Embedding Evaluation and Research into Curriculum Design and Delivery

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In October 2015, the Australian Federal government established the *Higher Education Standards (HES) Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015* as a legislative instrument under the *Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TEQSA) Act 2011*. Part A of the Framework provides Standards for Higher Education which represent the minimum acceptable requirements for provision of higher education by providers registered under the TEQSA Act 2011. Institutional responses to these standards include review and updating of governance instruments in order to demonstrate that a framework and supporting quality assurance systems are in place to enable monitoring and reporting of award degrees ('course' in UTAS) against these standards. In response to, and informed by, the HES Framework, the University of Tasmania has developed a Quality Management Framework. A comprehensive program of review has been undertaken, resulting in the existing suite of governance instruments being revised with new policies, procedures, and guidelines being developed.

The introduction of the HES framework was a major driver for establishing a course level approach to quality assurance (QA). This, along with the curriculum evaluation work completed by Dr Andrea Carr and Dr Jo-Anne Kelder, who have been collaborating since 2012, has resulted in the development of a Curriculum Evaluation and Research (CER) Framework that is:
- a way of thinking about the *teaching* (curriculum design and delivery) component of academic work, and;
- an approach for embedding evaluation and research into teaching at a course level.
The CER framework is supported by practical resources that reduce the barriers to a systematic and collaborative approach to assuring the quality of curriculum.

The task of assuring curriculum is of sufficient quality to meet minimum requirements includes, typically, engaging in administrative activities of collecting evidence and reporting actions, impact and outcomes. From a UTAS institutional perspective all academics are required to meet Teaching Performance Expectations (TPEs). The TPEs set out three domains of activity and academic staff must develop their individual performance review documents against the TPEs and be able to demonstrate engagement in quality activities; evidence of evaluation and scholarship (SoTL), and; leadership in curriculum quality activities. Additionally, academic professionalisation (and meeting aspirational institutional expectations of teachers) means that individual academics need to create opportunities to engage in good curriculum design and to be good teachers.

In developing the CER framework, we considered the requirements of academics and designed this teaching team approach to quality curriculum that enables academics to

meet performance expectations (including leadership) as well as collect evidence of the outcomes and impact of engagement in quality improvement (QI) and QA of curriculum design and delivery. We also considered what resources could be provided to support 'good' teaching processes and outcomes.

With the introduction of the HES Framework, QA reporting has become a mandatory activity for academics. The UTAS Quality Management Framework is aligned with the HES Framework and the focus is on award degrees (courses). A range of reports are expected each year (Unit Review; Course Review; Course Portfolio; Peer Review of Assessment) and evidence (including outcomes and impact) through assessment moderation, benchmarking and external peer review of assessment, student surveys, peer review of teaching is required.

The CER Framework highlights the cyclic aspect of how QI, QA and SoTL can be inter-connected in the context of a teaching team working as a community of practice focused on quality enhancement of a course. Teaching team members will have different orientations for their teaching and curriculum design, but overall the team effort will be coordinated to ensure all three kinds of quality activities are supported. The CER Framework further highlights the concept of leveraging the outcomes of routine QI activities into QA and SOTL activities and outcomes. A design-based approach to curriculum evaluation and research can simplify the data collection and analysis required, by ensuring alignment of educational research questions with questions asked by external accreditation agents and questions asked by teachers of their courses as a whole.

Key elements of the CER Framework and its successful implementation focus on a distributed leadership approach that enables staff to collaborate within a team-based environment. Further, success of this approach is predicated on engaging students in the evaluation of quality curricula, building a research culture and modelling this within course cohorts. Importantly, support from institutions to recognise and reward the pursuit of quality curricula is essential. Fundamental to the CER Framework is a clear and coherent research plan that outlines routine collection of natural data that emerges as a result of teaching in courses. This data should be analysed regularly for QI and QA purposes, for post curricula delivery, and for scholarly outputs, e.g., publications, grants and awards.

The practicalities of implementing a 'whole-of-course' evaluation and research plan can be a barrier to implementing the CER Framework. In response, we have developed a range of resources designed to mitigate obstacles to this quality-focused activity. The resources include a generic ethics application with an accompanying method for using an institution's Learning Management System to collect students' natural data and a suggested online mechanism for establishing participatory consent.

QI, QA and SoTL activities are not optional in the current Higher Education environment. The CER Framework legitimises and enables collegial, scholarly activity that is directed toward quality learning and teaching. The CER Framework embodies a team and capacity-building approach along with opportunities for leadership development that also supports institutional quality requirements.