in around your normal activities, and that's the resource implication, and we just keep getting lumped with more and more reporting and more and more learning outcome stuff that comes in.
(Marketing)

A colleague suggested a solution which aligns with the proposed strategy outlined in Figure 1 of this report; that is, the use of a cyclical approach to peer review that involves periodic blind peer review as part of a broader systems approach to monitoring academic standards using a suite of strategies:

I don't think it's necessary to do it every semester. I think you would rotate it through a major or something like that every two years of something like that...any more than that would become very cumbersome. (Marketing)

4.5 Implications for future work

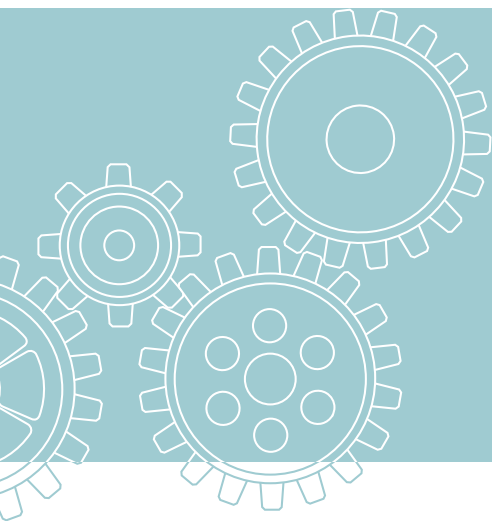
If academic peer review of achievement standards and approaches to assessment are to become part of the 'core business' of higher education, it is essential that these processes are integrated into the fabric of academic work and the incentive and accountability systems of our universities. In the words of one participant:

It really is a question of not looking at it as outside the ordinary business of providing business education or economics education, it actually needs to become an internal process by which we can actually start to improve.

As repeatedly noted by participants, staff need time for professional development to learn how to engage productively in peer review and in collegial discussions before and after the process to maximise the benefit to individuals, students and the institution as a whole. A sector-wide approach to developing and sharing situated good practice resources and guides to assist these activities would significantly assist this process. It is recommended that this be followed up and become part of the work of the secondee which the project team recommends is appointed by the OLT to give leadership to follow-up on the project outcomes and recommendations.

The feedback from the many forums and feedback sessions on the project's findings have informed the eight Recommendations detailed in the concluding chapter of this report. The following chapter considers the implications of these findings for institutional policy.

It is essential that these processes are integrated into the fabric of academic work and the incentive and accountability systems of our universities.



Chapter 5

A policy perspective on managing peer review and moderation of standards

This section addresses Research Question 4.

What disciplinary and institutional differences are evident in processes for managing inter-institutional peer review and moderation at subject level and what are the implications for accommodating such diversity in ongoing implementation?

The findings reported in Chapter 4 highlight different views about approaches to curriculum design and assessment across disciplines in final year units. A single unifying theme, however, is the importance of putting in place discipline-responsive, systematic, accountably led institutional approaches to monitoring and assuring standards. All universities have internal quality assurance frameworks which set overall strategies and standards whilst supporting diversity. The findings of this study reinforce the value of using these frameworks to underpin approaches to benchmarking standards among institutions (see Figure 1).

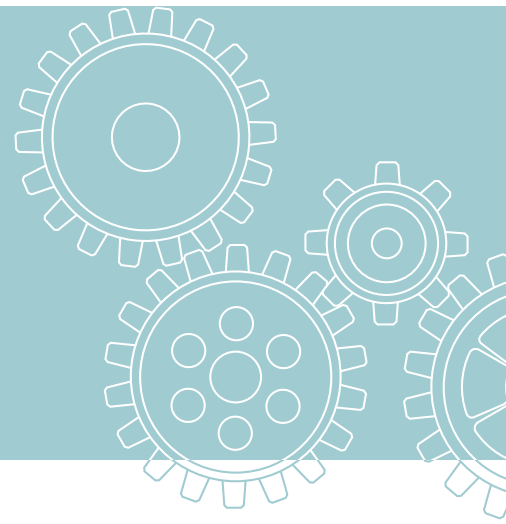
During the course of the project the assessment policies of each university partner were collated and analysed, along with numerous exemplars from other universities. The aim was to gauge the extent to which university policies already included references to standards-related matters such as use of reference points to inform academic judgements about standards, and fostered moderation, peer review of learning standards within and between universities and benchmarking of teaching and learning standards.

The following checklist is the result of the combined analysis of these policies. Sample policy statements are included to assist institutions interested in embedding peer review approaches for the purposes of monitoring and assuring learning achievement standards. The checklist below is also included in the handbook for practitioners and policy makers that has been developed during this project.

5.1 Policy checklist and exemplars: Embedding peer review of standards in policy and practice

Following are 10 policy checkpoints to guide the review of existing assessment and related policies and guidelines to assist institutions in the design and implementation of policies and practices that reflect a commitment to collegial peer review among academics in disciplines to monitor and assure teaching and learning standards. They are consistent with three decades of research on effective change leadership and implementation in higher education (Fullan & Scott, 2009).

- Checkpoint 1: Define key terms.
- Checkpoint 2: Develop an institutional standards framework to provide a rationale and context for peer review of teaching and learning standards.
- Checkpoint 3: Articulate the benefits of collegial peer review and moderation.
- Checkpoint 4: Build professional development into the peer review process for all staff with teaching and assessment responsibilities, including sessional staff.
- Checkpoint 5: Clarify expectations of staff.
- Checkpoint 6: Ensure that peer review and moderation responsibilities are included in position description and workload allocations.
- Checkpoint 7: Adopt a tiered approach to monitoring and assuring teaching and learning standards that emphasises local, department level peer review, as well as inter-institutional approaches.
- Checkpoint 8: Integrate peer review into course quality assurance and enhancement cycles.
- Checkpoint 9: Design systems, policies and guidelines to enable sharing of student assessment samples.



- Checkpoint 10: Review benchmarking policy and partnership arrangements to ensure that they include scope for benchmarking teaching and learning standards.

Expanded policy checkpoints with exemplars from Australian universities follow.

Policy Checkpoint 1: Define key terms.

- Key terms may include: moderation, consensus moderation, teaching standards, learning standards. See the Glossary of Terms (Appendix B) in this report for definitions.

Examples from Griffith University:

Moderation of assessment is defined as the process used to ensure the quality of assessment and its outcomes; it ensures that the judgements of students' performance are consistent and have the same 'meaning' irrespective of time, place or marker.

Consensus moderation is defined as follows: Consensus moderation of assessment is the process used to reach a general agreement about what quality assessment and its outcomes 'looks like'; it ensures that the judgements of students' performance are consistent and have the same 'meaning' irrespective of time, place or marker.

Examples from the University of Tasmania:

Performance standard: A clearly articulated description of the level of attainment that acts as a stable reference point or recognised measure for the purposes of reaching a decision on the quality of a student's work (source: University of Tasmania, 2009).

Benchmark: A point of reference against which something may be measured. Benchmarks are data comparisons.

Benchmarking: The systematic comparison of an organisation's inputs, systems, processes and outputs both against those of external bodies and internally against previously collated in-house data (source: University of Tasmania, 2011).

Policy Checkpoint 2: Develop an institutional standards framework to provide a rationale and context for peer review of teaching and learning standards.

- The goal is for academics to be confident in their own informed and calibrated judgements, and able to trust their colleagues' abilities to make routine appraisals of student works with an appropriate degree of detachment and self-regulation. Furthermore, the way in which academic achievement standards are assured needs to be transparent to colleagues, students, quality assurance agencies and the wider society (Sadler, 2012, p. 14).

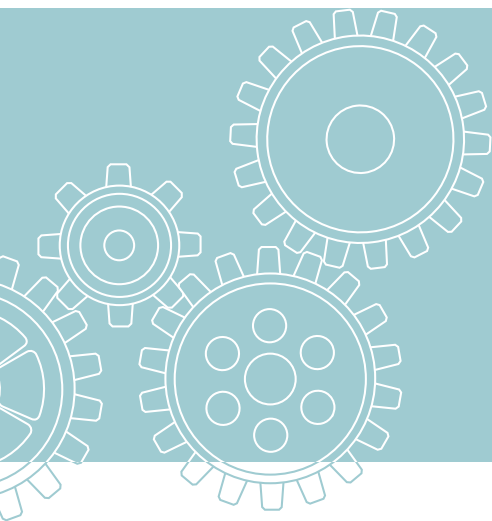
An example of a comprehensive framework is the University of Western Sydney Academic Standards and Assessment Framework (see Figure 2 in Section 4.4.2 below).

The University of Tasmania has developed a University Standards Framework which has been tested and endorsed. It comprises six domains: Research, Research Training, Curriculum, Learning, Teaching, and Student Experience. Online resources and publications are available at: <http://www.utas.edu.au/student-evaluation-review-and-reporting-unit/academics-standards-projects>

Policy Checkpoint 3: Articulate the benefits of collegial peer review and moderation.

Sample statements include:

- Consensus moderation processes are used to develop a common disciplinary understanding of the course standards that underpin comparability and ensure consistency of marking.



- Consensus moderation is most commonly conducted via a peer review process, where the aim is to reach agreement. At its best, the process will also facilitate the resolution of any minor objections, resulting in agreement and consent by all participants.
- As a part of the assurance of quality, consensus moderation is also used to ensure there is no 'slippage' of assessment standards and judgements over time i.e. that consistency is maintained over time. Furthermore, we want to ensure that the standards required of students are essentially equivalent across related courses (and institutions), i.e. those standards are comparable. (source: Griffith University)
- Moderation assists academic staff to work towards judgements that are valid, reliable and consistent, fair and equitable, and actively improve learning and teaching. (source: Charles Darwin University)

Policy Checkpoint 4: Build professional development into the peer review process for all staff with teaching and assessment responsibilities, including sessional staff.

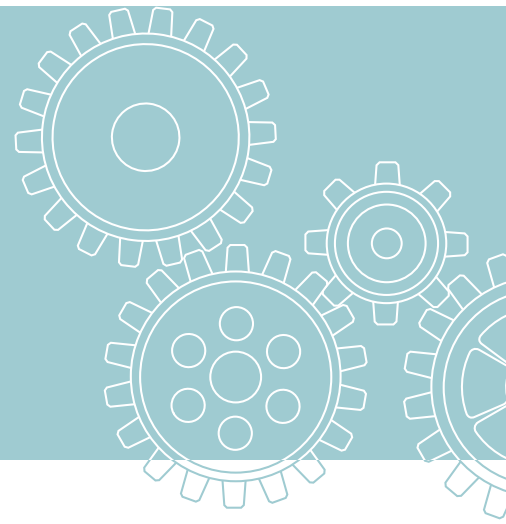
Sample statements include:

- All academic staff, including sessional staff, with teaching, unit coordination and assessment responsibilities will have access to a peer review and feedback guide (online) to be used as the basis for peer review of teaching and learning standards within their academic department.
- The academic development unit (or equivalent) will facilitate professional development activities to support staff skill development in the area of peer review of standards, consensus moderation and calibration of academic staff to assist in the assurance of academic standards. Professional staff development in the area of peer review and consensus moderation may be integrated into sessional staff induction programs, academic staff introductions to university teaching programs or in graduate certificate in higher education programs, or the like.
- In addition to centrally supported professional development, each Department will be responsible for facilitating academic calibration professional development activities at least once per year for each course/program. This calibration process includes staff 'tuning' staff 'judgement-making ability' (Sadler, 2012, p.14) to ensure that grading is valid, reliable and self-regulated. The aim of department-based professional development in the area of calibration is to build academic and sessional staff confidence in their own informed and calibrated judgements, and to build trust in their colleagues' abilities to make routine appraisals of student works with an appropriate degree of detachment and self-regulation.

Policy Checkpoint 5: Clarify expectations of staff.

Sample statements include:

- Moderation should be based on a commitment to open communication and quality improvement.
- Moderation should take a holistic approach, based on the best available data and using a range of appropriate techniques. (source: Charles Darwin University)
- Consensus moderation processes are used to develop a common disciplinary understanding of the course standards that underpin comparability and ensure consistency of marking. One or more of the following approaches to moderation are conducted every time a course is offered:
 - Course level planning e.g. self and peers (internal or external to the course) review the assessment plan to ensure the assessment regime and tasks are appropriate to the learning objectives of the course (Refer Section 3.1).



- Individual student work e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) develop and use marking guides/rubrics specifying predetermined criteria so the bases for marking are consistent and communicated to both students and examiners.
- Recommended course grades e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) review assessment exemplars across different grades at the end of a course to assure consistency of assessment judgements.
- Course standards over time e.g. examiners (internal or external to the course) review assessment exemplars and marks awarded to current students with those awarded for comparable exemplars from previous course offerings.
- Cognate courses e.g. Griffith colleagues, colleagues external to the University or through professional accreditation processes, review marks and/or grades awarded to assessment exemplars to assure comparability of course standards within the degree program, across the qualification level and across like programs offered by other providers.
- The Course Convenor documents the moderation process with the teaching team, in conjunction with the recommended grades, for consideration by the School Assessment Board. (source: Griffith University)
- The Comparability of Assessment (Moderation) Guidelines require that: a sample of assessment is moderated where there is more than one instance, or more than one person marking assessment tasks by (for example):
 - Double marking of 'A's and Fail grades.
 - Exchange marking of examination scripts.
 - Exchange marking of a major piece of assessment (source: La Trobe University.)
- The Macquarie University Assessment Policy requires that: "all assessment tasks undergo regular cycles of moderation."
 - The assessment guidelines expect: 'a shared understanding of standards and expectations in regard to assessment of learning'.
- Staff of the university are expected to have: 'sound connections with related professional and accrediting bodies and employer groups to establish a clear and shared understanding of the standards of achievement implied in graduates' credentials they receive from the University'. (source: Macquarie University)

Policy Checkpoint 6: Ensure that peer review and moderation responsibilities are included in position description and workload allocations.

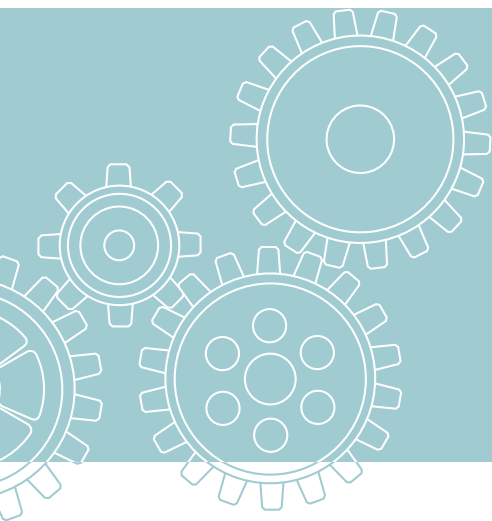
Sample statements include:

- Academic staff are expected to: "seek external expert moderation of assessment design and grading practices to gain feedback on the academic and disciplinary standards they entail". (source: Macquarie University)

Policy Checkpoint 7: Adopt a tiered approach to monitoring and assuring teaching and learning standards that emphasises local, department level peer review, as well as inter-institutional approaches.

Sample statements include:

- While the development of well-designed criteria and standards will invest the assessment process with greater objectivity, of necessity the process must also rely on the professional judgement of the assessors. For this reason, internal and external moderation are critical to assure validity and reliability of assessment practices including the awarding of grades.



- Unit coordinators are required to internally moderate all units to ensure that marks awarded between tutorial groups and by different teaching staff are internally consistent, comply with the QUT Grading Scale (and meet appropriate academic standards. Course coordinators are responsible for external moderation of assessment to assure academic standards of the course are appropriate. (source: Queensland University of Technology)
- The assessment tasks and the judgements made of student learning in the University's courses are subject to periodic benchmarking to ensure the maintenance of appropriate academic standards.
- Benchmarking involves comparing academic standards in one course with the academic standards applied (a) in the same course at different times, (b) in different courses in the same institution or (c) similar courses in other institutions. (source: The Australian National University)

Policy Checkpoint 8: Integrate peer review into course quality assurance and enhancement cycles.

Sample statements include:

- Moderation is central to the quality assurance processes built into programs of learning development, implementation and monitoring
- Moderation at the University, including monitoring and adjustment of the quality of assessment, will be built into quality control processes throughout the program of learning life-cycle. (source: Charles Darwin University)

The Course Quality Assurance Policy states that:

- Course cycle, external review and accreditation contribute to Course Quality Assurance through the independent validation of professionally recognised standards, and facilitates benchmarking. Faculties with courses that are not covered by professional accreditation are expected to include course cycle and external review approaches as part of periodic curriculum approval and review between corporate review cycles. (source: Queensland University of Technology)

Policy Checkpoint 9: Design systems, policies and guidelines to enable sharing of student assessment samples.

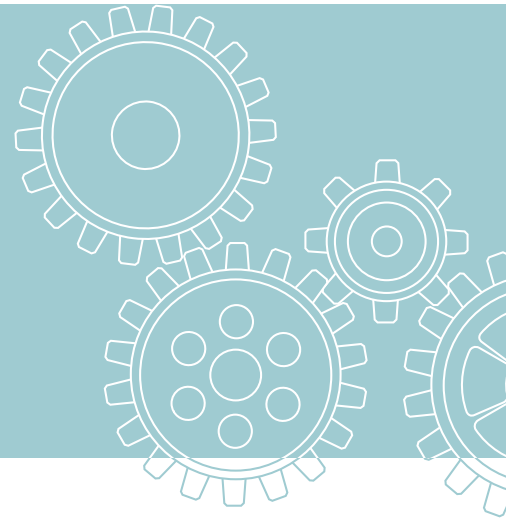
Sample statements include:

- Colleges are responsible for keeping examples of anonymous student work at different levels of achievement and records of learning outcomes, assessment processes and the outcomes of assessment. (source: The Australian National University)
- All graded assessment will be submitted electronically and stored in the nominated repository to facilitate sharing of de-identified samples of student work for the purposes of peer review within and beyond the institution.
- Student assessment cover sheets will include a statement indicating that de-identified assessment samples may be distributed to peer reviewers within and beyond the university for the purposes of quality assurance.

Policy Checkpoint 10: Review benchmarking policy and partnership arrangements to ensure that they include scope for benchmarking teaching and learning standards.

An example from the draft benchmarking policy of the University of Tasmania, 2011:

- Benchmarking can take a number of forms, and may be characterised on three dimensions: the nature of the benchmarking exercise; the organisational level at which it is undertaken; and the partnership arrangements involved.



3.1.1 Nature of benchmarking:

- i. **Data comparison:** the phenomenon in question is compared against some sort of reference point or benchmark; this might be quantitative (e.g. the attrition rate) or qualitative (e.g. threshold standards for learning outcomes).
- ii. **Investigative:** a detailed investigation is carried out to understand the phenomenon in question, the level of performance, the reasons for that performance, and means of improving performance.

3.1.2 Organisational level:

- i. **Whole of organisation.**
- ii. **Organisational sub-unit**, e.g. faculty, school, university institute, division, campus.

3.1.3 Partnership basis:

- i. **Informal relationship** often deriving from personal connections and usually involving an agreement to undertake one benchmarking exercise.
 - ii. **Formal relationship** that may involve one benchmarking exercise or an ongoing series of exercises, and is often codified into a formal memorandum of understanding.
 - iii. **Membership relationship** where the organisation participates in collecting and sharing information on one or more phenomena as a result of belonging to a particular organisation (e.g. CAUL, CAUDIT).
 - iv. **Internal** benchmarking where the benchmarking occurs across organisational units within the one organisation
- There are many kinds of benchmarking methodologies, including process, outcome, sector/functional, strategic, activity, internal, performance, public information, competitive, horizontal and vertical benchmarking. More details are provided in *Benchmarking Procedures*.
 - Benchmarking exercises will often involve a partnership with one or more other organisations or organisational units. Such partnerships may be reflected in a formal agreement such as an inter-institutional memorandum of understanding, a membership agreement or a less formal arrangement. Formal agreements require approval at the appropriate level in the University, determined by Governance and Legal.

5.2 Academic achievement standards within an academic quality and standards framework for Learning and Teaching

The UWS Academic Standards and Quality Framework for Learning and Teaching can be used to enable staff to see where the current project fits into the broader set of activities and services that optimise student retention and productive learning in a University. The framework in Figure 2 emphasises that it is the total student experience that counts and an underpinning quality management policy, leadership and accountability system is necessary to enact it. The framework shows that it is the combined effect of sound learning design (1), aligned support (2) and effective delivery (3) that optimizes productive learning and positive outcomes for students (4). It notes that the quality of inputs (high quality design, support and delivery) are all important but that the key test of academic quality and standards resides in the impact which all this effort has on students' development of the capabilities that count for successful early career professional/disciplinary performance and leadership. It is on level 4 in the framework that the current project is focused.

The UWS framework attracted a commendation in the University's Cycle 2 quality audit and is now being adopted and adapted by a range of universities around the world.

