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The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is Australia’s independent national quality assurance and regulatory agency for higher education.

This publication contains a selection of papers drawn from the concurrent sessions held at the combined Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Conference and Higher Education Quality Forum on Friday 30 November 2018.

The views and opinions expressed in the following papers do not necessarily reflect those of TEQSA and publication of the following papers does not constitute an endorsement.

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# Table of Contents

**Foreword** .......................................................................................................................... 5

**Innovation** .......................................................................................................................... 6

*Collaborative Cross-border Joint Quality Assurance: Pilot Exercise by Hong Kong and UK Quality Assurance Agencies* by Rob Fearnside and Dr C.C. Chong ............... 7

*Achieving regulatory alignment in initial teacher education accreditation* by Phoebe Haywood ................................................................................................................................. 20

*The Ties That Bind Are Quality Assured: Balancing Teaching Innovation and Compliance Requirements* by Dr Tim Rogers ................................................................................................................................. 39

*Sydney Data Stories: Embedding interdisciplinary research in undergraduate curricula* by Dr Diana Warren and Dr Samantha Clarke ................................................................. 58

*Academic risk and delegations: Innovative approaches to areas of difficulty in academic governance* by Emeritus Professor Hilary Winchester and Professor Josua Pienaar ................................................................................................................................. 75

**Excellence** .......................................................................................................................... 87

*A working model for collaboration for HE institutions with diverse contexts across the Pacific region* by Dr Sara Booth ................................................................................................................................. 88

*Failing the future: are Australia’s MBA programs up to the climate change challenge? Initial investigations* by Dr Lorne Butt and Professor Elizabeth More, AM ........... 102

*Governing for Quality Assurance: from good practice to best practice to excellence?* by Associate Professor Graham Forsyth ................................................................................................................................. 120

*Steps toward excellence: Retention pilots for student success* by Dr Margot McNeill, Jonathan Hvaal, Victoria Quilter, Lee Ridge and Marion Iraninejad ................................................................. 133

*Ethical Excellence of Assessment* by Emeritus Professor Janet Verbyla .................. 159

**Diversity** .......................................................................................................................... 171

*Beneath the Surface of Initial Teacher Preparation: what contributes to pre-service teacher confidence to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in curriculum* by Associate Professor Jennie Bickmore-Brand and Dr Sue Starling . 172
Valuing Viewpoint Diversity: Four Examples for Higher Education by Professor James Dalziel

Equity at and beyond the boundary of the Australian university: student equity within third party delivery and non-university higher education institutions by Naomi Tootell and Matt Brett
Foreword

Welcome to this selection of papers from the 2018 Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) conference. Now in its third year, the TEQSA conference has become a compelling event for the Australian higher education sector. This year’s conference saw 800 delegates from Australia, New Zealand, the UK, Singapore, Hong Kong and the United Arab Emirates gather in Melbourne to discuss the theme of Innovation, Excellence, Diversity.

Strong student participation has become a feature of the TEQSA conference, and 2018’s event saw student leaders from across the sector take a prominent and active part in proceedings. The attendance and active involvement of students at the conference highlights TEQSA’s commitment to involving students in our work, and sector-wide discussions about issues impacting them.

Both the quality and number of submissions received by TEQSA during the call for papers was outstanding. It is so pleasing to see higher education professionals take the time to produce and submit their work and ideas for consideration, and is a sign the theme resonated strongly with the sector.

For undertaking the immense task of reviewing the almost 100 submissions, I extend my sincere thanks to the esteemed review panel. The panel was again chaired by Professor Prem Ramburuth, School of Management, UNSW Business School, and also included Professor Jeanette Baird, Honorary Senior Fellow, L H Martin Institute, University of Melbourne; Dr Andrew Piskun, Assistant Director, Policy and Analysis, TEQSA; Julie Renwick, General Manager, University of Wollongong College; Gesa Ruge, HERDSA Fellow, higher education researcher and winner of the award for best paper for the 2017 TEQSA conference; and Rev Dr Stephen Spence, Associate Academic Dean, AA Poly Melbourne.

Winner of best paper for the 2018 conference was awarded to Dr Tim Rogers, for his submission titled The ties that bind are quality assured: Complexity and teaching innovation. Dr Rogers’ submission explores the premise that a central brake on innovation in the higher education sector may be the unintended outcome of the interaction between academic autonomy and system integrity.

The papers included in this publication explore a diverse range of issues relating to the conference theme and provide insightful, thought-provoking and valuable contributions to discussions around innovation, excellence and diversity in Australian higher education.

Thank you for your interest in TEQSA’s 2018 selection of conference papers and I hope to see you at the 2019 TEQSA conference.