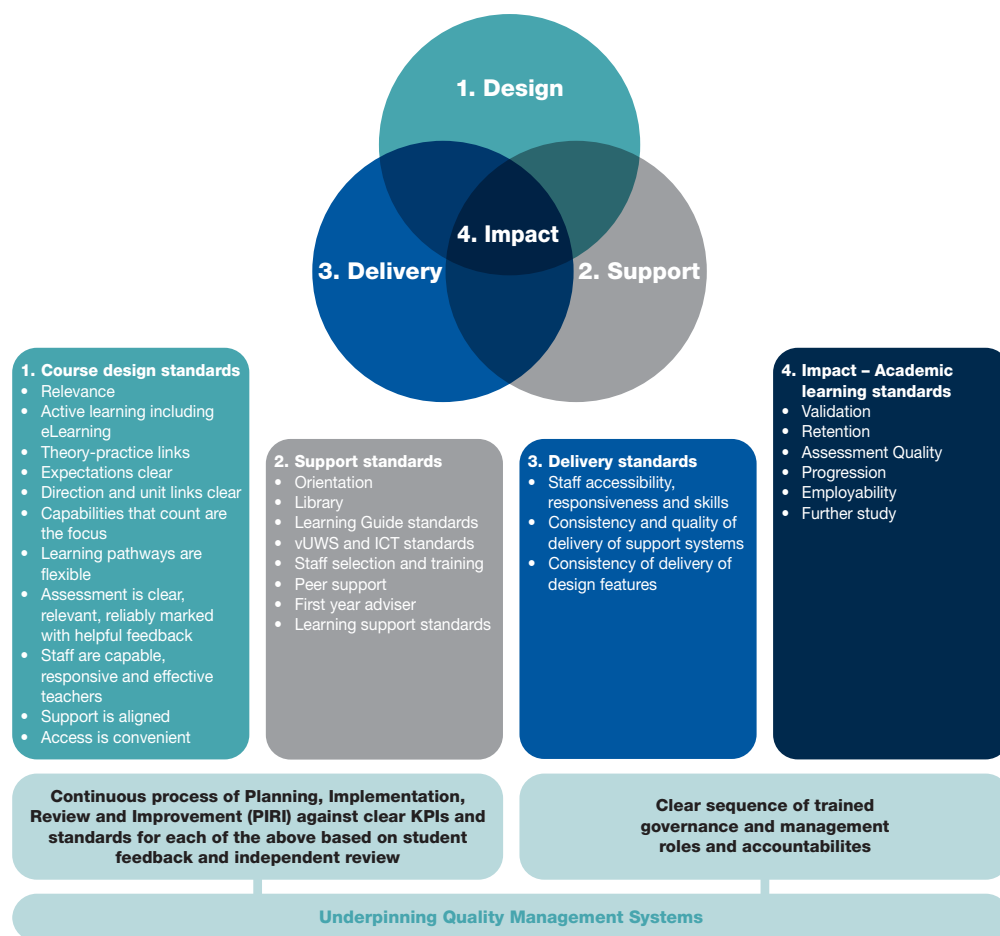
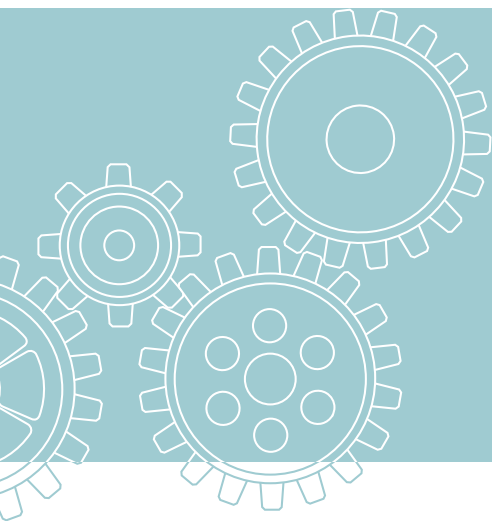


Figure 2: UWS Academic Standards and Quality Framework for Learning & Teaching

The framework is used to ensure that the total student experience and its impact are tracked and that data from the tracking system based on this framework (see UWS Annual Course Review process and dashboard tracking system) are used to provide consolidated diagnostic reports and suggestions for improvement. This system repeatedly identifies assessment quality and feedback as being of top priority to students. The framework acknowledges that everyone at a University plays an important role in retaining students and engaging them in productive learning with positive outcomes.

Participants in this project and a wide range of parallel projects around the world have noted that overall frameworks are very important as a means to enable everyone to ‘see the forest for the trees’, to locate particular initiatives within a broader framework and to identify the importance of their role in ensuring the total student experience is engaging and productive.

Chapter 6

Project outcomes and impact



The project sought to develop, test and enhance ‘a sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation’. It has generated a number of important outcomes against its endorsed project objectives, as outlined below.

6.1 Outcomes

Outcome 1: Production of a validated proof-of-concept inter-institutional unit-level peer review and moderation model that is sustainable and scaleable for use across the sector and across disciplines.

The inter-institution peer review and moderation model first developed by UWS in 2010 has undergone a number of refinements over the course of the project. These refinements are based on lessons learned at various stages and the extensive user feedback obtained from academic colleagues involved in the project, focus group meetings on the outcomes, the feedback from the project evaluator as well as detailed feedback from the project team and steering group members. The *User Guide* (see Appendix C and the project website: www.uws.edu.au/latstandards) is intended to describe the model developed and to assist all universities interested in pursuing this approach to assuring achievement standards with its successful implementation. The *User Guide* is complemented by a number of resources, also available on the website in the section entitled ‘implementation materials’. These include a step-by-step guide to implementing the process and editable documents to facilitate peer provision and review of inputs and blind marking.

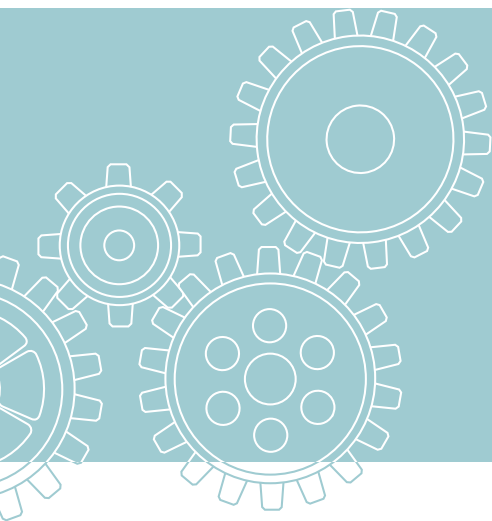
Outcome 2: Evaluation of the relative benefits of peer review and moderation and the Group of Eight (Go8) Quality Verification of Standards (QVS) approach for assuring standards.

A discussion paper prepared by Professors Liz Deane and Kerri-Lee Krause entitled *Towards a Learning Standards Framework* compares and evaluates the peer review and moderation model with the Go8 QVS. The paper also includes a comparison of these two approaches to assuring standards with that used by Winthrop Professor Phil Hancock (University of Western Australia) and Associate Professor Mark Freeman (University of Sydney) in the *Achievement Matters* project. The *Learning Standards Framework* paper is included as Appendix E and is available on the project website at www.uws.edu.au/latstandards http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/398620/learning_stds_framework_final_dec_2012.pdf

Further evaluation of the peer moderation model tested in the project has come from the detailed feedback provided in ongoing face-to-face and electronic meetings over the course of the project with the Project Team, the National Steering Group and International Steering Group member (Dr Peter Ewell). Academic colleagues have given feedback at the extensive follow up discipline roundtables, focus groups, and interviews.

Outcome 3: Develop networks of institution and discipline-based academic staff to share good practice in assessment and peer review and moderation across disciplines.

Networks of academic staff have been successfully established and developed over the course of the project. Site visits have been held in each phase of the project (Phase 1 – Semester 1 and 2, 2011; Phase 2 – Semester 2, 2011 – 2012) and the disciplinary feedback forums have helped build the required networks. Email and telephone discussions between discipline groups in the early stages of peer review and the moderation activities themselves have offered an opportunity for academic colleagues to network with colleagues outside of their own institution who share expertise in the same discipline. Discipline-based feedback teleconferences held at the conclusion of each peer review and moderation activity gave colleagues a further opportunity to build linkages.



Outcomes 4: Capacity-building among peer-reviewers.

A total of 52 academics from 12 discipline areas participated in the peer review and moderation process. Participants' feedback on the value of this experience (Section 4.2) indicates that the process has proven to be a feasible and productive way in which to foster practical, situated, learning-by-doing, with clear guidance and peer support. Participants have consistently reported that this prompted them to reflect on, and make improvements to, their own approaches and practices.

Outcome 5: Promotion of a common language around issues of peer review and moderation and standards.

While colleagues often reported engaging in several forms of internal quality assurance including benchmarking, remarking of student work, calibration activities, they reported that a common set of definitions of key terms that would ensure everyone was speaking the same language when discussing aspects of quality assurance, standards, assessment and evaluation was absent. Participants suggested that the sorts of inter-institutional benchmarking and moderation fostered by this project would be significantly facilitated if this were achieved. Appendix B provides a starting point for this process. Involvement in the process, including using project materials such as the *User Guide* and editable feedback forms, also enabled colleagues to become familiar with the language of peer review and moderation and standards and have an opportunity to use this language when connecting nationally with colleagues in their discipline.

Outcome 6: Production of user-friendly resources.

A number of resources have been developed during the project which can be used by institutions to evidence assurance of quality and standards and address TEQSA requirements for higher education providers. These are available on the project website www.uws.edu.au/latstandards.

The project has provided capacity-building opportunities on the core concepts explored in the project for both the academic staff involved in the project as well as the senior university leaders who comprise the project team.

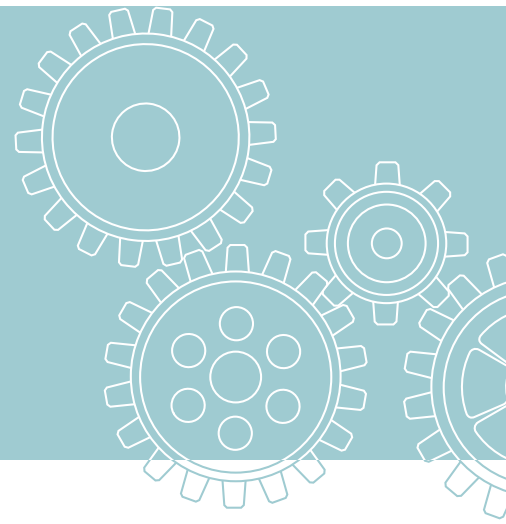
6.2 Evidence of impact on the higher education sector

6.2.1 Impact within Australia

The positive impact of the project on the sector can be seen in the number of additional institutions which have asked if they can use and/or adapt the methodology within Australia and, more recently beyond it. It has played an important role in helping shape policy developments in the sector, continuing to align with the work of TEQSA and the Higher Education Standards Panel.

In particular, the project has raised significant implications in relation to the national policy agenda regarding the measurement and reporting of student learning outcomes. Notably, several of the institutions that form part of this project referred to the value of peer review and moderation of learning outcomes as an important part of any effort to monitor and report on student learning outcomes in their institutional submissions to national policy discussion papers for the area.

The Australian Higher Education Standards Panel March 2013 discussion paper refers to the fundamental importance of peer review methodology such as that used in this project for the purposes of validation of learning outcomes and achievement standards. The work of the project has been discussed directly by Professor Krause with Emeritus Professor Alan Robson, the Chair of the National HE Standards Panel, as well as with the TEQSA representatives. Emeritus Professor Robson has given public support for the peer review approach.



The project has been showcased at key sector events like the TEQSA Teaching and Learning Standards Summit held mid-2011. This was an important event for raising awareness in the sector regarding the practical ways in which peer review of standards might be implemented as an alternative to the use of generic, un-situated ‘value-add’ measuring instruments proposed at the time such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment.

6.2.2 International links and impact

A number of international contacts have been initiated and awareness of the project amongst these contacts has been strengthened during the course of this project. Selected examples are outlined below.

USA

The project leaders have discussed the project methodology with Dr Peter Ewell, Vice President at the National Centre for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS, USA). NCHEMS is a research and development centre founded to improve the management effectiveness of colleges and universities. Dr Ewell also has close ties with the US *Tuning Project* and has provided advice to the project team in his role as international member of the Project Steering Group.

UK

Contacts in the UK with whom the Project Leader has consulted on the project include: Mr Norman Sharp, former Head of the Scottish Quality Assurance Agency. Selected outcomes of the project were presented at the Scottish Quality Enhancement Themes conference (July 2013) in Glasgow.

Canada

Professors Krause and Scott have visited Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, on two occasions to share information about the project and to benchmark similar practices in Canadian higher education. Professor Scott discussed the project as part of his 2013 keynote address at the Canadian Association for Institutional Research & Planning Conference at the University of Regina.

South Africa

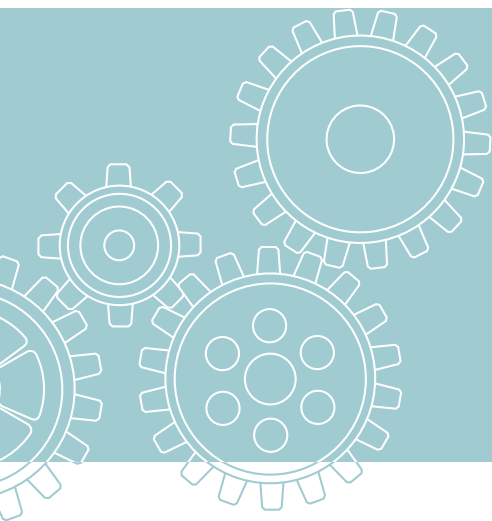
The project co-leaders held a Skype call with senior representatives of the University of Cape Town, including the DVC Academic and colleagues responsible for quality assurance at the University. We sent them a copy of the project outline and user guide. They invited us to speak to a forum of DVC Academics in South Africa. This took place in 2013. An academic in Nursing at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa, requested the user guide to use with nursing academics in South African universities.

China

Dr Xiaoguang Shi from Peking University requested a copy of the user guide and information about the methodology for application among a number of Chinese universities.

New Zealand

The project methodology and approach was discussed in a keynote address at the New Zealand HE Quality Conference in May 2013.



6.2.3 Links with parallel projects

Links with a range of parallel projects and initiatives have been made. For example, representatives of this project were involved in a meeting of ALTC/OLT standards-related projects convened in August, 2011. Links were established with Simon Barrie who is leading a project on standards entitled *Assessing and Assuring Graduate Learning Outcomes* (Available online: www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo). See Appendix F for a table of all the other projects with whom we have made connections. Consultation has also been undertaken with the Queensland Studies Authority to review moderation practices and to check on synergies with our project and with Professor Beverley Oliver to identify links to her OLT-funded project on *Assuring Graduate Capabilities: Evidencing Levels of Achievement for Graduate Employability*.

6.3 Outputs

The project has resulted in a number of outputs that have been, and will be of benefit to the sector. All are available on the project website at: www.uws.edu.au/latstandards.

6.3.1 The project website

The project website consists of three sections:

- 1. About the project:** This includes two project summaries – one brief and one longer. The summaries give details of the project, including its aims, research questions, conceptual framework and methodology.
- 2. Project reports and publications** – This includes two discussion papers arising from the project which have been distributed in the Australian higher education sector and to selected international colleagues.
 - i. *Mapping Learning and Teaching Standards in Australian Higher Education: An issues and options paper* (Krause, Barrie, Scott, Sachs & Probert, 2011); and
 - ii. *Towards a Learning Standards Framework* (Deane & Krause, 2012).

The final project report will also be hosted on this site.

3. The Resources section of the site is comprised of three parts:

- i. Readings – links to relevant journal articles and research papers that have informed the project approach;
- ii. Presentations – downloadable copies of all project-related keynote presentations and workshops delivered by members of the project team;
- iii. A user guide and templates to assist in the implementation of peer review approaches among institutions. These include a *User guide for implementing inter-institutional peer review of learning standards*; an editable peer review feedback form; and coversheets and templates to assist in implementation.

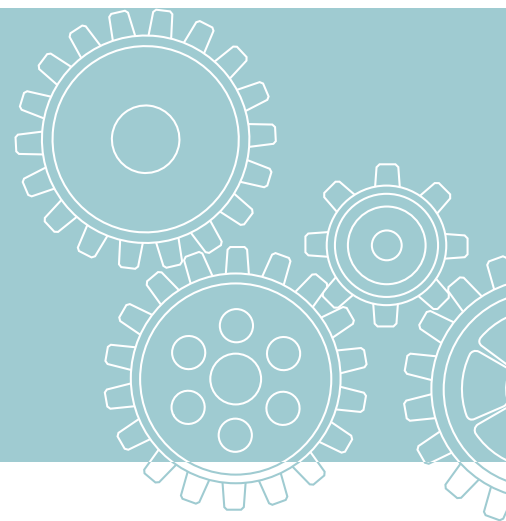
6.3.2 Selected publications and presentations

Deane, E., Krause, K-L., & Scott, G. (2013). Developing teaching and learning standards in a new regulatory environment. Paper presentation at the *International Conference on Enhancement and Innovation in Higher Education*, 11-13 June 2013, Glasgow.

Deane, E. & Krause, K-L. (2012). *Towards a Learning Standards Framework*. (see Appendix E)

Krause, K-L. (2012, October). *How well are we monitoring and assuring learning standards?* Presentation to the UWS Assessment Committee.

Krause, K-L. (2012, 26-28 September). Teaching and learning standards: Implications for policy and practice. Paper presented at the *Australian Conference on Science & Mathematics Education*, Sydney.



Krause, K-L. (2012, 31 May). *You and the TEQSA standards: What does it all mean for you on Monday?* Paper presented at James Cook University, Queensland.

Krause, K-L. (2012, 15-16 May). Teaching and learning standards: Implications for the sector, institutions, collaboration. Paper presented at the *Institutional Performance in Higher Education Conference*, Melbourne.

Krause, K-L. (2011, Nov 29-30). Increasing the quality of teaching & learning to encourage retention in Higher Education. Keynote address at *Measuring & Improving Student Engagement & Experience Conference*.

Krause, K-L. (2011, 28-29 September). Teaching and Learning Standards – Issues, challenges, opportunities (and elephants in rooms) Paper presented at the *2nd Annual National Learning and Teaching Forum*, Sydney.

Krause, K-L., Barrie, S., Scott, G., Sachs, J. & Probert, B. (2011). *Mapping Learning and Teaching Standards in Australian Higher Education: An issues and options paper*.

Keynote presentations during the course of the project included:

- i. September 7, 2011: Presentation to Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRUA) consortium meeting, Melbourne (Krause and Alexander);
- ii. September 28-29, 2011: Keynote presentation at the National Learning and Teaching Forum, Informa Higher Education Series (Krause);
- iii. September 28-29, 2011: Keynote presentation at the National Learning and Teaching Forum, Informa Higher Education Series (Scott);
- iv. September, 2011: Australian National University (ANU) Quality and Standards Forum (Scott);
- v. November 4, 2011: Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) presentation (Krause);
- vi. November 29-30, 2011: Keynote at Measuring and Improving Student Engagement and Experience Conference: increasing the quality of teaching and learning to encourage retention in higher education (Krause);
- vii. November, 2011: International keynote address to the South African Association for Institutional Research conference (Scott);
- viii. February, 2012: Keynote presentation to Australian Council of Business Deans (Scott);
- ix. July, 2012: Invitational address to the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency/ Higher Education Funding Council of England (QAA/HEFCE) national meeting on developing a quality assurance framework for education for sustainability in UK higher education (Scott);
- x. May, 2012: Criterion Conference national workshop on operationalising standards (Scott with Margaret Mazzolini);
- xi. August, 2012: National workshop for the directors/teams of the four commissioned OLT academic integrity projects (Scott);
- xii. October, 2012: Keynote address at University of Adelaide's learning and teaching week (Scott);
- xiii. March 19-20, 2013: Keynote presentation and workshop on project outcomes, Criterion Conference: assessing and reporting learning and teaching outcomes (Krause and Alexander);
- xiv. May, 2-3, 2013: Invitational presentation on project outcomes, Testing together? Invitation-only meeting to advance the agenda of collaborative assessment of graduate outcomes in the professions, University of Queensland (Alexander).



Chapter 7

Success factors, sustainability, potential challenges and key lessons

Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas and

Change doesn't just happen but must be led, and deftly

(Fullan & Scott, 2009)

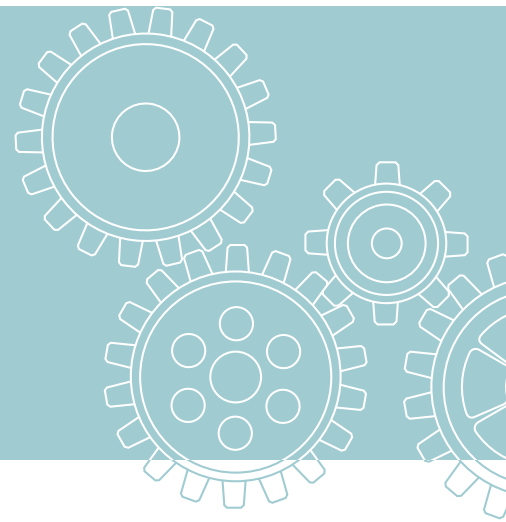
In this chapter we reflect on the key strategies and factors that have helped to ensure that the original OLT project proposal is implemented consistently and effectively. We also reflect on the challenges to be faced if it is to be sustained and embedded at institutional and sector-wide levels. The factors and strategies identified below are consistent with earlier ALTC/OLT research on change leadership for higher education (see, for example, Scott, Coates & Anderson, 2008 and Scott et al., 2012).

7.1 Factors critical to successful implementation and dissemination: Sustaining the project

1. Short term success factors during project implementation

Many factors have been critical to the success of this project. What has been learned can be directly applied if a university wishes to undertake its own peer-moderation project. They include:

- i. The use of an initial pilot project funded and facilitated by the UWS, which informed the methodology of the project and provided a strong foundation for longer term, positive working relationships among the project team.
- ii. The commitment, expertise and seniority of the project team members. Most team members were senior leaders in their respective institutions, with a significant capacity to influence policy and governance in their universities. Together they represented a powerful group with extensive expertise and experience in the area of academic standards. Many team members contributed financially to the project by paying for return flights to Sydney to attend team meetings. Their commitment, leadership and collegiality as a team cannot be underestimated. It was they who won and sustained the local engagement and commitment of the academics who participated in the peer moderation process.
- iii. The project evaluator and critical friend, Emeritus Professor Adrian Lee, was involved in the project from a very early stage. He attended several project team meetings and steering group meetings and played a key role in focussing the team's attention on the outcomes, impact and sustainability of the project. He contributed substantially more time than anticipated to the project and has been a strong advocate of the methodology in a range of contexts. He also suggested several connections with other projects that have been very valuable. This notion of having an external formative evaluator – a highly experienced critical friend – is a key ingredient in any change effort.
- iv. The Project Officer role is pivotal to the success of large-scale, long-term projects such as this. In the later stages of the project, the Project Officer was employed for an additional day per week to manage the project workload. A successful project officer needs to be multiskilled, have high levels of emotional intelligence, including the ability to work productively with diversity along with the capacity for data collection, analysis and report writing. The key to the day-to-day operational success of the project was having a project officer who was sufficiently sensitive to liaise with busy academic staff and secure their engagement with tasks that were additional to their usual duties. In all the feedback sessions on the project, academic participants paid tribute to Project Officer Kate Aubin's excellent management of it.
- v. Site visits to meet with academics at their university prior to the commencement of the peer review process emerged as a critical success factor. Originally these visits were not planned but they were key to engaging academic staff with the project early in the process



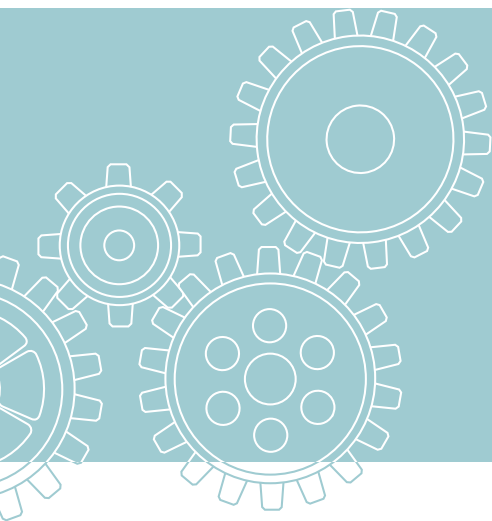
and to explaining its rationale as well as answering questions that helped to contribute to improvement of the process.

- vi. Funds to support peer reviewers in institutions were not originally part of the project bid but ALTC agreed to provide additional funds and these have played a significant role in the project's success. This enabled peer reviewers to function as an extension of the project team as they sought to pilot the methodology, refine it and help develop the *User Guide*, along with helping collect project data and provide feedback.
- vii. An expert Steering Group with national and international representation is key to giving overall direction and sector-level promotion of the project in key groups and committees. The Steering Group members provided invaluable advice and guidance during all phases of the project. Members were selected carefully for their wide range of experience, expertise and positional influence in tertiary education, nationally and internationally.
- viii. The ability to 'listen, link then lead' (Fullan & Scott, 2009). This involves the provision of a tested framework and method to participants with a direct view to them providing feedback on how to improve it (listen), then bringing together a consolidated version of what is most relevant and feasible (link) and finally to promote it more widely (lead). This approach was seen in the way in which a draft user guide and the approach itself were tested and improved in response to feedback from academic colleagues during Phase 1, and further improved during Phase 2 of the project.
- ix. Support of the ALTC/OLT. In addition to the funding provided for this project, the ALTC/OLT supported the project through the hosting of the inaugural Standards Coalition meeting in Sydney in 2011 and through the active involvement and support of Ms Siobhan Lenihan on numerous occasions.
- x. Connections with other projects and initiatives. This project has been enriched as a result of collaborations with a range of other project leaders, including Professor Beverley Oliver, Associate Professor Mark Freeman and Associate Professor Simon Barrie, to name a few. We have also made connections with those coordinating the Group of Eight QVS project and this has provided a valuable opportunity to consider the merits of a range of approaches to academic peer review of standards. This strategy of targeted benchmarking for improvement is another proven way of optimising the successful implementation of innovations in higher education.

2. Longer term success factors

The following three success factors apply more to assuring the medium to long-term sustainability of the project. They have been identified as a result of discussion among project team members and through the process of formative evaluation facilitated by the project's critical friend and evaluator, Emeritus Professor Adrian Lee. Several actions are noted under each success factor.

- i. Ensure that the peer review and moderation process is scalable, located into a broader agenda and sustainable.
 - Seek strategic advice from key stakeholders such as TEQSA and the Chair of the Higher Education Standards Panel.
 - Locate the project within a clear Learning and Teaching Standards and Quality Framework and link this to the new national standards panel academic standards and to the four OLT projects on academic integrity. An example of such a framework is the Academic Quality and Standards Framework at the University of Western Sydney (see Figure 2, p.50).
 - Link to the work of international groups like the International Association of Universities (IAU) and national groups like Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD).



This project represents a significant culture change among academic staff and university leaders. While academic peer review is standard in research, it is not as widely accepted and practiced in the area of teaching.

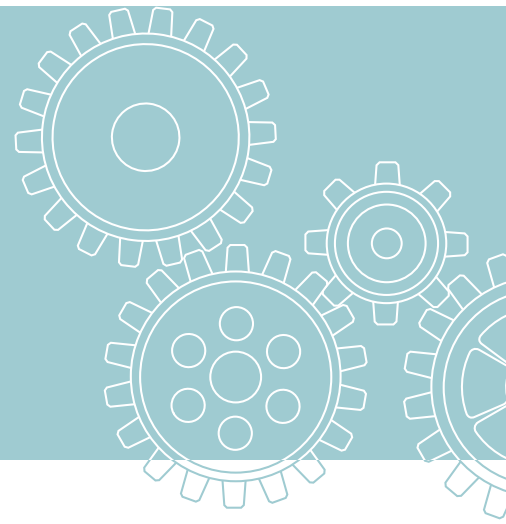
- ii. Embed peer review and moderation models in institutional policies and practices.
 - Use Associate Deans (L&T) or equivalent leaders of learning and teaching to foster this under the coordination of the relevant PVC/DVC.
 - Introduce an 'assessment moderation award' category as part of institutional award systems for learning and teaching.
 - Run a train-the-trainer project with local program coordinators (possibly in partnership with the university's learning and teaching development unit).
 - Use assessment-focused learning guides and ask peers to review them against the criteria established in this project.
- iii. Continue engagement with key stakeholders including TEQSA, the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) and non-project partner universities.
 - Seek advice from key stakeholders on ways to scale up the peer review of academic standards methodologies.
 - Liaise with the OLT, the HESP and TEQSA to support implementation of the recommendations, as appropriate.
 - Promote this project, its rationale and methodology in the media and among stakeholders in the government, higher education and industry sectors.
 - Facilitate ongoing national discussion, possibly in partnership with Universities Australia or OLT, or hosted by one of the partner universities. Link and leverage what is being undertaken in the area of assessment standards, integrity and quality.

7.2 Challenges and potential impediments to success

Various challenges have inevitably been encountered during the course of implementing this project. These are identified below with some of the strategies we have found to be effective in addressing them.

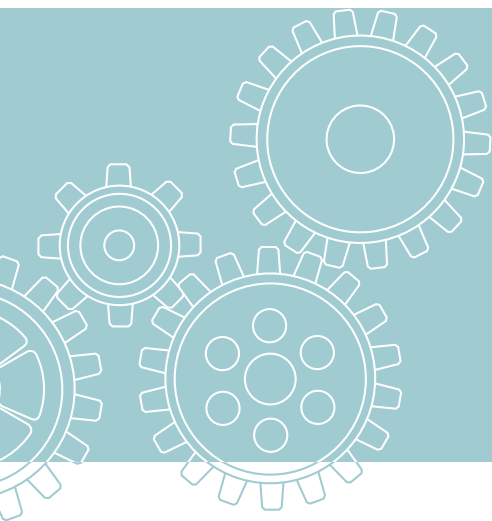
- i. **Culture change.** This project represents a significant culture change among academic staff and university leaders. While academic peer review is standard in research, it is not as widely accepted and practiced in the area of teaching. Engagement and buy-in among academic staff participants cannot be expected to be automatic; however, once the project rationale was explained the typical staff response was "that makes sense" or "yes, we do that in our Department but it's good to be able to see what other universities are doing". An associated challenge involves making academic peer review of teaching and learning standards an accepted part of normal university business, just as it is in peer review of research for publication. A key incentive in helping achieve this is to have it built into the position descriptions, performance development and management systems of universities.
- ii. **Reducing feelings of threat that may arise from external peer review of standards.** Understandably, academic staff were anxious about having peers review unit outlines and assessment items. There were anxieties about criticism of unit materials, publication of the results of peer review, and concerns that students may use the outcomes to request a review of grades. Reputational risk was also a concern if the process resulted in any public revelations of 'sub-standard' performance at an institution. These are all very real concerns which we anticipated, but it took time and some workarounds to address these challenges.

Strategies that were used to address these challenges included assuring staff that no institutional data would be made public and that only project team members and individual unit coordinators would receive the individualised feedback from peer reviewers. Aggregated data were compiled for each discipline area but no institution or unit could be identified. We developed participant agreement forms for each participant to sign as part of an acknowledgement that the outcomes related to any particular unit or institution were to remain confidential to the peer reviewer.

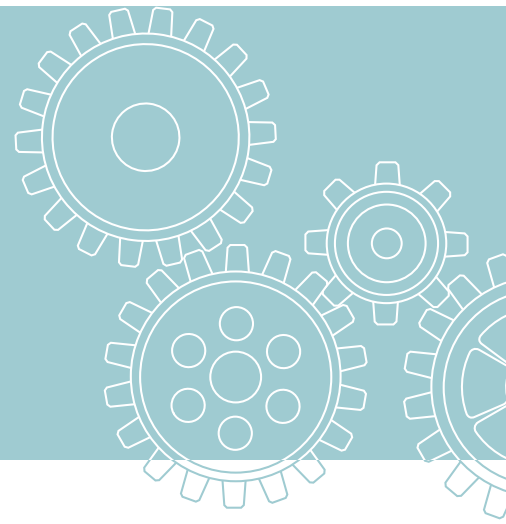


- iii. **Workload for academic staff.** This process was introduced over and above the existing workload for academic staff participants. While the vast majority were supportive and actively engaged with the process, three staff from three different universities indicated that they were not able to meet the deadline for reasons such as other writing commitments or study leave. This challenge was addressed by extending deadlines for returning feedback and acknowledgement by the relevant local senior leader from the project team. The need to ensure that peer review of learning and teaching standards is incorporated as part of the workload for academic staff with teaching and program/unit coordination responsibilities is addressed in the recommendations.
- iv. **Unit selection and feedback timelines.** Identifying 'comparable' units for peer review was not as simple as expected. We anticipated that, for each discipline, it would be relatively simple to identify core units on similar topics in the final year of study. This was not always the case. We had to compromise by broadening the unit selection criteria and ensuring that peer reviewers were sufficiently comfortable to review unit materials and assessments in areas in which they did not necessarily currently teach. We also had to extend the peer review timeline to cover two semesters – i.e., where relevant, comparable units may not have been taught in the same semester among partner universities. It is not ideal for reviewers to wait a year for feedback so this is something to review for subsequent implementation. The feedback from participants suggests that unit content comparability is less important than we at first envisaged. Timeliness of feedback and equivalence of year level are more important factors to consider.
- v. **Disciplinary differences.** Adapting the project methodology to the Creative Arts discipline proved challenging. There are a number of unique ethical issues surrounding the use of student work in these fields of study. The ethics information provided to colleagues involved in the project was adjusted to reflect these issues. Teleconferences were useful in overcoming issues associated with ethics, de-identification, and technology in the Music discipline. Based on feedback from colleagues, recommendations for using the peer review and moderation model within disciplines such as Music have been generated.
- vi. **Frequency and mode of project team meetings.** Given the senior roles of members of the project team, it was a challenge to arrange for regular meetings of the group, particularly face-to-face. In some cases, meetings were deferred or face-to-face meetings were rearranged as teleconferences due to busy schedules. While we recognise the value and importance of arranging face-to-face meetings, this was not always possible. In the absence of frequent face-to-face meetings, the Project Leader and Project Officer sought to maintain email and phone contact with the project team. Additional face-to-face meetings between the Project Leader, Project Officer and Project Evaluator were also very helpful.
- vii. **Thinking at program level.** While this project primarily focused on unit-level assessment inputs and outcomes, it was framed in the context of course/program level outcomes. Home universities were asked to provide contextual information about how their unit fitted into the broader design of each program. One unexpected challenge was that not all participants could readily provide such information.

As noted in Section 4.3 we addressed the challenge of unit-to-program thinking by piloting a process among a sample of Law academics who engaged in a calibration exercise using the methodology of Associate Professor Mark Freeman's *Achievement Matters* project. During the course of this Roundtable session, we made specific mention of program-level reference points such as the Law Discipline Standards and the AQF. Professor Sally Kift, the Law Discipline Scholar, participated in the Roundtable. This proved to be an invaluable process for raising academic staff awareness of the role of reference points in informing academic judgements about standards. It received very positive feedback from all participants.



- viii **Reference points for assuring standards.** This project was framed by the assumption that external reference points are key to the process of setting, monitoring and assuring subject and program achievement standards. This language is widely used in the UK quality assurance and enhancement methodologies but our experience in this project indicates that the notion of reference points is more tacit among Australian academics. In many cases, academic staff participants did not readily articulate the reference points they used to make judgements about standards. This was an unexpected but important finding. One of the challenges involved facilitating discussions among academic staff in different disciplines to provide opportunities to articulate the suite of reference points they used in the standards-setting process. In accredited fields such as Business and Engineering, academic staff more readily identified reference points however this was less evident in such areas as Journalism and Philosophy. Nevertheless, it proved to be a very instructive process. Academic staff made reference to the AQF as a reference point of growing importance, along with input from employers, successful graduates, subject benchmarks, peer input, the university's own graduate attributes and the requirements of government funding bodies.
- ix **Challenging a binary notion of academic peer review:** the issue of blind peer review. The Go8 QVS project took place simultaneously with this project. It is fair to say that the methodology of the two projects was similar, with two key exceptions, as follows:
- a. the QVS project did not adopt a blind peer review mechanism – i.e., reviewers were identified from the start; and
 - b. in the QVS project the graded assessment items were shared with peer reviewers who 'verified' the grade rather than grading an unmarked piece of work, as for the Learning and Teaching Standards (LaTS) project (the project team adopted the acronym 'LaTS' as a short-hand reference to the project to facilitate sector-wide discussions).
- It was invaluable to have two representatives from Go8 universities on the project team who were able to compare and contrast the two approaches. During the course of the project, there were many discussions, both among project team members as well as across the sector and at conferences, about the relative merits of the two approaches. The project team identified expediency and efficiency as the primary benefit of the non-blind peer review approach. Rather than suggesting an either/or binary approach to peer review methodologies, an alternative is to consider the purpose of the peer review process itself. When the stakes are highest and an objective, arm's length peer evaluation of standards is required, the blind peer review approach would be preferable. For other purposes, alternative approaches may be useful, including non-blind peer review. A tiered approach to assuring learning standards is explored in the discussion paper *Towards a Learning Standards Framework* (Deane & Krause, 2012. See Appendix E).
- x. **Communication.** In all cases, reciprocal communication with individuals and groups of academic staff in the discipline was the key to addressing challenges and working through solutions. Email discussions and teleconferences were helpful in modifying processes to suit the way units and assessment items were structured. The project officer played a significant role in 'trouble shooting' in this regard and participants appreciated having a single point of contact when they had questions.



7.3 Key lessons learned

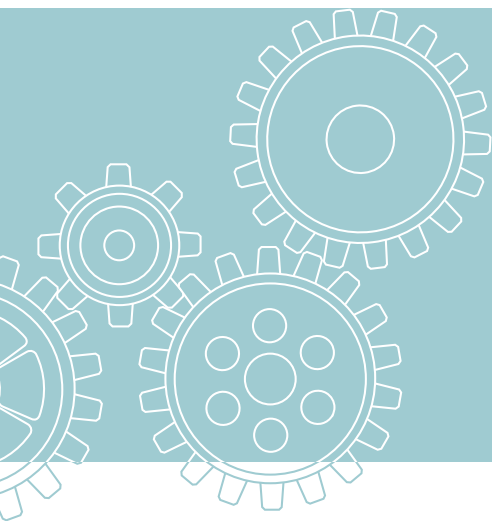
Below are some of the key lessons learned about how to effectively support the implementation of a peer moderation project of the type investigated in the study.

i. Communication and staff engagement

- *Site visits were invaluable* for making personal contact with colleagues, for ensuring that the process and responsibilities were clear, and to seek and identify improvements to the approach and methodology of the project.

ii. Project approach and logistics

- *Use language with care.* The language used in relation to peer review and moderation of standards is critically important. We have reduced the focus on 'moderation' and the emphasis on grades and increased the focus on peer review and feedback from academic colleagues.
- *Facilitate collegial dialogue in the debrief process.* Teleconferences and/or email conversations between Unit Coordinators and/or peer reviewers appear to have proven to be very productive ways to facilitate collegial dialogue following the peer review process.
- *De-identification of peer reviewed materials prior to distribution.* De-identification continues to be a debatable issue. Views on the subject were split among project team members and participants. De-identification of student work was never questioned. However, the issue of de-identification of unit materials was more hotly contested. Project team members and participants alike readily accepted the goal of achieving objective, 'arm's length' peer reviews, but the associated workload and the likelihood of colleagues identifying the university were seen as powerful reasons not to advocate for de-identification of unit materials among some colleagues. Feedback from project participants across disciplines indicates mixed support for de-identification. While the argument for expediency is strong, perhaps the most persuasive argument is that relating to fitness for purpose. In a high stakes environment, there is a strong argument for aiming for objectivity and anonymity as far as is practicable.
- *Number of reviewers.* The methodology underpinning this project was based on the premise that triangulation is ideal when engaging in peer review of academic standards. If streamlining of process is the goal, it may be sufficient to have one reviewer per unit, rather than two. This would also reduce the workload for academic staff. While participants acknowledged that one peer reviewer might be sufficient, the majority recognised the value of having two sets of feedback.
- *Number of grade bands considered.* Feedback from participants indicates a strong preference for considering student work from a range of levels of achievement/grade bands, rather than simply considering threshold pass/fail samples of work.
- *More contextual information.* During the course of the feedback process, academic peer reviewers noted that there was a need to provide more contextual information about the unit than was originally sought through the *User Guide*. This was emphasised by several reviewers in order to ensure that anonymous reviewers had a full appreciation of the context and rationale for unit design and approach.
- *Allow more time for the review process.* More time than was originally anticipated was needed for completion of peer review and moderation tasks. This was factored into the timelines provided to reviewers in Phase 2 which made for a much smoother implementation process.



One of the most significant and unexpected successes of the project was its contribution to academic staff capacity building among participants. This feedback came from the participants themselves, as well as from project team and steering group members who observed the positive impact of the collegial conversations, the discussions.

- *Plan for administrative and project support* to assist with implementation. Additional funds were allocated to universities in the project to assist with the administration costs involved in such tasks as de-identifying student work and collating unit materials. The administrative coordination of the Project Officer was also pivotal to the success of the project. For instance, it was important to have a project officer to check that all materials were de-identified and to coordinate the distribution and receipt of peer reviewed materials.

iii. **Supporting peer and self-review**

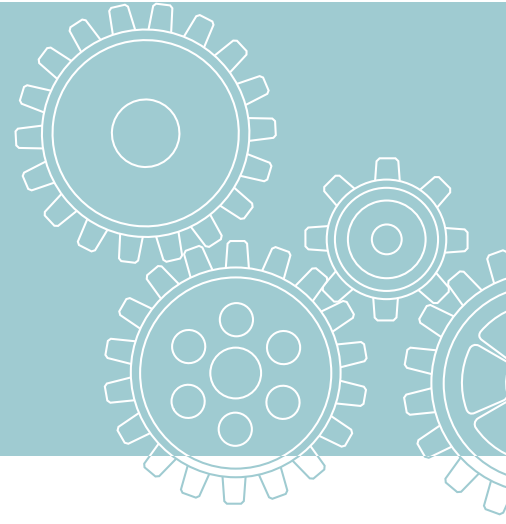
- Peer reviewers appreciated being provided with a clear timeline, rather than negotiating a timeline with the Project Officer.
- The feedback form (part of the *User Guide*) was deemed to be a useful self-reflective tool by many participants. This has been an unexpected positive outcome of the *Guide* and one we recommend is pursued further.

iv. **Managing sensitive issues**

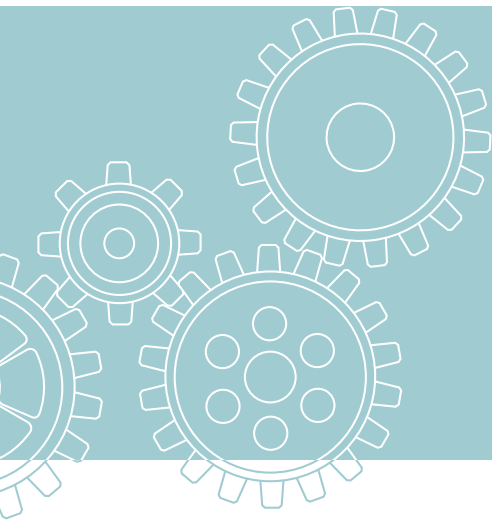
- The methodology adopted in this project required colleagues to engage in processes that are potentially sensitive in terms of sharing unit level information among universities. Discipline findings reports were helpful in enabling the outcomes of peer review and moderation to be distributed while maintaining confidentiality for universities and colleagues. Care needed to be taken when handling individual feedback on units. There were also issues raised concerning differences in the level of expertise of reviewers. This was managed on a case-by-case basis.
- In order to manage potential sensitivities a participant agreement form was developed to accompany the usual ethics consent form. The agreement form represented an important opportunity for participants to recognise the privilege and responsibilities involved in the academic peer review process. This addition to the process was well received and treated with respect by all colleagues.

7.4 Unexpected but positive outcomes

- Academic staff capacity building.** One of the most significant and unexpected successes of the project was its contribution to academic staff capacity building among participants. This feedback came from the participants themselves, as well as from project team and steering group members who observed the positive impact of the collegial conversations, the discussions about reference points that might best inform academic judgements about standards, and the professional development role of the peer review process along with the use of the scaffolded feedback guide.
- Value of collegial conversations.** Without fail, the disciplinary groups who participated in the debrief teleconferences commented on the value of collegial conversations about achievement standards and the opportunity to 'look over the fence' to see what colleagues in other universities are doing as being especially useful. Several commented that they had not had an opportunity to participate in such conversations prior to this project and many suggested that there would be merit in continuing these conversations at disciplinary conferences and the like.
- Scholarly outcomes.** During the course of site visits with academic staff, several colleagues indicated that they would like to produce discipline-based publications based on their experience of this peer review process. This is a very positive outcome and we will be pleased to facilitate this.



- iv. **Additional partners in the peer review process.** We were delighted to have colleagues from Deakin, the University of Tasmania and the University of Wollongong join the project and adopt the project's methodology. While the additional resourcing has been minimal, it has nevertheless involved some additional project coordination, a site visit and additional data analysis. These additional tasks and budget items were not foreshadowed in the project proposal but we have made the necessary adjustments to accommodate this valuable addition to the project.



Chapter 8

Conclusions and recommendations

We recognise and endorse the important link between teaching and learning standards and the need to treat them together in any discussion of a standards framework. However while a Teaching Standards Framework has been proposed by a range of groups, no similar framework exists for assuring the quality of achievement standards in university learning. We endorse the view that approaches to assuring and demonstrating learning outcomes standards need to be sufficiently flexible to accommodate sector diversity, yet they also need to be defensible, robust, scaleable and sustainable.

The value of expert peer review in the discipline is widely endorsed, as is the need to ensure that any framework takes account of existing, validated, institutional quality and standards frameworks in order to streamline reporting and monitoring demands.

8.1 Moving forward

The options listed here are not mutually exclusive. They are designed to foster practical actions that may be taken up by a range of stakeholder groups.

In this section some options for moving forward in the area of assuring subject and program achievement standards are identified. These proposals represent a starting point only, and further comments and suggestions are encouraged. The options listed here are not mutually exclusive. They are designed to foster practical actions that may be taken up by a range of stakeholder groups and have been highlighted in the feedback sessions on the project's outcomes.

A suggested option for progressing the development of learning standards in particular, includes the development of a tiered framework for monitoring, assuring and reporting on learning standards that recognises many of the initiatives already in place. This tiered framework could include:

1. **Discipline/department level** peer review and moderation within and across universities, conducted in a staged manner across disciplines and over time with reporting available on institutional websites.

Tier 1 assumes that higher education providers have existing unit/subject level moderation systems in place that are integral to their quality assurance and assessment processes.

2. **Institution-level monitoring and reporting** using whole-of-institution mechanisms to assure learning standards, along with a report against criteria and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

This may also include reporting on:

- a. the outcomes of benchmarking as part of the Provider Standards compliance process;
- b. how institutions are addressing specific Quality Assurance (QA) areas such as English proficiency standards and assessing graduate capabilities.

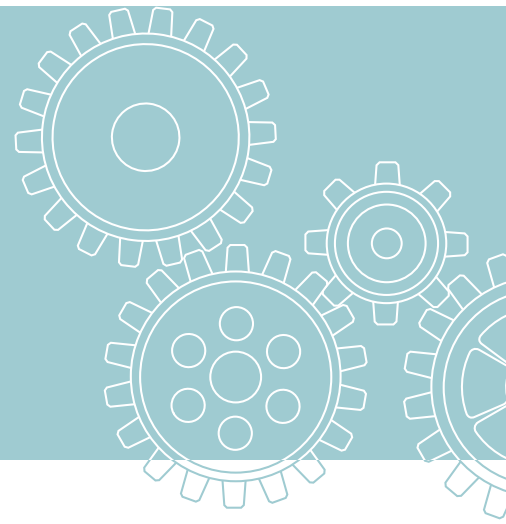
Agreed institutional performance indicators could be integrated into the Compacts process.

Benchmarking partner institutions may report on the outcomes of collective initiatives (e.g., the outcomes of the Go8 QVS initiative, or the outcomes of the Learning and Teaching Standards Peer Review and Moderation work, currently being piloted among 11 universities).

3. **National-level monitoring and reporting** on institutional performance based on a streamlined reporting mechanism that draws on Tier 1 and 2 outcomes.

This would need to accommodate a range of models and approaches. The focus would be on ensuring that institutions are able to report that they have a range of models in place for monitoring and assuring learning standards, working over time.

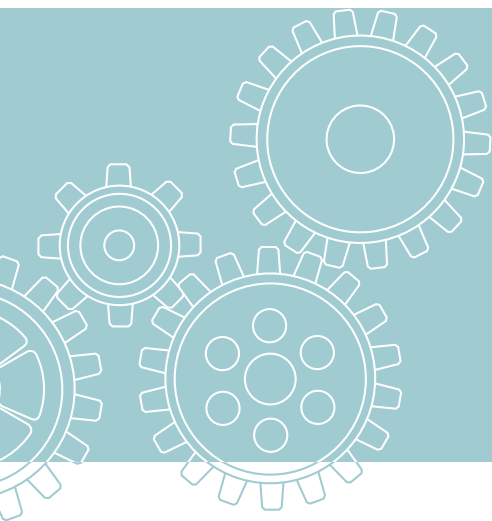
Figure I (Section 3.6.1) represents one approach to designing a purpose-driven framework for assuring learning standards.



- **Level 1:** (Department and unit level) focuses on assuring learning standards through the use of moderation and calibration activities among marking teams (e.g., among teams of sessional staff at the unit level) prior to marking, and during or after marking moderation activities. This should take place every time a unit is offered.
Purpose: to assure validity and reliability of assessment practices through ongoing calibration of markers at the unit/subject level.
- **Level 2:** External checks take place on a cyclical basis as a way to benchmark learning and teaching standards. Meeting the requirements of accreditation and professional bodies may be included in Level 2.
Purpose: to benchmark processes and outcomes and to address external accreditation requirements.
- **Level 3:** Involves inter-university peer review and verification of grades and standards using an external assessor approach. The identity of the external assessor is known, no effort is made to engage in blind peer review and graded assessment items are shared for verification purposes (i.e., the external assessor either agrees or disagrees with the grade allocated).
Purpose: to verify learning standards across institutions by agreeing/disagreeing with grades allocated to final year assessment items.
- **Level 4:** Involves blind peer review where two external peer reviewers receive de-identified unit materials and ungraded assessment items (i.e., the identity of the institution and the unit is not divulged). The two reviewers grade assessment items using criteria provided by the home institution. Feedback and graded items are returned to the home institution via a third party (Project Officer). The home institution receives feedback from two partners to inform practice. The identity of partners may be divulged by mutual agreement to enable further discussion.
Purpose: to provide 'arm's length' assurance of learning standards across institutions through blind peer review and grading of final year assessment items.
- Discipline-based approaches to calibrating academic staff continue (e.g., the *Achievement Matters Project*).
Purpose: to calibrate academic staff across institutions, using external course-level reference points such as discipline standards.

Further options for the sector to pursue include:

- Identify and share institutional examples of where learning and teaching standards frameworks are being successfully developed and implemented (see section 4.3.1 for an example). This section provides a case study example to which other universities may add. Existing institutional frameworks such as these may be a useful starting point for guiding the development of learning and teaching standards in particular areas e.g., teaching standards may be developed in the areas of learning design, delivery and support; learning standards may involve a focus on one or more of the following: validated peer review of student outcomes, outcomes of objective tests, employer feedback, graduate feedback, to name a few.
- Develop a suite of sample program and subject/unit achievement standards statements. One example is that proposed in the TEQSA Discussion paper (2011) (see p.18) where a teaching standard statement in the category of "provision for student diversity" is proposed. In order to progress this, the definition and dimensions of learning standards would need to be identified, along with consideration of the range of ways in which learning standards might be expressed.

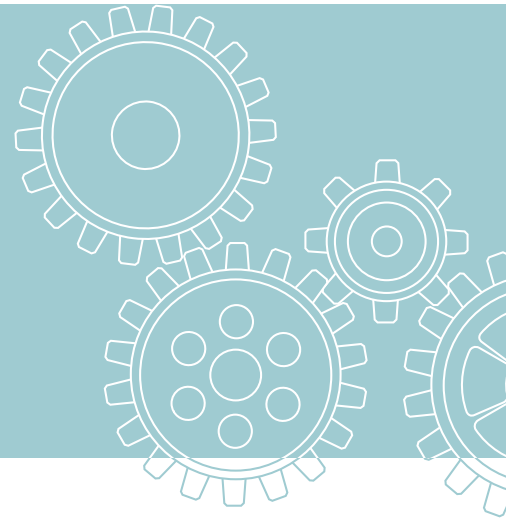


- Articulate the suite of reference points that can be used in various combinations and weights depending on the field of education concerned to validate program, subject or unit achievement standards. One under-utilised reference point is data from studies of the top ranking capabilities and competencies of graduates identified by their employers, colleagues and clients as performing successfully in the first three to five years of professional or disciplinary practice (see Scott, 2013). A wide range of other potentially relevant reference points have been identified earlier in this Report.
- Review the relative merits and feasibility of existing peer review models (e.g., the Go8 QVS of Standards project and the Krause-Scott et al Learning and Teaching Standards Project on peer review and moderation of coursework) and their focus on assessment artefacts, i.e., actual samples of student work as authentic evidence of learning standards.
- Consider the role of discipline standards and threshold learning standards in building a comprehensive subject and program achievement standards framework.
- When addressing learning standards focus on defining and benchmarking what is considered to be a 'pass grade' in final year units.

8.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings and outcomes of this project, it is recommended that:

1. The Chair of Australia's Higher Education (HE) Standards Panel advocate for the use of the project's 'blind' peer review methodology as a means to efficiently monitor and objectively assure the quality and comparability of disciplinary learning and assessment standards across Australia's HE system.
2. The Tertiary Education and Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) endorse the process tested in this study as an efficient and effective way in which to externally assure the assessment standards of Australian higher education at the disciplinary, subject and, over time, the institutional level; further, that this endorsement apply to both self-accrediting and non self-accrediting institutions of higher education.
3. The Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) create a position for a National Assessment Quality and Standards Fellow/Advisor to
 - a. assist the HE sector to establish the policy and practice frameworks to embed inter-institutional peer review of teaching and learning standards and
 - b. identify and disseminate the most effective assessment practices identified through peer review in each professional or disciplinary area.
4. Higher education providers collaborate with peak disciplinary and professional bodies, under the coordination of the proposed OLT Advisor/Fellow (see Recommendation 3) to ensure that academic staff develop skills in articulating and using the full range of reference points now available for the purpose of monitoring and assuring learning outcome standards and relevance.
5. Higher education providers ensure that their assessment policies and quality frameworks are reviewed to include requirements for regular inter-institutional peer review of standards for final year undergraduate units, including review of unit inputs and assessment; further that priority be given to ensuring that academic staff, including sessional staff, have appropriate professional development to normalise consensus moderation and calibration activities within academic departments.

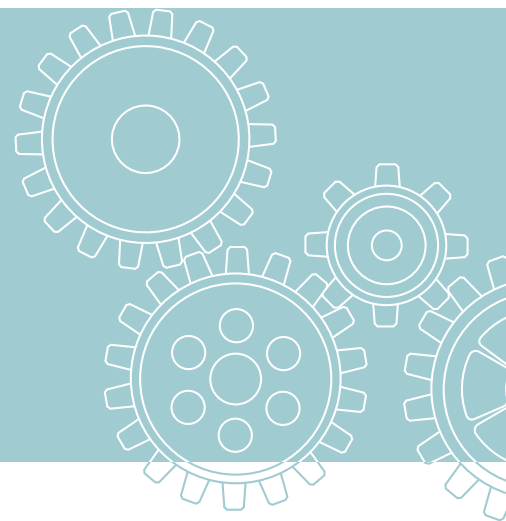


6. Higher education providers review academic workload policies and role statements for academic staff with teaching, coordination and assessment responsibilities to reflect expectations regarding regular involvement in consensus moderation and calibration activities.
7. The project team liaise with the OLT and experts across the sector to discuss establishing a national resource bank of validated assessment items and strategies by discipline, based on positive ratings from peer reviewers involved in peer review activities across the sector, that could be used as a resource by academics.
8. Further investigation be undertaken to determine if the use of final year capstone units of study and assessment tasks are a valid and feasible way to evaluate graduating students' capability to integrate and appropriately apply to real world problems what they have learned in individual units of study in their selected discipline or profession.

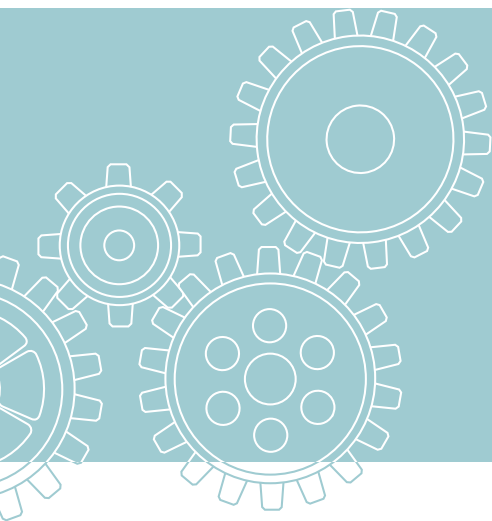


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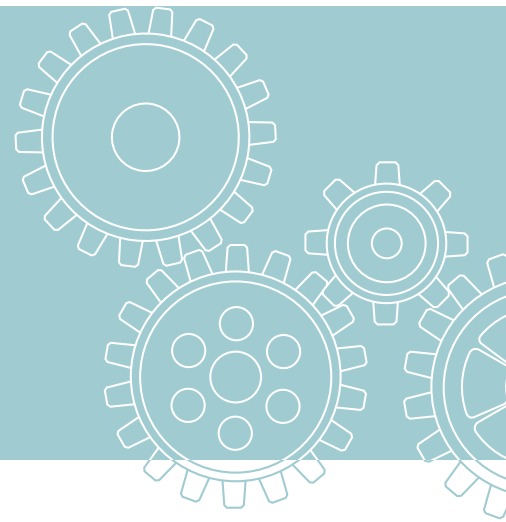
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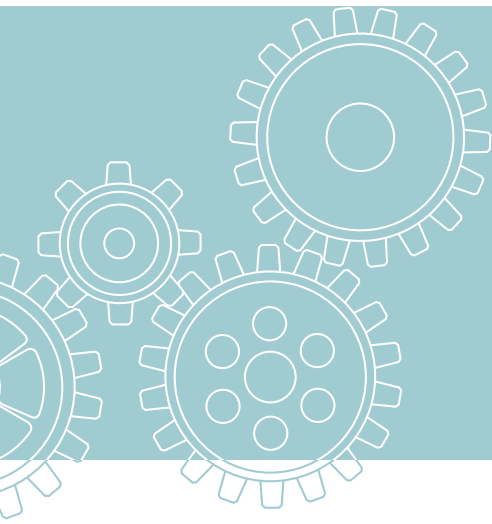
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Appendix A

Independent Evaluation Report



Independent evaluation report from the OLT Assuring Final Year Subject Standards

Evaluation report

A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation
SP10-1843

Lead institution:

University of Western Sydney

Partner institutions:

Australian National University, Charles Darwin University, Griffith University, La Trobe University, Macquarie University, Queensland University of Technology, The University of Melbourne

Project leaders:

Professor Kerri-Lee Krause
Emeritus Professor Geoff Scott

Evaluator:

Emeritus Professor Adrian Lee

1 Approach to evaluation

As external evaluator for the duration of this project, I focused primarily on a hands on contribution to formative evaluation rather than an in depth summative evaluation. As mentioned in the project report, I was a critical friend who believed that formative judgments as the project proceeded are more useful than a truly independent evaluation as to overall success and critique of what should have been done. My approach to evaluation has been heavily influenced by the work of Patrick Boyle as outlined in his paper with Mark Griffiths entitled *Some Guidance for Systematic Project Evaluation*.¹ In particular that evaluation is continuous throughout the project, that the project team has to identify the likely factors that will contribute to the success of the project as well as likely factors to impede progress, the essential need to engage stakeholders early and that major effort has to be put into a strategy to ensure effective dissemination and sustainable outcomes. My attendance at team meetings and meetings with the project leader and project manager allowed me to ask the hard questions as to whether the above approaches to evaluation were in place. Below I do make summative evaluative comments that hopefully will contribute to management of future OLT projects and I make strong supportive statements with respect to what should occur in the future to ensure that this project is successful in that it has impact on higher education beyond the universities that contributed to the project.

1 Boyle, P. & Griffiths, M. (2010). <http://guidelinesonuniversityprojectmanagement.com/guideline-twelve>



2 Overall conclusion

This project has been an outstanding success and it has been a privilege and pleasure to be the external evaluator. Given the philosophy outlined above, I have been able to closely examine what has happened within the project as it progressed. A project team of very high calibre senior leaders in Australian higher education have put in motion a process that could have major impact and contribute the ever increasing demand that more attention be paid to standards in learning and teaching. For that they are to be congratulated. Special mention should be made of Kerri-Lee Krause who as major project leader has been tireless despite having taken on early in the project's life the major responsibility of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Professor of Higher Education at the University of Western Sydney.

If one reads the abstract of the project report that focuses on the trial of a process, one concludes that the project clearly achieved its aim, has been very successful and the trial proved that the process can work. However having watched and heard the project team, it is clear that they hope for much more from this project and believe that the process they have created can deal with one of the priorities with respect to the quality of higher education in Australia. That is, a process that can reassure the accrediting bodies, politicians and the general public that standards across institutions are equivalent and we can be confident about the standard of higher education in Australia. Thus it is pleasing that the team have drafted a set of recommendations that technically are outside the brief of the project yet are a strategy to ensure dissemination and sustainability of the process they have validated. This is totally consistent with directions the OLT hopes for. The recommendations re adoption of their methodology are powerful and need to be taken forward to ensure one of the requirements of a successful OLT project is achieved that is an outcome of a sustained change in teaching and learning.

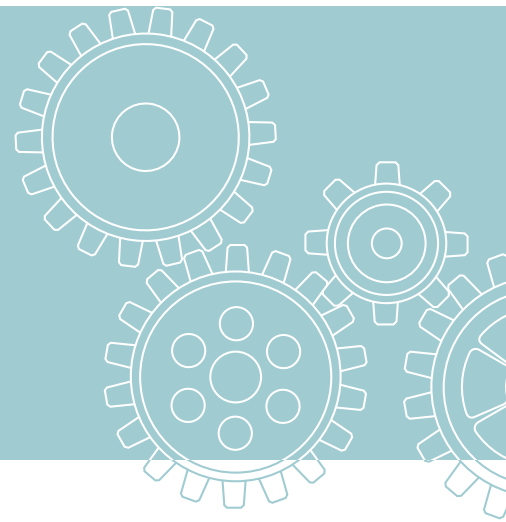
3 Evaluative comments on aspects of the project outlined in the final project and my observation of the project in process

The project report is a true record of the project and its achievements and it very honestly reflects on challenges, successes etc. Rather than comment on every aspect of the report, for some sections I highlight what are the major issues and offer my very personal (and sometimes biased!) evaluative comments.

3.1 Recommendations

As I have mentioned in my overall conclusion and elsewhere below, to have the impact this project deserves much more needs to be done, these recommendations need to be acted upon. Without the imprimatur of the Standards Panel and the devising of protocols that will provide the evidence for TEQSA that all higher education providers are implementing and acting on peer review as a method to assure standards through inter-university moderation, it will not happen. Similarly the project is still a work in process. Proof of principle has been achieved but much more refinement is needed hence the need for further funding. The recommendations for higher education providers will only be taken up if Recommendations 1-4 occur.

Despite both subject and program achievement standards being in the title of the project, in reality the project has been about subject and not program. Early on this was accepted as being a separate project in itself. Thus Recommendation 8 provides a strategy for a focus on whole of program achievement and should be taken seriously and the OLT may consider contracting a separate project that undertakes a focus on capstone units. Capstones are being increasingly used as a device to put whole of program learning together to assess whether graduates are work ready in their chosen disciplines.



3.2 Events (Report section 6.3)

A clear indicator of success of any project is the interest generated in the higher education sector in Australia and beyond. The number of invitations to present on the project is one such indicator for the current project. Even more significant is that other universities sought to be included in the project.

3.3 Key Stakeholders (Report section 3.4)

Identification of key stakeholders early on in the project contributed to project achievements. However as stressed in my report, this work needs to continue.

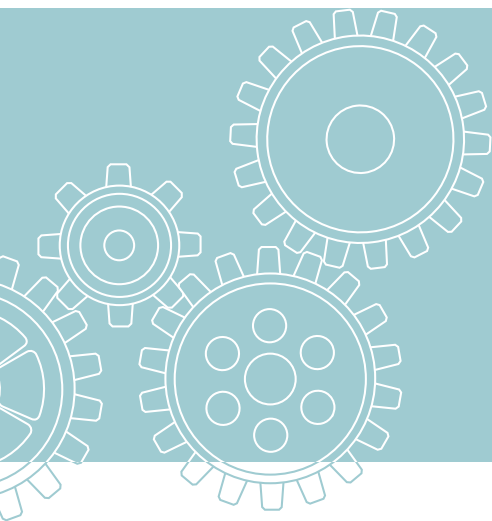
3.4 Outputs by category (Report section 6.3)

Given the short time frame of the project, it is not surprising that there are few published outputs. However given the interest across the country and overseas it is certain there will be significant publications from this project. However, given the heavy responsibilities of the project team, as mentioned below, time will be a problem. Adoption of the project recommendations will enhance the likelihood of publications, which will be important particularly for worldwide dissemination.

3.5 Success factors (Report Chapter 7)

It has been acknowledged in the final report that a major success factor has been the seniority and experience level of the project leaders and project group. However this could be also seen as a major risk factor as it was extremely difficult for these senior persons to give the time to the project that they would have liked to. It was very difficult to get the project team together for both face-to-face meetings and virtual gatherings. The project was fortunate in having the services of an extremely competent and intelligent project officer who was in complete tune with the project and worked very well with Kerri-Lee Krause. Kate Aubin was initially employed for three days a week and then later for four days. There is an important learning for the OLT here. Based on my experience as an evaluator on three significant OLT/ALTC projects and as facilitator of project management workshops involving more than 400 project managers/leaders I conclude that no major project should be funded by the OLT unless the budget includes the salary of a project manager for four days per week and five days per week for large complex projects that are led by academic leaders with extensive management responsibilities in their institutions. In this project, employment of the project manager for four days allowed the major achievements reported for this project. It has been heart-rending to work with managers in other significant projects who are only being employed for 1-2 days. This poses a significant risk and is likely to blunt the success of some very good OLT-funded projects, minimizing the investment put into them.

A success factor highlighted has been the importance of site visits to the various universities. It is stated that these were not initially planned but I saw clear evidence of the success of these visits and attended one such briefing. At the partner universities, the project generated a fair degree of anxiety, which was not surprising. During the on-site visit, the clear purpose of the peer review process could be demonstrated and with a clear understanding of the goals, anxiety was lessened. This certainly happened at the UWS briefing. There is a strong lesson here for other project leaders. The need for face-to-face interaction with project participants and project team members cannot be emphasized too strongly.



This project has a long way to go before it can be considered a success with lasting impact on the quality of Australian higher education. However, the likelihood of success has been significantly enhanced by the attention particularly Kerri-Lee Krause and Kate Aubin paid in ensuring strategies for sustainability including working with the Standards Panel and TEQSA and the embedding peer review and moderation models in institutional policies and practice. These factors will be critical for the long-term success of the project and is why I give such a strong endorsement of the Recommendations included in the final report.

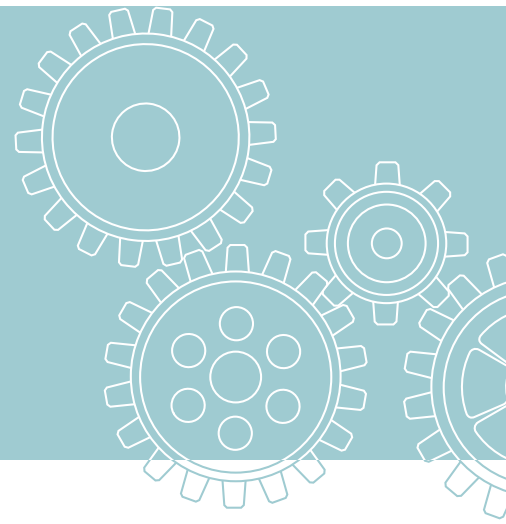
One area missing in the strategies for promotion of the project has been the education of the general public on review practices as evidence that enough attention is being paid to the quality of teaching in Australian universities. This may be a personal hobbyhorse but that universities are prepared to go to such lengths to assure comparability of standards as outlined here and the continuous improvement aspects of the project could be reassuring to the public and requires promotion.

3.6 Challenges and potential impediments to success (Report section 7.2)

As mentioned in the report, the project does indeed represent a significant culture change amongst academic staff and university leadership. For sustainability, it requires the leadership to embrace the concept, reassure staff that data is confidential, acknowledge it is a legitimate part of an academic workload and the goal is to improve rather than critique. This is not unlike the processes for staff development, as long as senior leadership is cynical and downplays the value of staff development compared to research achievement; staff will not feel a need to become involved. However, once leadership culture changes and thus staff attend development activities they find it remarkably rewarding. One of the most positive outcome of this project is how positively participant staff felt about the process and how it has encouraged them to change practice. In the future this aspect should be publicised in order to get staff buy in.

Workload is going to be a major factor that may ultimately mean the LaTS protocol does not get taken up by the majority of Australian universities or indeed continue in the Universities in which it has been trialled. Apart from embedding in policies and acknowledgement in workload formulae, a cyclical rotation of around 2-3 units per year amongst different disciplines could work and be sufficient to have impact. As long as some mechanism of sharing the learnings from these reviews can be shared among all schools in a faculty then the process could be manageable.

The frequency and mode of staff meetings was a significant issue and should not be ignored. On the other hand, the position and stature of the project team gave credibility. I am not sure what could have been done differently apart from strengthening the role of the Project Manager as already stated. In other projects, one to one meetings of the manager with project team members around the country has been successful and has led to much greater contributions from these individuals. In project proposals it could be considered that encouragement be given to include greater funding for travel by the Project Manager when the team comprises a significant number of DVCs, PVCs, deans etc.



The issue of blind peer review. (Report section 7.2 ix)

This is a major issue with respect to fulfilling the real goals of this project. I witnessed much discussion on this amongst the project team and discussed it with the project leader a number of times. At the same time as this project was running the Group of Eight universities devised and trialled an alternative methodology, the Quality Verification of Standards (QVS). This is being seen as an alternative to this project's blind peer review schema. Indeed a number of other universities have already committed to the QVS protocol, which is disappointing. The project team for the current project included two representatives from the Go8 that meant there was an opportunity for real comparisons. However, it also made it more difficult for the team to be critical of the QVS. Thus a particularly important part of the final project has been the challenging of the value of the QVS and diplomatically suggesting the tiered approach shown in Figure 1 on page 26. As evaluator, I have been privileged to see the actual results of the blind peer review process which was vastly different from the 100% agreement found in the QVS trial. To achieve the ultimate goal of confidence in the equivalence of standards across universities in Australia some form of manageable peer review of student performance is essential. This reinforces why it is so important that the project leaders continue their active dialogue with the Standards Panel and TEQSA as indicated in the report's recommendations.

3.7 Lessons learnt (Report section 7.3)

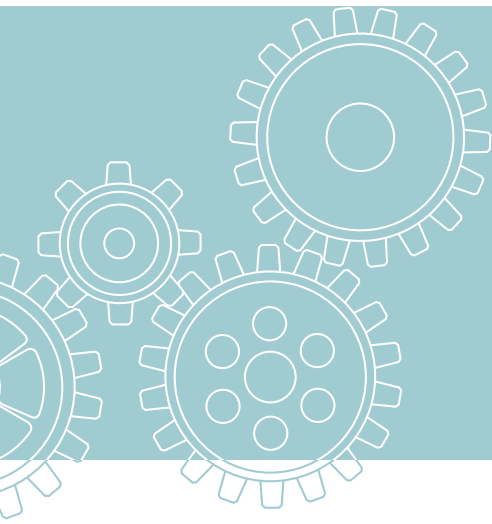
This is a very complex and important project. There is still much to be tweaked with the methodology as indicated in section 7.3. One very positive aspect of the project was the way in which the process was informed by formative evaluation and was gradually improved as the trials progressed. But as this section indicates there is still a way to go. For this reason, Recommendation 3 becomes very important. The two-year secondment position to work as indicated is essential if the full potential of this project is to be realized. I appreciate that the OLT is loath to continue funding projects so that other ideas can be explored and others given an opportunity. However, this is potentially so important to the sector that continuation is needed. My experience with NHMRC funding is relevant here. Whereas grants are normally three years there is a provision for a limited number of five year funded projects, which are of such complexity and importance that the extra investment is justified. I submit based on the results to date that the extra two years support suggested for an expert secondment to OLT is justified and strongly support it.

3.8 Unexpected successes (Report section 7.4)

It is surprising that possibly the major outcome of this project that is, "Academic staff capacity building" and the "Value of collegial conversations", are listed in the report as unexpected successes. This is the aspect of the process that leads to continual improvement and almost certainly will contribute to increasing equivalence of standards.

3.9 Summary of key findings (Report Chapter 8)

Close inspection of the summary data reported here provides the evidence that makes me so positive about this project. Firstly a review of the nuts and bolts of assessment, content, assessment and unit learning outcomes, clarity of explanation rather than simply the grading contributes to the continuous improvement process rather than simply a focus on marks or grading.



However, there are some significant differences in the results of peer grading of the same work between institutions including situations where a pass was given by one reviewer and a fail by another. There are two major consequences of this. One is a need to limit publication of this data as it could be incorrectly interpreted or sensationalized by students or the media. More importantly it increases the importance of this project with respect to continuous improvement of assessment within institutions such that if the process is embedded in institutional policy a greater likelihood of equivalence of standards will result. Probably the most important finding in the project that has been acknowledged by the team is that one of the “most significant and unexpected successes of the project was its contribution to academic staff capacity building among participants”.

4 Conclusion

For all the reasons stated above this has been a successful project and I congratulate all involved and thank them for the opportunity to watch them work on it. However should it end here, then to a degree the funding and effort expended by the participating institutions will have been wasted. I like to see the project as a beginning of a process that becomes widespread throughout all Australian universities. This will need not only further funding but also promotion and support by the regulators and belief and commitment from senior management around the country.

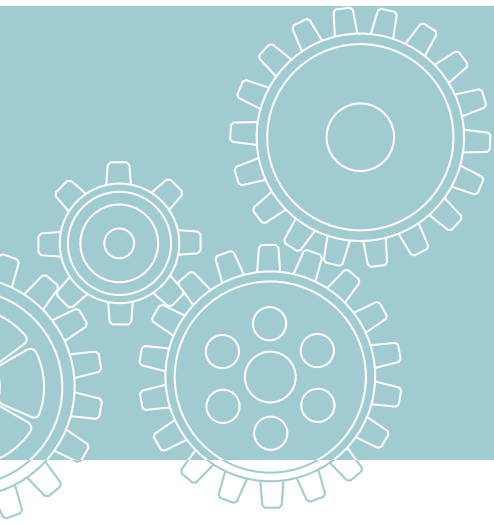
Adrian Lee
28/02/2013

Appendix B

Glossary of terms



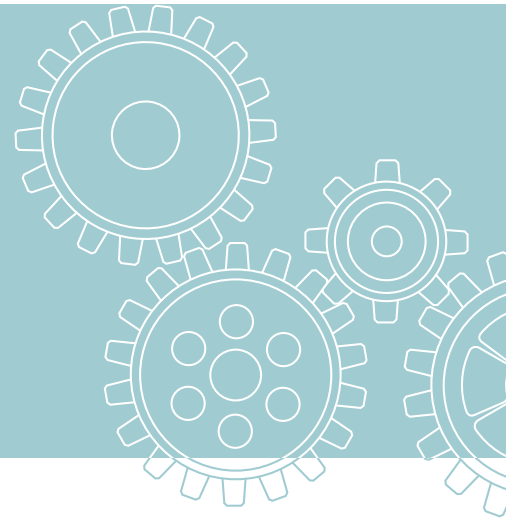
- *Academic standards* – refers to both learning and teaching standards. Teaching standards are understood to encompass “process” or “delivery” standards, while learning standards refer to “outcome standards” which describe the “nature and levels of student attainment” (TEQSA, 2011, p. 3).
- *Assessment* – the process of gathering data in order to make judgements about the development of the key capabilities and competencies to be developed in a course/unit of study.
- *Assurance* – process of ensuring that activities and outcomes meet an agreed standard.
- *Capability* – an integration of knowledge, skills, personal qualities and understanding used appropriately and effectively – not just in familiar and highly focused specialist contexts but in response to new and changing circumstances (Stephenson, 1998, p.2).
- *Capstone subject* – a final year culminating subject taken at the end of the program in which students showcase capabilities and competencies developed during the program.
- *Competence* – the ability to perform/use set skills and knowledge in relatively predictable, current circumstances to a set standard. Competence is necessary but not sufficient to be identified as being professionally capable.
- *Coursework* – curriculum covered at unit/subject and course/program level.
- *Evaluation* – making judgements of worth about the quality of Higher Education inputs and outcomes.
- *Learning standards* – refers to the validity and clarity of the learning outcomes set down for graduates to achieve.
- *Management* – organisation and coordination of the activities of an enterprise in order to achieve agreed objectives and outcomes successfully and consistently.
- *Moderation* – A peer review process by which a University assures itself and stakeholders that its assessment processes are consistent with its policies for the area; focus on the capabilities and competencies required of graduates; that the assessment processes used to measure these are valid and that marking is reliable. Consensus moderation uses processes of peer review to undertake this process in an objective and criterion-referenced fashion – often using a set of validation reference points. RMIT, for example, notes that moderation in this area brings assessment judgements and standards into alignment.
- *Program/course* – whole-of-degree program.
- *Reliability* – trustworthiness of assessment, the extent to which the grade awarded by one marker aligns with that awarded by another marker.
- *Quality* – fitness for purpose/fitness of purpose and performance to an agreed standard.
- *Standard* – a level of achievement with clear criteria, indicators and means of testing.
- *Standards framework* – this describes, in graphical or narrative form, the main dimensions of the area and the presumed relationships amongst them. The UWS Academic L&T standards and quality framework is one such example.
- *Strategy* – linking relevant, desirable and clear ends to the most feasible means necessary to achieve them.
- *Subject/unit* – an individual unit taken as part of a whole-of-degree program.
- *Teaching standards* – refers to the inputs necessary to achieve the required learning outcome standards. They can cover the quality of course design, support, delivery and staff.



- *Validity* – in establishing learning outcomes (the focus of assessment) validity refers to the process of confirming, on evidence and against a range of agreed reference points that what is being given focus on in a course or subject is both relevant and desirable. In terms of the process of assessment, validity refers to the use of assessment methods that are ‘fit for purpose’ – that is, they are shown to be the best way to measure the development of the capabilities and competencies set down for achievement in a particular course or subject.

Appendix C

User guide for implementing inter-institutional peer review of standards



The user guide and template for peer review of standards was progressively adapted and improved, based on feedback from academic colleagues who participated in the project. Their suggestions for improving the peer review process and layout of the guide are gratefully acknowledged. This user guide contains various templates that were used through the project and that may be adapted and used as appropriate.

Teaching and Learning Standards Project Inter-University Peer Review and Moderation of Coursework OLT (ALTC) Project

User Guide

VERSION FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Project Leaders

- Professor Kerri-Lee Krause
PVC (Education)
University of Western Sydney
- Emeritus Professor Geoff Scott
Executive Director (Sustainability)
University of Western Sydney

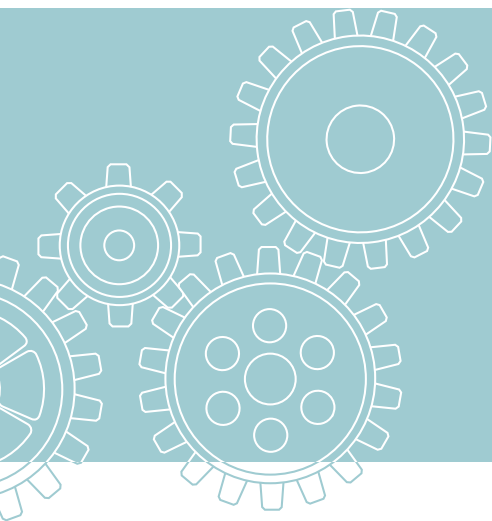
Project Team

- Associate Professor Heather Alexander (Griffith University)
- Professor Tom Angelo (La Trobe University)
- Professor Stuart Campbell
- Associate Professor Martin Carroll (CDU)
- Professor Liz Deane
- Associate Professor Duncan Nulty (Griffith University)
- Professor Pip Pattison (The University of Melbourne)
- Professor Belinda Probert
- Professor Judyth Sachs (Macquarie University)
- Associate Professor Ian Solomonides (Macquarie University)
- Professor Suzi Vaughn



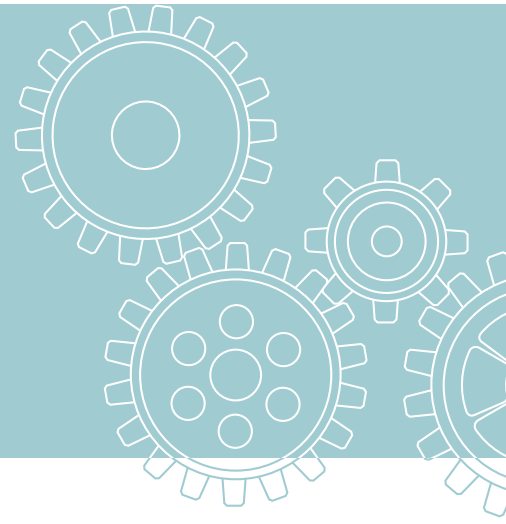
Funded by the Australian Government
Office for Learning and Teaching





User Guide Overview

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Attachment B: Coversheet – Home University Materials	5
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Project Overview

The Teaching and Learning Standards (TaLS) Project addresses the Government's search for a valid and efficient way to assure sector standards in relation to academic achievement, whilst assuring appropriate diversity and responsiveness. It seeks to identify a collegial approach for reviewing unit/subject 'inputs' such as unit outlines, learning objectives and assessment items, along with actual samples of student assessment outcomes. This approach is based on 'blind' peer review among disciplinary experts in partner universities. It uses a sampling approach and is not unduly onerous.

Our goal is to provide opportunities for academic staff with disciplinary expertise to 'calibrate' their ability to judge student work and to support one another to ensure that their approaches to assessment are valid and reliable.

This use of peer review will be underpinned by a common evaluation framework. In the project, discipline specialists from partner universities will compare:

- the learning outcomes, assessment criteria, and assessment tasks used in common units of study; and
- the reliability of marking in these units.

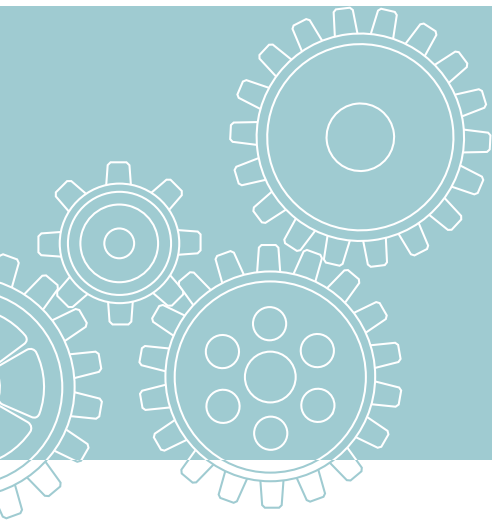
This means that the project gives focus not only to comparing assessment outcomes – in particular the reliability of marking – but also to comparing the nature and validity of a range of assessment inputs – including the specified learning outcomes, assessment tasks, and grading criteria in common units of study across partner universities. This process will be used to identify, critique and consolidate the indicators being used to identify the standards for learning outcomes, assessment processes, assessment tasks and marking in common areas of provision and specific disciplines across the partner institutions.

The project deliverables will include:

- A range of discipline-specific moderation strategies developed through peer review for adaptation and use within or between universities to assure the quality of academic achievement standards in specific fields of education.
- A validated, reliable and cost-effective method that could be used to assure the quality, relevance and assessment of student outcomes in Australian universities, whilst at the same time promoting sector diversity and responsiveness.

The results from the participating universities will be consolidated and circulated to all participants for feedback. The enhanced report will then be discussed at a meeting of relevant project team members from the partner institutions with a view to determining if the approach is efficient, productive, relevant and scalable. Peer reviewers will also be asked to provide their feedback on the process, suggesting enhancements where appropriate.

National roundtable discussions will be conducted to review the veracity and implications of what emerges. We will also link up with parallel projects, including those supported by the Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) and international developments in the area of standards and assessment.



Key Terms Used in this Guide

Unit of study – may also be referred to as a *subject* or *course*. This is normally a one semester (or equivalent) unit of study and forms part of a degree program.

Unit guide – in most universities this is the main guide for students. It often includes assessment information and learning objectives, as well as information about assessment.

Learning guide – this term may be used in some universities. It involves a self-teaching package on how to undertake the assessment tasks and associated learning activities that inform them.

De-identified – a sample from which any identifying institutional information, student details, and marks have been removed.

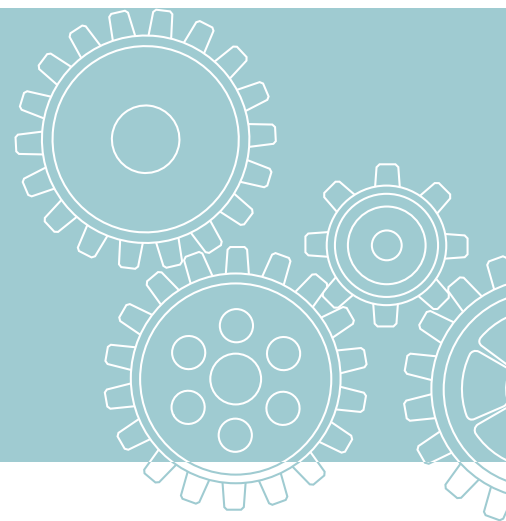
Home University – the university in which assessment materials/unit guides are selected and de-identified for peer review.

Partner University – agrees to take part in the 'blind' peer review exercise and provides feedback on de-identified assessment materials/unit guides from the Home University. In this project at least three universities share the de-identified assessment inputs and the agreed sample of assessment products for blind review by peers with appropriate disciplinary expertise in another university.

Unit Coordinators – individuals with primary responsibility for convening a unit of study. We expect that Unit Coordinators will do some or all of the peer review of unit outlines and 'blind marking'/moderation of sample assessment items from Partner Universities, but they may nominate colleagues (see Peer Reviewers).

Peer Reviewers – a Unit Coordinator may wish to nominate one or more colleagues to assist with reviewing unit outlines and moderating sample assessment items. This is optional. Unit Coordinators may choose to do all review activities themselves.

Timeline to be negotiated among partner universities.



ATTACHMENT A CHECKLIST

Please paste the relevant information in the sections below or refer to the appropriate document.

- All materials should be *de-identified*, i.e., free from identifying institutional information, unit codes, student details, marks, or written comments.

A – Brief rationale for unit design and approach (optional)

B – Degree

- ☐ Information about degree program structure in which unit is located
- ☐ List of degree-level learning outcomes
- ☐ Specification of the unit selected, including where it fits into the degree program (including core or elective status) and a brief outline of how it is linked to degree level outcomes

C – Unit/Subject

- ☐ Unit title
- ☐ Unit outline
- ☐ Unit learning guide (if applicable)
- ☐ Unit learning objectives/outcomes

D – Assessment tasks

- ☐ Description of specific assessment tasks being used in unit (including copies of essay and exam questions)
- ☐ Weighting for assessment tasks

E – Grading

- ☐ Brief details of the grading system and nomenclature used for the unit concerned
- ☐ Copies of grading guides/criteria sheets that accompany the samples of student work to be submitted (see F, below).
If no grading guides/criteria sheets are used, please provide an explanation of how student work is graded.

F – Sample of student work

De-identified samples of student work from *one* of the assessment tasks in the unit (preferably worth 25% or more of final grade) which represent the:

- ☐ bottom of the range (fail or equivalent)
- ☐ minimum requirements for a pass (low pass or equivalent)
- ☐ middle of the range (credit or high credit)
- ☐ top of the range (distinction/high distinction or equivalent)

This will equate to a *total* of 4 samples of student work – i.e., one from each grade band.

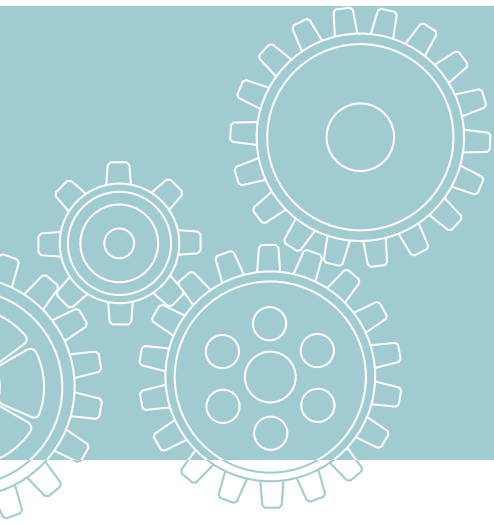
Suggestion for sending student work

Hard copies of student work can be scanned and emailed to [insert your email contact here].

G – Assessment coversheet

- ☐ A completed coversheet (*Attachment B*) for each sample of student work. Please save the completed editable *Home Uni Coversheets – Attach B* document and email as an attachment to the Project Officer.

Please EMAIL this completed document to [insert your email contact here].



ATTACHMENT B COVERSHEET

Home University Materials
(Completed by: Unit Coordinators and/or Support Person at Home University)

University: _____

Your contact details: _____

Student work sample number: 1 2 3 4 Other: _____

Discipline: _____

Degree: _____

Unit code: _____

Type of assessment (e.g., Final exam): _____

Assessment weighting: _____ % of final grade

Actual marks (if relevant): _____ / _____

Grade awarded (please select)*: Fail Pass Credit Distinction High distinction

**Please indicate and select equivalent if a different grading system is used*

Comments and suggestions for improving this process:



ATTACHMENT C PEER FEEDBACK FORM

(Completed by: Unit Coordinator and/or Peer Reviewer/s in each Partner University)

SECTION A: YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE UNIT OUTLINE

In reviewing the unit outline/learning guide:

1. To what extent does the curriculum content for this unit cover all that a final year undergraduate unit on this topic should cover? (Please select the description that best represents your view)

Not at all 1	Somewhat 2	Adequately 3	Very Well 4	Completely 5

Please explain your rating. Please list up to three specific suggestions for improvement where appropriate.

2. a. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain how the assessment tasks relate to the unit learning outcomes? (Please select)

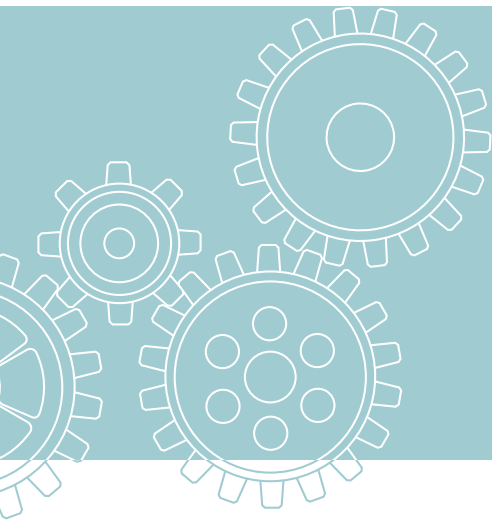
Not at all 1	Somewhat 2	Adequately 3	Very Well 4	Completely 5

Please explain your rating. Please list up to three specific suggestions for improvement where appropriate.

- b. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain how the assessment tasks relate to the overall graduate outcomes of the degree program? (Please select)

Not at all 1	Somewhat 2	Adequately 3	Very Well 4	Completely 5

Please explain your rating. Please list up to three specific suggestions for improvement where appropriate



ATTACHMENT C PEER FEEDBACK FORM *continued*

3. To what extent does the unit outline/learning guide explain clearly (preferably with examples) the requirements for achieving at various grade levels (e.g., what is required to achieve a credit, distinction etc.)? *(Please select).*

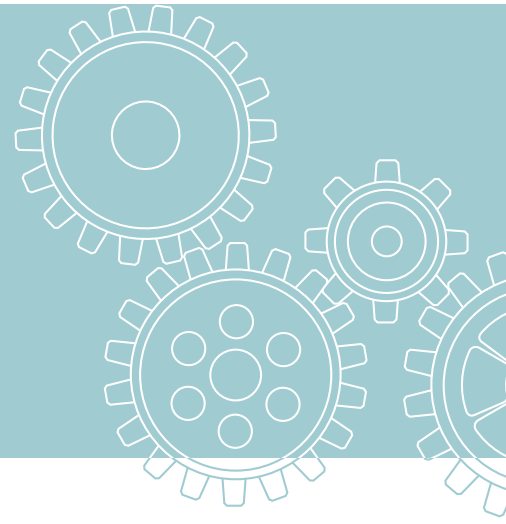
<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not at all</i> 1	<i>Somewhat</i> 2	<i>Adequately</i> 3	<i>Very Well</i> 4	<i>Completely</i> 5

Please *explain* your rating. Please give *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate.

4. What, briefly, are the **best aspects** of the unit outline/learning guide?

5. Do you have any suggestions for **further enhancing** the unit outline/learning guide?

Comments



ATTACHMENT C PEER FEEDBACK FORM *continued*

SECTION B: YOUR FEEDBACK ON THE GRADING GUIDELINES

In reflecting on the assessment grading guidelines provided for the samples of student work that you are reviewing:

1. To what extent is it clear how student work will be awarded grades at different levels for that assessment task? (Please select)

<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not at all</i> 1	<i>Somewhat</i> 2	<i>Adequately</i> 3	<i>Very Well</i> 4	<i>Completely</i> 5

Please *explain* your rating. Please give *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate

2. To what extent are the grading criteria at an appropriate level for a final year undergraduate unit of study in this field of education? (Please select)

<i>Not applicable</i>	<i>Not at all</i> 1	<i>Somewhat</i> 2	<i>Adequately</i> 3	<i>Very Well</i> 4	<i>Completely</i> 5

Please *explain* your rating. Please give *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate

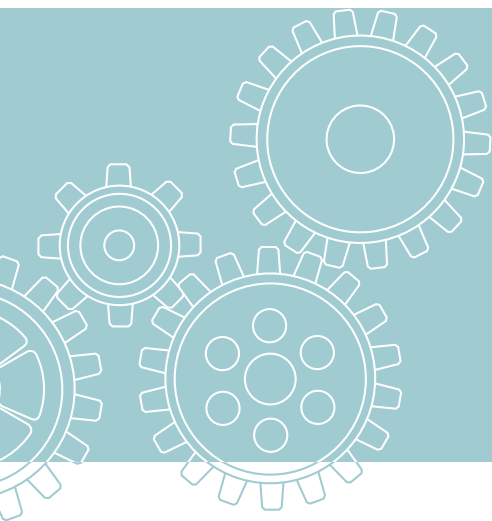
SECTION C: YOUR FEEDBACK ON ASSESSMENT TASK/S

In reviewing the list of assessment tasks which students have to complete in the unit of study:

1. To what extent is the range of assessment tasks suited to assessing the key learning objectives listed in the unit outline? (Please select)

<i>Not at all</i> 1	<i>Somewhat</i> 2	<i>Adequately</i> 3	<i>Very Well</i> 4	<i>Completely</i> 5

Please *explain* your rating. Please give *specific suggestions for improvement* where appropriate



ATTACHMENT C PEER FEEDBACK FORM *continued*

SECTION D: YOUR OVERALL FEEDBACK ON THIS PROCESS

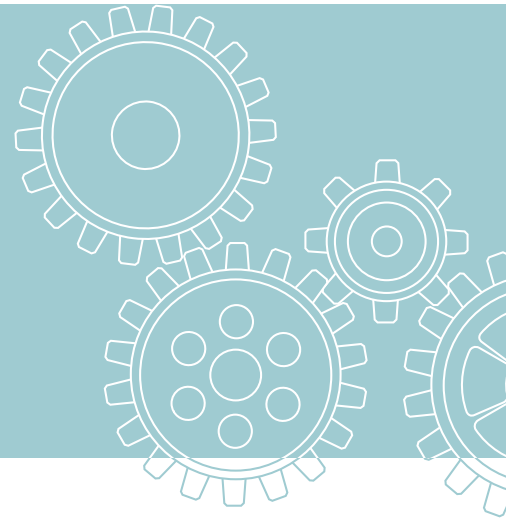
Please provide brief feedback on this peer review process as a collegial way to monitor and assure standards in common units of study between different universities.

1. What, briefly, are the **best aspects** of this peer review process?

2. Which aspects of this peer review process **do you think we could improve** and how might this be achieved?

Please save the completed editable *Peer Feedback Form – Attach C* document and email as an attachment to [insert your email contact here].

Many thanks for your valuable input.



ATTACHMENT D CHECKLIST

Partner University Materials
(Completed by: Unit Coordinators and/or Support Person in each Partner University)

A – Feedback on peer reviewed samples of student work

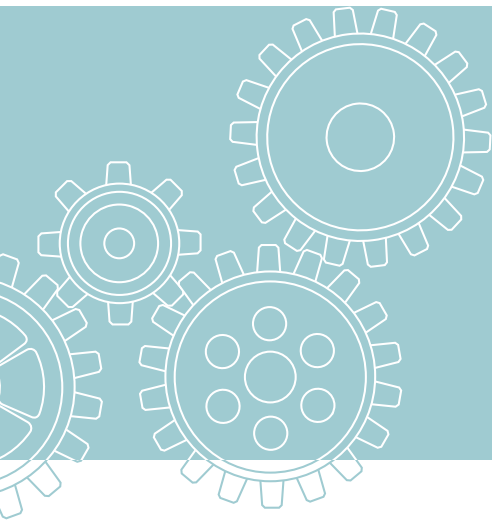
- ☐ Completed grading guides/criteria sheets (if supplied). Please email to [insert your email contact here].

B – Partner university feedback coversheet

- ☐ A completed coversheet (*Attachment E*) for each peer reviewed sample of student work. Please save the completed editable *Partner Uni Checklist + Coversheets – Attach D&E* document and email as an attachment to the Project Officer.

Explanatory Comments (*optional*):

Thank you for your significant contribution to this project



ATTACHMENT E COVERSHEET

Partner University Materials
(Completed by: Unit Coordinators and/or Peer Reviewer/s in each Partner University)

Partner university number: _____
(as labelled in the files you have received)

Student work sample number: _____
(as labelled in the files you have received)

Discipline: _____

Assessment item reviewed: _____
(e.g., Final exam)

Peer reviewer/s: _____

Contact details: _____

Your home university: _____

Mark (if relevant):
The mark I would allocate this piece of work
(using the marking guide that came with it) _____ / _____

Grade (if relevant):
The grade I would allocate to this piece of work (using the grading guide that came with it)

(please select)*: **Fail Pass Credit Distinction High distinction**

**Please indicate and select equivalent if a different grading system is used*

Comments:

Please also email the completed grading guides/criteria sheets (if supplied) to [insert your email contact here].

Appendix D

Synthesis of standards-related projects

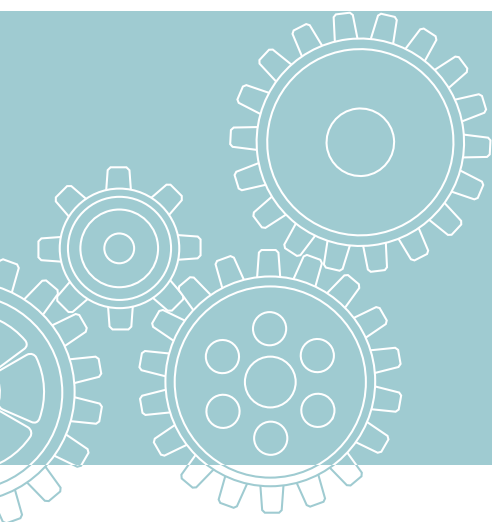
Members of the following projects formed the basis for a meeting of the National Standards Coalition, hosted by Professor Beverley Oliver at the offices of the ALTC in Sydney, August 2011.

Selected ALTC/DEEWR-funded projects relating to teaching and/or learning standards (correct as at Nov 2011)

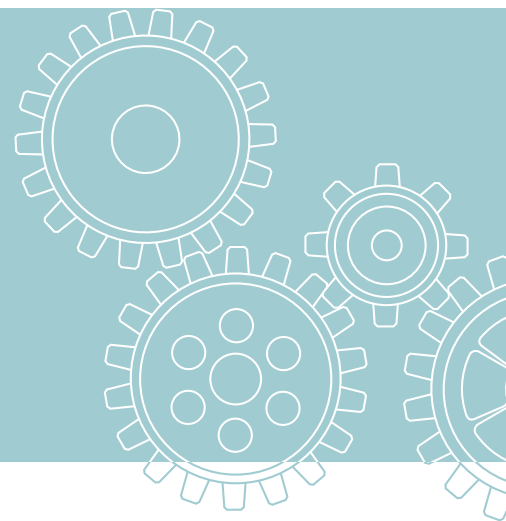
This information has been gathered from project websites, available reports and where possible, discussion with project teams. Please contact the AAGLO Project Officer (see <http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo>) if there is additional information that you would like to add.

1. Projects invited to ALTC Networking in standards-related projects and fellowships

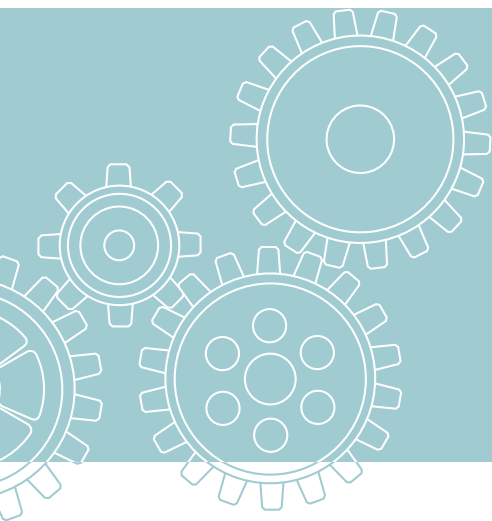
Lead Institution, project leader and partners	Project Title	Description (as available through online reports by respective project teams)	Year funded
UWS – Kerri-Lee Krause Charles Darwin La Trobe Macquarie QUT ANU Melbourne Griffith	A sector-wide model for assuring final year subjects and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation SP10-1843 The focus of this project is on the assurance processes in relation to final year assessments rather than on the assessment task itself. The information we generate about the tasks and the assurance processes used for these will usefully complement this.	This project will produce resources to guide inter-institutional moderation for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards. Eight universities will identify common final year subjects across eight disciplines aligned with the ALTC discipline standards project. Subject convenors will share subject outlines and selected assessment artefacts for review by at least two other project universities. The moderation process includes inputs (e.g., outlines, assessment tasks, marking criteria) and outcomes (i.e., assessment samples). External blind peer review of both inputs and outcomes will determine consistency of subject-level standards against comparable final year subjects in other universities. Where relevant, capstone subjects will be used, and program learning outcomes considered, to identify approaches for assuring program achievement standards through inter-university moderation. The project addresses the TEQSA imperative to demonstrate sector-level, self-regulated, robust approaches for assuring quality and standards, and highlights the role of peer review. Guidelines for practice will be sustainable and owned by academic disciplinary communities.	2010
UNSW – Sean Brawley UQ UNE	After standards: Engaging and embedding history's standards using international best practice to inform curriculum renewal PP10-1812 The information gathered about assessment in history might be very relevant to our work and certainly the community of practice this project will build will be important for us to connect into.	History is currently a 'demonstration discipline' in the ALTC's Learning and Teaching Academic Standards project. The new threshold learning outcomes (TLO) and the new standards environment that TEQSA will oversee, present history with both a significant challenge (navigating the new environment when the discipline has no standards experience) and a unique opportunity (using the TLO's promulgation to drive cognate agendas around curriculum renewal). It is the ambition of this project to build a community of practice through which Australian historians – systematically, universally, collegially, reflectively and effectively – respond to standards implementation and the resulting opportunities for curriculum renewal. The project has the endorsement of the discipline's peak body (Australian Historical Association), the Australasian Council of the Deans of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, and the active support of each of the 31 institutions that have history majors. This project will model, demonstrate and evaluate approaches and processes in dissemination and implementation that will be applicable to other discipline communities.	2010
UTS – Alison Lee AIPPEN Curtin Notre Dame Edith Cowan Griffith Notre Dame UQ Sydney UWA	Curriculum renewal and interprofessional health education: establishing capabilities, outcomes and standards PP10-1741 This project focuses on IPL – an interdisciplinary assessment context that should also be considered alongside the disciplines we are focussing on.	This proposal responds to the urgent need for curriculum renewal in health education – in particular, the need to graduate students from all health professions with well-developed interprofessional practice (IPP) capabilities. IPP capabilities are identified as essential for delivering health services that are safer, more effective, and more sustainable. Significant interprofessional education (IPE) initiatives have occurred internationally. However, within the Australian higher education context, IPE remains relatively undeveloped, and is not well integrated with core elements of the curriculum. In addressing this national challenge, the project will contribute in two areas. Firstly, it will produce and disseminate a range of IPE curriculum resources: a curriculum framework, generic capability statements, learning outcomes and assessment methods. Secondly, it will produce and disseminate resources to guide and support curriculum change. To maximise stakeholder buy-in and uptake, the project will build on existing curriculum development initiatives and utilise participatory methods.	2010



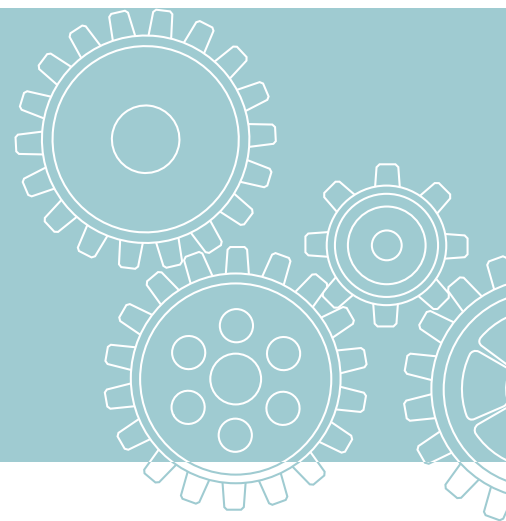
Lead Institution, project leader and partners	Project Title	Description (as available through online reports by respective project teams)	Year funded
Wollongong – Heather Yeatman Curtin Deakin Flinders QUT Newcastle UQ USC	Curriculum renewal in public health nutrition PP10-1769 This project focuses on developing academic standards and a competencies framework for PHN. The production of performance/assessment criteria at UG and PG levels and the assessment opportunities available to an emerging discipline should foster productive interactions with the AAGLO project.	This project will use a consensus-based approach to develop academic standards to support the emerging discipline and workforce of public health nutrition (PHN). There is a need for a current academic discipline base and pedagogy for the education of professionals who are able to address contemporary food issues. A modified Delphi methodology will be used to reach consensus on PHN academic standards. The project will develop a competencies framework, including competency units, elements and performance/assessment criteria (consistent with competency frameworks used by professional disciplines). These will codify and make explicit the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to perform effectively the work required of a public health nutrition practitioner, from graduate entry to advanced practitioner at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A national forum will be conducted to disseminate and operationalise the academic standards. The process will form the first phase in curriculum renewal in PHN, to be articulated at national and international levels.	2010
UQ – David Wilkinson ACER Monash	Developing the foundation for a national assessment of medical student learning outcomes SP10-1869 This project developing processes for national program assurance of GLOs. The sector wide engagement and sharing generated by this project will provide an important community for AAGLO to tap into to broaden the consideration of approaches to the establishment of national item banks and development of a standard assessment instrument.	As the recent national study of medical education in Australia has affirmed, growing internationalisation of the medical profession, increasing diversification of programs and curriculums, and ever-growing pressure to prove and improve academic standards heighten the need for robust and efficient assessment in medical education (DEEWR, 2008). This project responds to the need to prove and improve the standards of medical education by establishing an Australian Medical Assessment Collaboration (AMAC). The aim of AMAC is to set foundations of a national assessment to monitor the outcomes of later year medical students in Australia. This project will include scoping work, wide-ranging sector engagement, international involvement, faculty training, development of initial criterion-referenced assessment frameworks, and the compilation and validation of sample test items. This ALTC project will provide the foundation for what will be the ongoing development and implementation of an item library that will provide a sustainable and robust means of assuring the standards of medical education in Australia.	2010
Monash – Adrian Evans Griffith La Trobe Murdoch ANU UNSW	Strengthening Australian legal education by integrating clinical experiences: identifying and supporting effective practices PP10-1603 This project focuses on developing standards for clinical legal education. The AAGLO project will consider the applicability of its outcomes across a range of assessment contexts including those with a focus on clinical education.	This project seeks to develop standards for effective clinical legal education in their own right and to assist in renewal of University law curricula in Australia. The project will investigate current practices in clinical programs in six Australian jurisdictions with participation from six law schools closely identified with experiential learning in law. Workshops across Australia will explore the disparate and uneven approaches to clinical learning and effective practice. The findings from each jurisdiction will also be workshopped, compared and contrasted among key stakeholders, resulting in these deliverables: the production of recommended standards for current and new clinical programs, a national conference and an edited book. In this way, law deans'; and academics'; consciousness of the importance of experiential learning to renewal of law curricula will be strongly disseminated across Australia and provide sufficient information for the Council of Australian Law Deans to implement national clinical standards within their projected standards for accreditation of Australian law schools.	2010



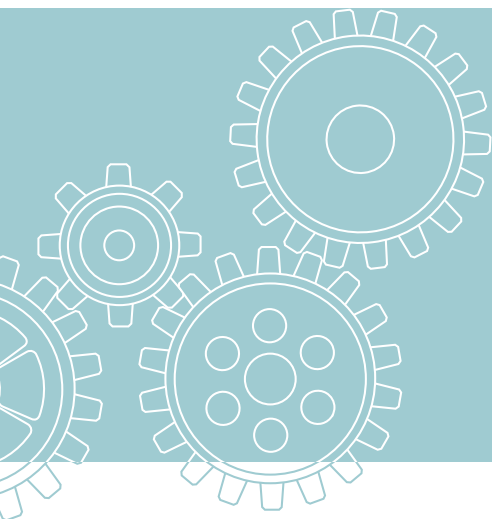
Lead Institution, project leader and partners	Project Title	Description (as available through online reports by respective project teams)	Year funded
UTS – Romy Lawson Bond QUT RMIT USQ	Hunters and gatherers: strategies for curriculum mapping and data collection for assuring learning SP10-186 Accreditation processes are increasingly incorporating assessment into their processes with a consequent increase in demand for reliable and efficient technologies to support data collection and storage. Collaboration between the AAGLO and “Hunters and Gatherers” projects has been established.	Assurance of learning is a predominant feature in both quality enhancement and assurance in higher education. It involves making program expectations and standards explicit, then systematically gathering, and interpreting evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations. This benefits the institution, ensuring program aims are evaluated and used for program development, and is important for external scrutiny (AUQA, TEQSA, professional bodies). This project aims to investigate two elements of assurance of learning: (1) mapping graduate attributes throughout a program; and (2) collecting assurance data. It will conduct an audit across disciplines subject to accreditation in Australian universities to evaluate current methods of mapping graduate attributes and their impact on the curriculum, and also the systems used to collect and store data. This information will be critically analysed to develop strategy on curriculum mapping and data collection. It will draw upon the use of existing software packages (e.g., SOS – mapping; ReView, SPARKPLUS collection) to support the efficient and effective implementation strategies.	2010
Adelaide – Maree O’Keefe Monash Melbourne UQ	Harmonising higher education and professional quality assurance processes for the assessment of learning outcomes in health SP10-1856 This project focuses on ensuring alignment of GLOs and accreditation requirements in selected health discipline. Of particular interest to the AAGLO project is the explicit reference to LTAS TLOs as an external reference point for standards in these demonstration disciplines.	The outcomes of the ALTC Learning and Teaching Academic Standards project have reinforced the importance of ensuring ongoing alignment between threshold learning outcomes and professional accreditation standards. This harmonising project will work across, and with, higher education institutions and healthcare professional accreditation agencies to identify and match the goals and expectations of educational, professional and governmental institutions in relation to quality assurance activities. Within a framework that is organised around the threshold learning outcomes, information will be captured about teaching and learning practices, designs and environments, and assessment approaches that underpin contemporary healthcare professional education. The project will specifically focus on a subset of health professions including medicine, dentistry, nursing and physiotherapy as demonstration disciplines. A detailed analysis within each of these demonstration disciplines will directly inform development of the framework that can subsequently be more widely adopted.	2010
Macquarie – Judyth Sachs	Teaching standards framework project This project is developing a teaching standards framework that includes assurance processes. Some of these processes may be applicable to assurance of GLOs.	The Teaching Standards Framework (TSF) project was initiated to facilitate the development of teaching standards for the Australian higher education sector. Macquarie University had developed teaching standards frameworks at the institutional and individual levels for its own purposes in 2009. Nine universities were involved in testing and re-designing the institutional framework between August and December 2010. The updated framework includes six standards that provide institutions with a way of benchmarking the quality of their teaching, learning environment and curriculum. The revised TSF provides the structure and methodology for institutions to indicate how they meet each of these standards. The TSF is designed around three themes and seven focus areas considered common to all institutions. These provide a benchmark whilst allowing for both the celebration of institutional excellence and the identification of areas in need of development. The TSF enables an assessment across an entire institution or organizational unit and accommodates institutional diversity. There is also the facility for extensive reporting on particular focus areas. Participating institutions were of the view that the TSF required the development of an online version and more testing before it could be implemented. The regulatory regime managed by TEQSA in which Australian institutions will shortly be operating increases the need for a tool through which excellence and areas in need of development can be evaluated and standards defined. The TSF, when online and with more testing, could be that tool. The report makes a series of recommendations about how the implementation of the TSF in Australian institutions could be achieved.	Published 2011



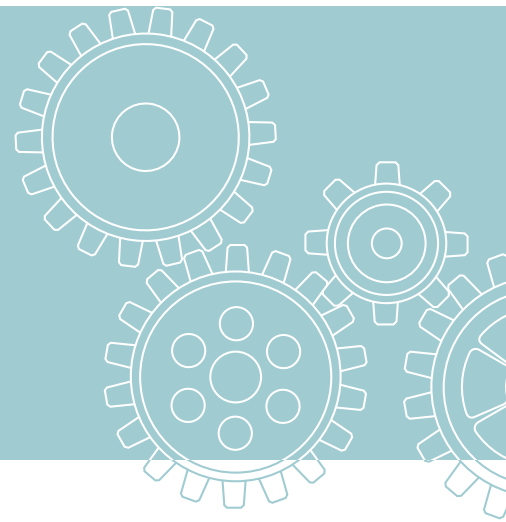
Lead Institution, project leader and partners	Project Title	Description (as available through online reports by respective project teams)	Year funded
UWA – Phil Hancock Sydney – Mark Freeman UWS RMIT Adelaide Deakin	<p>Achievement Matters: External Peer Review of Learning and Teaching Academic Standards for Accounting</p> <p>Australian Business Deans Council, CPA I, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in I and the ALTC Discipline Support Strategy.</p> <p>This project is developing national system of peer review of assessment tasks and student responses in accounting. The processes developed might be very relevant to our work and the community of practice this project will build will be important for us to connect to.</p>	<p>Accounting is the first discipline seeking to collaboratively develop and implement a national model of expert peer review for benchmarking learning outcomes against nationally-agreed threshold learning outcomes developed under the ALTC 2010 Learning and Teaching Academic Standards project. 1 Assessment tasks and specifications, chosen to evidence particular thresholds, will be peer reviewed by recent graduates and professional bodies as well as by senior academics. Following calibration activities, random samples of completed student work will also be double-blind reviewed by academic peers. A debrief activity rounds off the cycle. After the pilot cycle, limited to accounting departments and bachelor students from ten universities, the project will be expanded to coursework master students and invitations to participate extended to all other Australian accounting degree providers, including private and TAFE providers. This project is funded by the Australian Business Deans Council, CPA I, the Institute of Chartered Accountants in I and the ALTC Discipline Support Strategy. An unsuccessful ALTC grant application will necessitate limiting the number of additional participants. Project intended outcomes: 1. External peer-reviewed evidence of accounting academic standards in all types of higher education providers, benchmarked against the accounting threshold learning outcomes; 2. A model process for obtaining and using blind external peer review evidence that captures inputs (i.e. assessment specifications) as well as outputs (i.e. completed student work) and 3. Professional learning and capacity building. These outcomes will: serve quality assurance purposes, nationally and internationally, and support quality enhancement locally; produce a model that is inclusive, reliable, and is likely to be adopted by other business disciplines; provide valuable professional development for experienced academics and, if mirrored locally, for early career academics.</p>	
QUT – Wageeh Boles	<p>Navigating a pathway between the academic standards and a framework for authentic, collaborative, outcomes-focused thinking in Engineering Education</p> <p>This project focuses on designing and implementing assessment tasks that provide evidence of student learning outcomes in engineering. The information collected on assessment practices may be very relevant to our work.</p>	<p>The pending roll-out of threshold learning outcomes devised by the Learning and Teaching Academic Standards project will significantly impact curriculum design, pedagogy and assessment in all Australian tertiary institutions. By developing a transferable framework for collaborative, outcomes-focused thinking, this fellowship program will enable academic staff to constructively engage with the imperative for universities to enhance student learning outcomes.</p> <p>During a Fellow-in-residence program at five Australian universities, an action research approach will be used to support engineering academics in designing and implementing assessment tasks that provide evidence of students' attainment of learning outcomes. Later, the Fellow will work as a collaborator and change agent with heads of schools and academic leaders to support academics' effective teaching and assessment practices. The major outcomes will be a shift to an authentic, outcomes-focused approach to teaching demonstrated in the design and evaluation of assessment tasks and a set of guides and resources for mentoring, with an emphasis on supporting early- and mid-career academics.</p>	2011 National Teaching Fellow



Fellowships	Project Title	Description	Year funded
UNSW – Jacquelyn Cranney	National standards for psychological literacy and global citizenship The focus of this project is on developing and assessing GLOs in psychology. The information collected on assessment practices may be very relevant to our work.	This fellowship will address the further development of academic standards (student learning outcomes, SLOs) for undergraduate psychology education, particularly the refinement of SLOs emphasising psychological literacy and global citizenship. The issue relates to increasing national and international emphasis on accountability in terms of sustainable and relevant educational outcomes. The issue will be addressed primarily through a wide range of network-based curriculum renewal activities, involving key national stakeholder groups. Innovative curriculum strategies for SLO development and assessment will be identified, and guidelines for minimum SLO attainment, assessment and evaluation will be created. These national disciplinary outcomes will be embedded through network prioritising and program accreditation processes. Transdisciplinary impact will be achieved through strategic institutional and national engagement, focusing on generalisation of academic standard development processes, with particular emphasis on global citizenship. Specific indicators of these outcomes are outlined.	2010 National Teaching Fellow
UNE – Wendy Beck	Improving graduate employability by implementing subject benchmarks	Employability is defined as a set of skills, understandings and personal attributes that graduates should have in order to succeed in their careers. The fellow's completed ALTC Discipline Study (Benchmarking Archaeology Degrees in Australian Universities 2007-2008) studied one aspect of employability. But how can humanities disciplines improve graduate employability even further? Suggested means to improvement are: a) to jointly develop employability profiles; b) to explore the development of collaborative teaching; and c) to encourage other disciplines in humanities to adopt the subject benchmarking process. This activity is important because it will implement and map cross-institutional approaches to improving employability in archaeology, as well as explicitly disseminating the results to other disciplines, for the first time. The proposed outcomes are: nationally-agreed principles for the provision of collaborative teaching in archaeology; general guidance for the articulation of appropriate employability profiles; and process development for sustainable cross-institutional benchmark development.	2009 ALTC Teaching Fellow
Curtin – Bev Oliver	Assuring graduate capabilities: evidencing levels of achievement for graduate employability This project is designing program-wide standards rubrics and strategies to evidence student achievement of learning outcomes. Some of the information gathered about strategies to evidence student achievement might be very relevant to our work.	Conversations about graduate capabilities inevitably turn to standards: academic staff, business and industry, the community, students and graduates seek clarity on the level of achievement required for safe practice and professional readiness. Course (program) leaders, students and industry partners are often guided by predetermined lists of generic attributes, professional competencies and outcomes. However, many seek clarity about the level of performance required during the course, at graduation and beyond (for example, how well a journalist or pharmacist is expected to be able to communicate at graduation). In addition, in an increasingly evidence-based culture, the sector is seeking new ways to assure the achievement of such standards. This fellowship proposes to engage curriculum leaders of undergraduate courses from any discipline to work with their colleagues, industry partners, students and graduates to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • define course-wide levels of achievement in key capabilities, articulated through standards rubrics • implement strategies to evidence student achievement of those standards (through student portfolios and course review processes, for example) • share the validity, challenges and opportunities of such approaches through scholarly publications. • Colleagues are encouraged to access an introduction to these concepts and join a community of practice and scholarship at http://tiny.cc/boliver. 	2011 National Teaching Fellowship

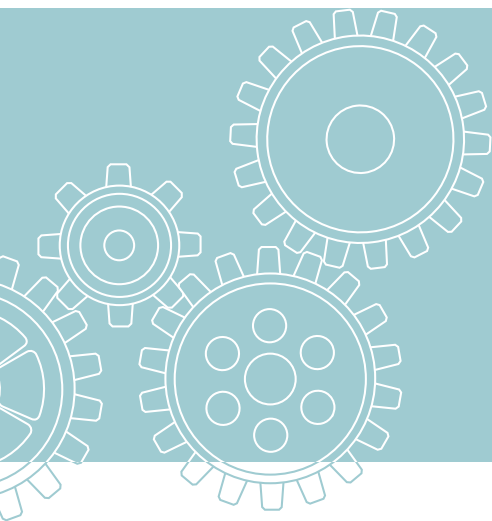


Fellowships	Project Title	Description	Year funded
Curtin – Bev Oliver	Benchmarking partnerships for graduate employability	Universities review curricula drawing on a range of data, including feedback gathered through the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and internal feedback systems which rarely include graduate and employer perceptions of graduate achievement of attributes and employability skills. This fellowship sought to address this gap by disseminating three tools to partner universities to engage in benchmarking for improved attribute and employability skill attainment in specific courses. The fellowship engaged partner universities to voluntarily engage in benchmarking with selected peer institutions (within agreed confidentiality boundaries) so that teaching teams could improve course curricula and improve stakeholder perceptions of graduate employability. The tools were: the Graduate Employability Indicator surveys, a portfolio of course review evidence from a range of data sources (such as the Australian Graduate Survey, course demand, student progress and retention, graduate and employer feedback); and a curriculum mapping tool which creates visual analyses of key aspects of the curriculum (such as where graduate attributes are developed and assessed, assessment types, learning experiences and resources, career development learning and curriculum themes).	2009 ALTC Teaching Fellowship

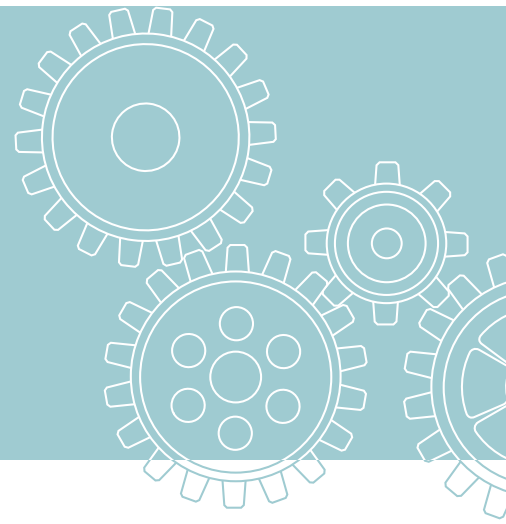


2. Additional projects identified by searching ALTC website

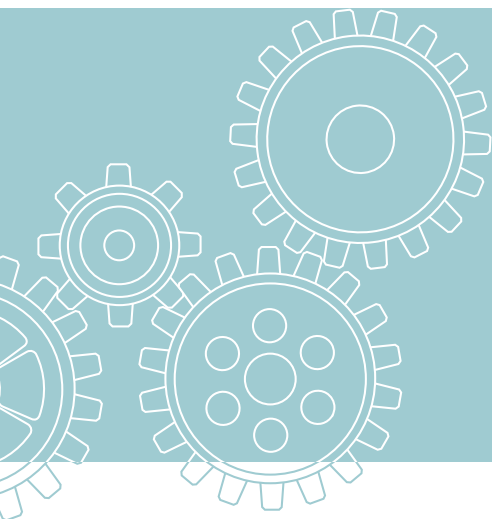
Lead Institution, project leader, partners	Project Title	Description	Year funded
Griffith – Elizabeth van Acker Macquarie QUT Newcastle Wollongong	Capstone courses in undergraduate business degrees: better course design, better learning activities, better assessment PP10-1646	Capstone courses within undergraduate business degrees are important for learning. However, little is known or understood about the purpose of capstone courses or the best approaches to course design, learning activities and assessment. This project aims specifically to gather and disseminate good practice in course design, learning activities and assessment practices for capstone courses. It will conduct an audit of capstones in the partner universities, interview various stakeholders and survey recent graduates. It will deliver outcomes that benefit employers of business graduates, university business schools and final year business students. It will be of national benefit in enhancing student employability and assurance of learning. It will produce a report of its findings, conference papers, workshops and journal articles. The project's main output will be a good practice guide about how to structure, teach and assess a capstone course.	2010
UNE – Wendy Beck	Benchmarking archaeology degrees at Australian universities PP6-53	The purpose of the project is to formulate a list of achievement standards for Australian Honours graduates in Archaeology. By project end, a nationally agreed public document, developed collaboratively by all Australian university providers of Archaeology, will be produced and disseminated. The project methodology should be transferable to other disciplines.	Published 2006
Sydney – Michelle Lincoln CSU Flinders	Benchmarking clinical learning in speech pathology to support assessment, discipline standards, teaching innovation and student learning PP6-26	This project will build the capacity of speech pathology academics to monitor and improve the quality of their teaching and assessment through benchmarking effective strategies for facilitating student learning in the workplace nationally and internationally. Programs will be supported to develop threshold standards of performance that will inform teaching practice within universities. The project also aims to facilitate international benchmarking for the purpose of maintenance of standards and improvement of learning and teaching practices.	Published 2008
UTS – Tracy Taylor QUT Sydney UQ	Facilitating staff and student engagement with graduate attribute development, assessment and standards in Business faculties PP7-332	To promote and support strategic change in advancing graduate attribute development in business education through engagement of staff and students with learning and assessment processes that embed graduate attribute development.	Published 2009
Macquarie – Leigh Wood ACU Edith Cowan La Trobe. USQ Canberra, UTAS	Embedding the development and grading of generic skills across the business curriculum PP8-935	This project identified and disseminated several current models of embedding graduate skills in business programs around Australia. An intensive workshop model of embedding graduates skills was developed and trialled. Practical teaching and learning resources on teamwork, critical thinking, ethical practice and sustainability were developed and may be found on the project website.	Published 2011
Griffith – Megan Dalton La Trobe Monash	Assessment of Physiotherapy Practice (APP) PP6-28	A preliminary search of the physiotherapy literature revealed a lack of systematic studies to determine the validity and reliability of instruments for assessing clinical competence of students in physiotherapy programs worldwide (Beckman et al. 2005; Stickley 2005). The project group therefore proposes a method for the development of a standardised assessment procedure that meets the needs of students and educators and provides valid and reliable measurements of student clinical competence. Specific project aims were to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a competency based assessment instrument to evaluate the performance of physiotherapy students in the workplace; • investigate and refine the psychometric properties of the instrument; and • investigate the viability of using the instrument as a measure of physiotherapy competency in the practice environment 	2006



Lead Institution, project leader, partners	Project Title	Description	Year funded
RMIT – M. Jones, Griffith, La Trobe	Generating academic standards for planning practice education PP6-47	To gain a greater understanding of academic standards within the discipline of urban and regional planning. The focus was on academic standards, assessment practices and student outcomes in planning education.	Published 2006
Newcastle – Jennifer Gore	Quality assessment: linking assessment tasks and teaching outcomes in the social sciences PP7-320	The project aimed to strengthen links between assessment tasks and teaching outcomes by refining and evaluating a model for improving the quality of assessment tasks in the social sciences (as well as other disciplines).	Published 2007
Wollongong – Roy Brown	The development of an undergraduate nursing competencies assessment tool for use across Australian universities CG7-523	To develop a new nationally-agreed competency assessment tool for all Australian universities with nursing programs that lead to eligibility for registration in all states and territories.	Published 2010 Not yet available
RMIT – Barbara de la Harpe CQU Murdoch UNSW	Increasing institutional success in the integration and assessment of graduate attributes across disciplines by identifying academic staff beliefs about graduate attributes GI7-638	An analysis and comparison of survey data gathered from academic staff at 16 Australian universities about their beliefs around graduate attributes.	Published 2009
Sydney – Sue McAllister Flinders James Cook La Trobe Newcastle UQ	Establishing infrastructure and collaborative processes for cross-institutional benchmarking of student clinical performance in speech pathology PP8-955	This project builds on the successful completion of the two earlier projects: COMPASS® and Benchmarking clinical learning in speech pathology. This project will develop tools for benchmarking student progress collaboratively across higher education programs through the application of innovative technology and will facilitate the collaborative use of this information to inform and improve educational practice. This process will assist those professional disciplines such as physiotherapy and nursing which have begun preliminary work in this area to develop national competency assessment tools. It will encourage other disciplines to consider taking up these challenges at a national level.	Expected completion 2011
Griffith – Sally Kift QUT	Curriculum renewal in legal education: articulating final year curriculum design principles and a final year program PP9-1374	There are 32 law schools in Australia and more than 20,000 law students (DEEWR, 2008). This project focuses on curriculum renewal of the final year of legal education and transition to professional practice. Project outcomes will include: (1) articulated curriculum design principles for the final year (with adaptability potential to other disciplines); (2) a transferable model for an effective final year program; and (3) a final year in legal education forum and website. An iterative action learning methodology will be employed in the project design phase, engaging national and international legal education experts, including ALTC teaching award winners, and two key representative bodies, the Australian Academy of Law, and the Australian Law Students' Association. Focus groups will be conducted with students and recent graduates to obtain feedback on the developing draft principles and program. Preliminary research points to the value of the following three final year curriculum objectives: reflection, closure and transition.	2009



Lead Institution, project leader, partners	Project Title	Description	Year funded
Edith Cowan – Trudy Cooper ACU RMIT Victoria	Australian youth work education: curriculum renewal and a model for sustainability for niche professions PP10-1612	The purpose of this project is to renew the curriculum for Australian Youth Work professional education, applying the approach to curriculum outlined by Barnett and Coate (2005). The blueprint for the renewed curriculum will anticipate future requirements for the Youth Work professionals. It will articulate the aspirations, common content, pedagogy, values and guiding principles of Australian university Youth Work professional education and articulate its relationship with the VET Youth Worker training curriculum. This will provide the groundwork for cross-institutional sharing of courseware and educational materials and will facilitate future benchmarking, inter-sectoral and inter-professional pathways, and international qualification recognition. The project will promote long-term change through the establishment of a cross-sectoral Youth Work Educators Network. Balanced Australian higher education provision requires the sector to offer both high enrolment and specialist undergraduate degree options. The project will provide a starting point for a sustainability model for other 'niche' professions. The project team includes representatives of all Australian Youth Work professional degree programs.	2010
QUT – Mary Ryan	Developing a systematic, cross-disciplinary approach to teaching and assessing reflective writing in higher education PP9-1327	The aim of this project is to develop staff and student capacities for teaching and learning reflective writing in higher education. A model and accompanying resources will be developed to support assistant deans (teaching and learning) and course coordinators to embed a systematic and developmental, evidenced-based, whole-course approach to the teaching and assessment of reflective writing for the purpose of transformative professional practice. The project will embed a model of good reflective practice across courses that support portfolio submissions, work integrated learning, transitions into university, and transition from higher education into the professions. It will develop essential skills for academic staff and students, to support the widespread introduction of the e-portfolio as an assessment item within units, and as a capstone assessment of professional practice and standards within courses. This will be achieved by working collaboratively across the disciplines of education, law, health, creative industries and business at Queensland University of Technology, with potential for widespread adoption across the sector.	2009
Canberra – Jennifer Webb CQU	Examination of doctoral degrees in creative arts: process, practice and standards PP10-1801	The creative arts disciplines constitute an important growth area for research higher degrees (HDR) and, in the decades since the Strand Report (1998), they have built a body of knowledge and set of practices associated with research and research higher degrees. However, there is virtually no empirical work in or across the creative arts disciplines that investigates how HDR examiners arrive at the commentary presented in their reports. Based on a process of national benchmarking and through extensive consultation, this project will investigate assessment practices, processes and standards in creative arts HDR, as well as beliefs and expectations of HDR students, supervisors and examiners, in order to establish a shared understanding of standards within this field of study.	2010
RMIT – Margaret Jackson Curtin QUT	Graduate professional entry courses in accounting and law PP9-1386	This project will examine the growing number of graduate entry courses, being introduced by Australian universities which are designed to allow graduates to enter a new profession. To date, there has been limited work undertaken to understand the educational implications of these new courses, and to understand in particular the academic standards for postgraduate professional entry courses, as opposed to undergraduate courses also leading to professional entry. This project will explore whether a masters level degree that meets the requirements for entry into a profession applies different academic standards from those applied in an undergraduate degree that also meets the same professional entry requirements.	2009

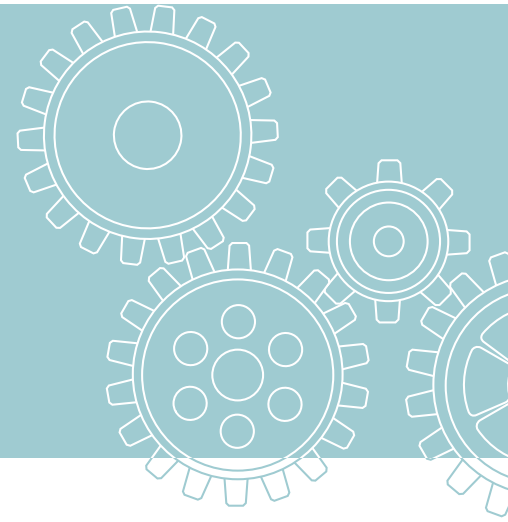


3. Additional relevant projects not funded by the ALTC

Lead Institution, project leader and partners	Project Title	Description	Year funded
Melbourne Professor Pip Patterson Group of Eight	Quality Verification System Group of Eight	<p>The Group of Eight (Go8) is exploring the viability and benefits of establishing a Quality Verification System (QVS) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• demonstrate the appropriateness of the standards of learning outcomes and grades awarded in Go8 universities;• maintain and improve the academic standards of Go8 universities;• enable comparisons of learning outcomes in similar subjects across Go8 universities; and• promote discussion on good practice in teaching and learning in the Go8 universities.	2011

Appendix E

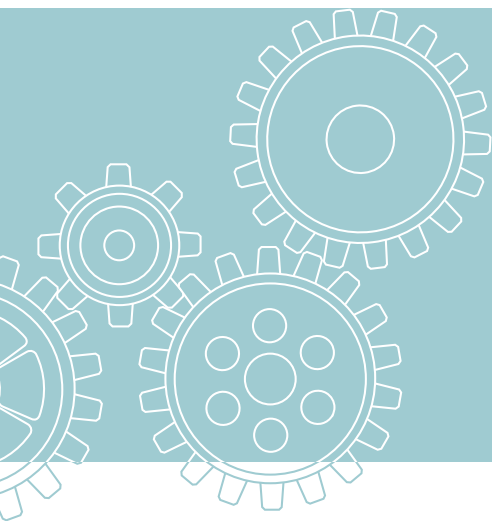
Towards a Learning Standards Framework



Paper by: Professors Liz Deane and Kerri-Lee Krause (University of Western Sydney) in collaboration with the project team (2012)

1. Context

- 1.1 For the past few years there has been rising global interest in academic quality and the development of valid indicators. In research this is being played out in a range of ranking systems whose merits, though hotly contested, are generally accepted. In education the situation is more ambiguous. Although the aforementioned ranking systems have sought to include indicators such as student survey responses or staff student ratios, these have often been seen as problematic and the relationship to educational outcomes is questionable.
- 1.2. Into this gap has stepped the discourse of determining the quality of graduating student outcomes. To date, this has been measured by proxy indicators such as surveys of student satisfaction and employment outcomes. More recently this conversation has expanded to include possible exiting testing of graduates. Attention has also turned to the more complex and nuanced area of determining and evidencing the learning outcomes of final year undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students where there is typically no integrative assessment such as a dissertation.
- 1.3. Internationally, the direction of this discourse is evident in the OECD AHELO project which, in two program areas of engineering and economics, is investigating the feasibility, utility and validity of both standardised exit testing and assessment of agreed, complex learning outcomes, discipline knowledge and its application. The Tuning project, currently being deployed in Europe, South and North America, is a further example of a cross-national approach to establishing consensus regarding descriptors for intended learning outcomes in undergraduate degrees.
- 1.4 In Australia there has been little support for standardised exit testing of generic skills and of discipline skills among graduating cohorts. The majority of academic effort has focussed on development of agreed discipline based approaches to determining student learning outcomes. The initial step along this path was the establishment of the ALTC/OLT Discipline Scholars. They have been working within and across their disciplines to develop agreed threshold learning outcomes (TLOs) or learning standards for graduates in respective discipline areas. To a significant extent this consultative, collegiate approach mirrors that undertaken in the UK Subject Centres of the previous decade.
- 1.5 Allied to this, and in the case of the Accounting discipline, evolving from it, have been three related but slightly different national projects:
 - the OLT/ALTC supported Learning and Teaching Standards Project (LaTS) involving inter- university peer review and moderation in the disciplines;
 - the Group of Eight (Go8) Quality Verification of Standards (QVS) project; and
 - the Achievement Matters: External Peer Review of Accounting Learning Standards project (AMA) supported by the Australian Business Deans Council, professional bodies and OLT and benchmarking outcomes explicitly against the learning standards agreed by the accounting discipline in 2010 for bachelors and coursework masters degrees.



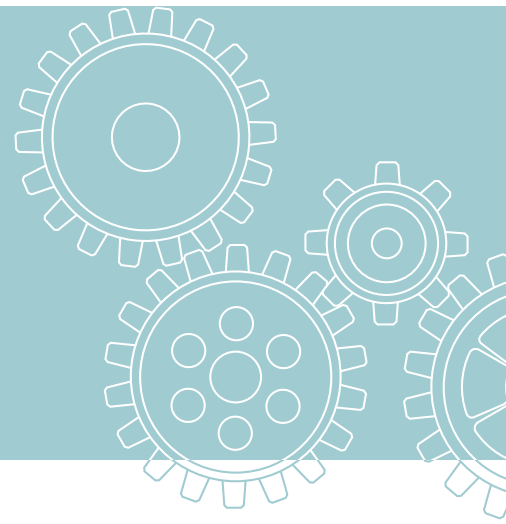
- 1.6 The TEQSA regulatory framework places a premium on proportionate management of risk, informed by quality information. In the case of the learning and teaching standards, the projects mentioned in 1.5 arguably play a key role in yielding robust, discipline-based evidence of approaches to monitoring and assuring academic standards at the discipline level within and across higher education providers. Considerable discussion of teaching standards (i.e., process or delivery standards) has occurred (e.g., see the Teaching Standards Framework) and they are well represented in the current threshold Provider (Course Accreditation) Standards. However, a learning standards (i.e., outcome standards) framework is yet to be proposed.
- 1.7 This paper presents an initial comparative review of three learning and teaching standards projects (see 1.5) with the intent of progressing towards a generally agreed, reliable and valid learning standards framework that is sustainable. The projects are reviewed in terms of their methodology, utility, validity, respective strengths and limitations.
- 1.8 The development of a learning standards framework, grounded in disciplinary contexts, would have value in many domains – in providing assurance to current and prospective students as to the quality of their award; to employers as to the relevance and competence of graduates and to government regulators as to attainment of currently ambiguously defined threshold standards of program delivery and outcomes.

2. Three Learning and Teaching Standards Projects

- 2.1 Table One provides a summary of the key features of three complementary national projects designed to provide evidence that learning and teaching standards are being monitored and assured by individuals, institutions and the sector.
- 2.2 **Methodology.** The LaTS and QVS approach consists of external, discipline-led, academic peer review of final year undergraduate student outcomes. In each project, external reviewers:
- comment on the appropriateness and comparative quality of the specified learning outcomes, assessment tasks, assessment criteria and assessment processes set for samples of final year subjects; and
 - report on the appropriateness of the grades awarded to stratified random samples of student work in these subjects.

These two projects differ in two key ways (see Table 1) : the LaTS method uses blind peer review of unit materials and requires peer reviewers to grade assessment tasks where the grade allocations have been removed. The QVS reviewers examine graded assessment items and indicate whether or not they verify the grade allocated.

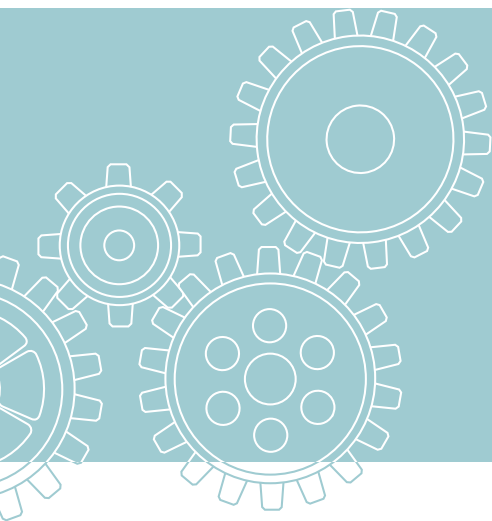
The AMA approach also consists of external, discipline-led, academic peer review of final year student outcomes. However, AMA includes coursework postgraduate as well as undergraduate outcomes, recognising higher standards must be evident in the former. Second, it uses discipline standards as the benchmark, pre-agreed across the discipline community (ie. academics, practitioners, professional bodies). Recognising there is rarely an integrative assessment covering all threshold outcomes in coursework degrees, initially it has focussed on a subset of learning standards. Third, reviewers rate unmarked student work into one of two categories ('not meeting' or 'meeting' the threshold standard) rather than one of four grades (Fail, Pass, Credit, Distinction). Fourth, peer reviewers engage in a three-stage consensus moderation activity with the aim of achieving calibration prior to undertaking any external review. For example, thirty reviewers participated in the September 2012 pre-workshop review, workshop consensus, and post-calibration confirmation activities. This 'calibration' of academics across institutions (and with practitioners) relates to the specific learning standards in focus. Calibration revolves first around the validity of an



assessment task to demonstrate the learning standards in focus; calibration on the standard achieved in a small random sample of pre-reviewed student work; and, calibration on new samples of student work. Fifth, to ensure there is little chance of data biasing reviewers, samples are randomly collected rather than stratified by grade bands. Sixth, private and TAFE providers of coursework degrees are engaged in the consensus process.

- 2.3 **Valid and reliable assessment.** All three projects are characterised by a discipline-based peer evaluation of assessment items, a clear recognition that the focus of the debate hinges on the nature, suitability and validity of assessment in a disciplinary context. All require external reviewers to comment on the appropriateness and quality of desired learning outcomes for the subjects; assessment tasks; criteria and processes. All are focused on the subject level, albeit what would constitute endpoint/capstone subject. Both LaTS and QVS require peers to provide program level information to enable judgements to be made in the context of course learning outcomes. Where they differ is in the extent, timing and level to which assessment items are critiqued and intra-disciplinary conversations facilitated.
- 2.4 **Disciplinary judgements.** All three projects require assessors to review assessment items in the context of the desired learning outcomes as determined by the assessment providers. This approach allows for academic diversity to be preserved. Thus whilst the projects require comments as to the suitability of the intending learning outcomes for a final year subject, not all subjects are intended to be delivering the same curriculum. This contextual assessment allows for the flexibility needed in discipline areas where learning outcomes are not tightly proscribed by professional accreditation requirements.
- The AMA project, in contrast, has *a priori* agreed on the desired learning outcomes being assessed but has not been prescriptive as to the nature of the assessment tasks – just that they are appropriate and valid.
- 2.5 **Capacity Building.** All projects provide some scope for building capacity and academic development of participants. This is implicit in the QVS and the benefits of being involved was acknowledged by reviewers, particularly the opportunity to see other institutions subject structures and differing modes of assessment. Post review dialogue between reviewers is more explicitly built into the LaTS and the AMA protocol, with the latter being much more extensive and focused and developing consensus around specified learning outcomes, albeit the differing pathways of delivery and assessment
- 2.6 **Workload.** Possibly the biggest potential impediment to systemic introduction of peer review processes are workload implications. QVS reviewers identified timing and time frame are problematic for teaching academics as were the costs associated with de-identification and tracking assessments, and coming to grips with institutional variation, understanding the context. In terms of reviewing workload, AMA reviewers incur an additional initial workload as they must participate in calibration activities.
- 2.7 **Scaling up.** There are two issues related to scaling-up. The first of these concerns an institutional agreement as to how much peer review is enough to achieve the desired outcome of assured standards. The other concerns scaling up from unit/subject to course level. Both the LaTS and QVS multi-disciplinary projects have used final year agreed indicator subjects as a proxy for course level assessment. The LaTS also asks reviewers to make judgements about unit level performance in the context of course learning outcomes provided by the home institutions.

However, one of the challenges identified in the LaTS project has been the need to engage academic staff in course-level thinking in order to make judgements about exit standards. In contrast, by benchmarking against discipline standards, AMA is explicitly course level focussed.



2.8 **Deliverables.** All three projects have the potential to identify, critique and consolidate the indicators that can be used to set the standards for teaching standards (e.g., assessment items, marking criteria, and guidelines for moderation and calibration) and learning standards (i.e., learning outcomes).

3. Lessons learned and next steps

3.1 Arguably, academic staff in the disciplines are well placed to monitor and assure learning standards. Universities have well-established quality assurance and policy frameworks requiring regular moderation of assessment at the department level, benchmarking and cyclical review.

3.2 However, in general, academic staff in the disciplines have not been called upon to evidence their standards-setting practices and learning outcomes to the extent that is now required to provide public assurance that learning and teaching standards are being met and exceeded. Three lessons derived from the LaTS project may help to inform next steps.

- **Lesson 1: Shift from unit to course level thinking.** In order to make judgements about exit standards, academic staff need to be able to demonstrate that they are interpreting unit-level learning standards in the context of course-level learning outcomes. This requires them to articulate the extent to which students' performance on unit-level assessment tasks meets course or discipline-level learning standards.
- **Lesson 2: Articulate reference points.** In the LaTS project, interviewees had difficulty articulating how they arrived at academic judgements about the standard of work that warranted a Fail/Pass/Credit grade. One strategy for addressing this is to ensure that academic staff are able to articulate various disciplinary reference points and how these inform decisions about learning standards. Reference points might include : the Australian Qualifications Framework; discipline standards; accreditation and professional body requirements; institutional graduate attributes and capabilities; input from external advisory committees; results of cyclical review; and practices of peers in other universities.
- **Lesson 3: Engage in 'calibration' and capacity building among academic peers.** This project argues for the value of 'calibrating' academic staff in the discipline. In the context of grading this means academic staff 'tuning' their 'judgement-making ability' to ensure that grading is valid, reliable and self-regulated.

The goal is for academics to be confident in their own informed and calibrated judgements, and able to trust their colleagues' abilities to make routine appraisals of student works with an appropriate degree of detachment and self-regulation. Furthermore, the way in which academic achievement standards are assured needs to be transparent to colleagues, students, quality assurance agencies and the wider society. (Sadler, 2012, p.14)

4. Towards a learning standards framework: putting the parts together

- Level 1 (department and unit level) focuses on assuring learning standards through the use of moderation and calibration activities among marking teams (e.g., among teams of sessional staff at the unit level) prior to marking, and during or after marking, moderation activities. This should take place every time a unit is offered.

Purpose: To assure validity and reliability of assessment practices through ongoing calibration of markers at the unit/subject level.

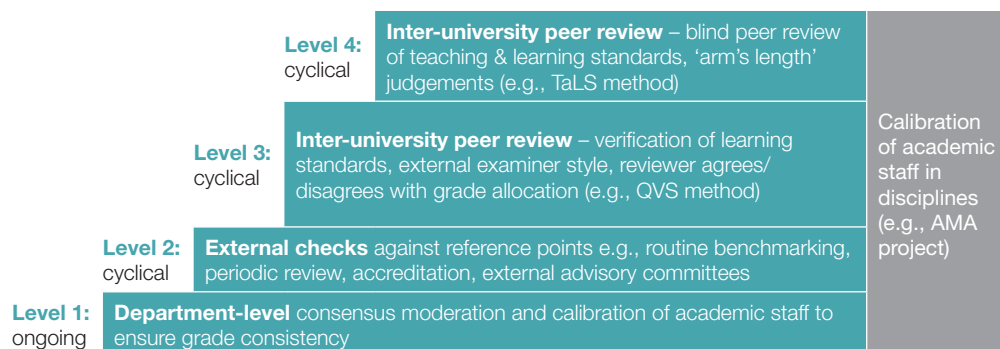
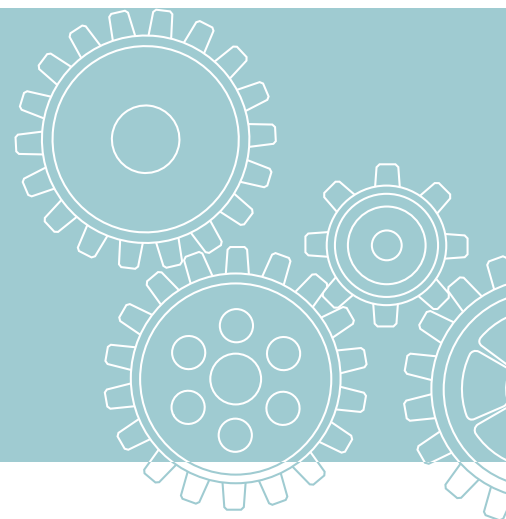
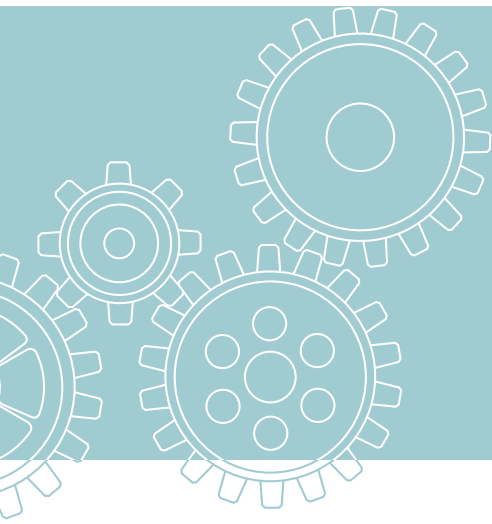


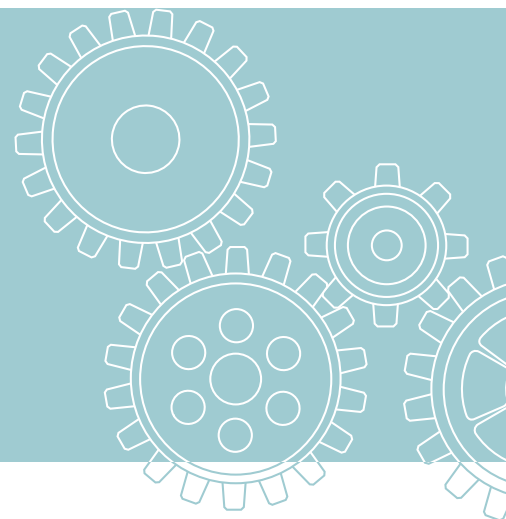
Figure 1: A framework for monitoring and assuring learning standards in the disciplines

- Level 2: External checks take place on a cyclical basis as a way to benchmark learning and teaching standards. Meeting the requirements of accreditation and professional bodies may be included in Level 2.
Purpose: To benchmark processes and outcomes and to address external accreditation requirements.
- Level 3 involves inter-university peer review and verification of grades and standards using an external assessor approach. The identity of the external assessor is known, no effort is made to engage in blind peer review and graded assessment items are shared for verification purposes (i.e., the external assessor either agrees or disagrees with the grade allocated).
Purpose: To verify learning standards across institutions by agreeing/disagreeing with grades allocated to final year assessment items.
- Level 4 involves blind peer review where two external peer reviewers receive de-identified unit materials and ungraded assessment items (i.e., the identity of the institution and the unit is not divulged). The two reviewers grade assessment items using criteria provided by the home institution. Feedback and graded items are returned to the home institution via a third party (project officer). The home institution receives feedback from two partners to inform practice. The identity of partners may be divulged by mutual agreement to enable further discussion.
Purpose: To provide ‘arm’s length’ assurance of learning standards across institutions through blind peer review and grading of final year assessment items.
- Discipline-based approaches to calibrating academic staff continue (e.g., the Achievement Matters project).
Purpose: To calibrate academic staff across institutions, using external course-level reference points such as discipline standards

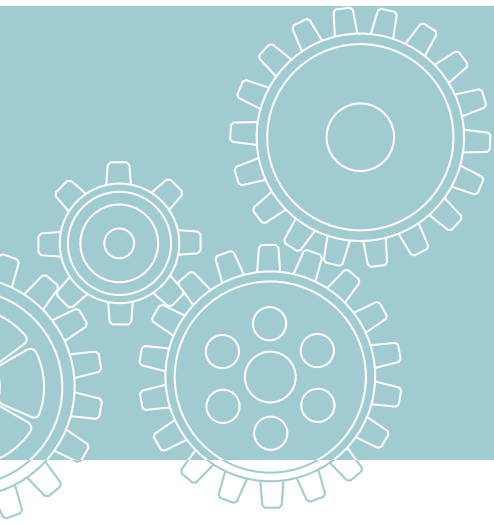


5. In summary

- 5.1 This paper argues for the value of developing a learning standards framework based on academic judgements and peer review of standards in disciplinary contexts.
- 5.2 Rather than advocating for a single approach to peer review of standards, a multi-level, holistic approach is advocated, based on the purpose of the activity. At the heart of this framework is the need to ensure that academic staff engage in regular calibration activities through the use of peer review of inputs (teaching standards) and outputs (learning standards). Calibration activities should include articulation of reference points that shape decisions about academic standards in the discipline, along with consideration of how judgements about unit-level learning standards are made in the context of course learning outcomes.
- 5.3 Inter-university peer review may comprise both verification and arm's length blind peer review of standards, depending on purpose. An institution may use multiple forms of peer review and calibration to provide evidence that it is monitoring and assuring learning standards. Each year, an institution may publish (e.g., on the MyUniversity website) information about types of peer review, peer review partners (including overseas reviewers), names of units/ courses reviewed annually, steps taken to ensure that peer reviewer feedback is actioned, evidence of success in meeting and exceeding learning standards (e.g., feedback on cyclical reviews, feedback from industry, external advisory committees, accreditation outcomes).



Feature	LaTS	QVS	Achievement Matters: Accounting
Discipline focus	Multiple disciplines across universities		Discipline-focussed, multiple institutions (include TAFE and private providers)
Method: key points of similarity/difference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blind peer review, de-identified unit materials using feedback sheet • assessment samples provided in 4 grade bands • all grades removed • peer reviewer grades 4 pieces of work using home university criteria • peer reviewers expected to make judgements in the context of external reference points (eg discipline standards, AQF) but these are not made explicit 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unit materials provided to peer reviewer • graded assessment samples provided • grades provided • peer reviewer verifies/agrees/disagrees with grade allocated by home university 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • double-blind peer review, de-identified assessment samples and input materials • assessment samples randomly drawn across all grades • all grades and markings removed • two peer reviewers rate work using nationally agreed discipline standards and rate validity of task • in groups prior to review, calibration occurs to achieve consensus on assessments (not) meeting national standard and assessment design (not) valid • masters as well as bachelors
Unit/mode of comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unit-level • assessment items re-marked/graded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unit level • grade/mark verified but not re-marked 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unit level in context of discipline TLOs • assessment items re-marked against national standard (ie. not meeting to meeting continuum)
Sampling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stratified random sampling of assessments from final year students in selected course • one sample from each grade band for one assessment task (total of 4 samples) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stratified random sampling of assessments from final year students in selected course • 5% from each grade band • maximum 25 items from large classes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • institution nominates task that best demonstrate TLOs in the discipline, project manager chooses samples • 5 random samples
Peer reviewers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two partner institutions review same material • reviewers to be experienced in the discipline, not sessional staff, preferably unit coordinator • blind assignment of reviewers by project officer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • one reviewer • specified as Level D or above (not always) • selected from a panel rather than blind assignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • two reviewers filtered for substantial experience • all reviewers calibrated to national standard, with practitioner participation in calibration • blind assignment of reviewers, once calibrated, by project manager
Basis of comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching standards reviewed through user guide and feedback sheet – feedback on unit content, assessment design, criteria • learning standards reviewed – grades allocated by two partners for the purposes of comparison, with rationale 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching standards reviewed through general comment on unit, no guided feedback sheet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teaching standards reviewed through online user guide and feedback form – feedback on assessment design, criteria • learning standards reviewed through online user guide and feedback form – rating allocated by two, unknown, calibrated external reviewers and calibrated reviewer from home institution; third external reviewer moderates consensus if first two disagree on rating ('not meeting' to 'meeting' continuum)
Result of comparison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • home university receives graded assessment items and feedback on teaching standards from two partner universities/peers on 4 pieces of work • identity remains unknown unless partners agree to discuss outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • learning standards reviewed – grades verified (i.e., agreed/disagreed) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • home university receives comments and ratings online on learning standards and teaching standards when published after deadline (unless disagreement between externals requires a third external to reach consensus on final judgement of (not) meeting national standard) • comments on learning outcomes and assessment tasks in context of discipline standards • identity remains unknown



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