Anthony McClaran

Chief Executive Officer, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
Innovation
Collaborative Cross-border Joint Quality Assurance: Pilot Exercise by Hong Kong and UK Quality Assurance Agencies

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Abstract

Transnational education brings both challenges and opportunities in the process of internationalisation. One of the most important challenges is safeguarding the quality of education provided. Given the growth of cross-border programs and the increasingly competitive market, quality assurance bodies have little choice but to work closely together to meet this challenge. The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications and the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency of Higher Education have developed a new model for collaboration, having recently conducted two pilot joint quality assurance exercises involving two partnerships between a UK higher education provider and a Hong Kong operator in April and May 2018.

This pilot project has proven to be a sound beginning for active collaboration with a view to formulating a joint quality assurance approach internationally. This paper describes the process, benefits and challenges in the conduct of UK-Hong Kong joint quality assurance exercises, which could become the basis for further collaboration.

Key Words: Joint exercise, Non-local program, Transnational education
Introduction

Transnational education (TNE), which also refers to cross-border higher education, has now become an integral part of the internationalisation of higher education. TNE not only provides global mobility for students, programs and institutions, but also brings with it opportunities and challenges. One of the most important challenges is to safeguard the quality of education in such a highly competitive market. At the same time TNE also provides opportunities for cross-border collaboration among different stakeholders, particularly quality assurance agencies.

In view of the challenges brought about by the growth and scope of TNE, there is an increasing awareness among quality assurance agencies that they have to collaborate and work together to address these challenges (Stella 2006). The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) and the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) have developed a model for such collaboration, having conducted two pilot joint quality assurance exercises involving two partnerships between a UK higher education provider and a Hong Kong operator in April and May 2018. This paper describes the process, benefits and challenges in the conduct of UK-Hong Kong joint quality assurance exercises, which could become the basis for further collaboration.

Background

Higher Education in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, the higher education sector has experienced significant growth over the past 20 years as a result of the government’s effort to double the secondary school leavers’ participation rate to 60% (EDB 2018). Students in Hong Kong are provided multiple and flexible post-secondary pathways, which can be divided into three main categories:

Publicly-funded programs: There are 10 institutions offering publicly-funded programs. Eight universities funded by the University Grants Committee (UGC) provide 15,000 first-year-first-degree places and 5,000 senior year undergraduate intake places. The Vocational Training Council (VTC) provides sub-degree programs while Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts offers programs from Diploma to Master Degree level in performing art (EDB 2017b).

Self-financing local programs: There are 19 self-financing institutions which do not receive recurrent public subvention for their operation offering self-financing locally-accredited higher education programs. Twelve of these institutions have local degree awarding powers, and can thus offer programs at bachelor's level and above. The others are vocational institutions and community colleges providing locally-accredited sub-degree programs (QAA 2018).

Self-financing programs leading to non-local awards: Apart from local programs, students also take non-local programs leading to non-local awards. For the purpose of this paper, the term “non-local program”, which is commonly used in Hong Kong, refers to an off-shore program operated in Hong Kong leading to a non-local qualification. The number of non-local programs expanded significantly in the late 1990s and early 2000s mainly to meet a
rising demand for top-up courses for students who had completed sub-degree programs (QAA 2018). These non-local programs are regulated through either registration or exemption from registration under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Chapter 493) (EDB 2017a).

The self-financing sector plays a key role in providing students with alternative pathways to access higher education. This sector has grown in both size and diversity to about 150 and 300 self-financing programs at the degree level and sub-degree levels respectively, vis-à-vis around 40 and 230 such programmes in 2005/06 respectively (EDB 2018).

**UK TNE Landscape in Hong Kong**

Hong Kong is a top territory for sending students abroad and also a TNE hot spot, alongside Australia and the UK (Ilieva et al. 2017). The Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (2017) published the Aggregate Offshore Record showing that 27,390 Hong Kong students studied a UK award for the academic year 2016/17. According to this data, Hong Kong is the sixth largest host country or region for UK TNE, following Malaysia (74,180 students), Mainland China (70,240 students), Singapore (48,290 students), Pakistan (43,870 students) and Nigeria (32,925 students).

As of July 2018, there were 1,135 non-local programs registered under the Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Chapter 493), of which 854 led to UK qualification awards (EDB 2017a). UK higher education institutions are key players in TNE in Hong Kong, delivering 72% of non-local programs. Most non-local programs are in the business field and the majority are provided at bachelor’s degree level (Kristoffersen and Chong 2015).

Registration is compulsory in Hong Kong, but accreditation is voluntary. As of August 2018, the Hong Kong Qualifications Register (HKQR) shows that 175 non-local programs were accredited by HKCAAQV. 132 out of these 175 non-local programs involved 26 partnerships between 20 UK higher education providers and five Hong Kong providers. The majority of UK TNE in Hong Kong is based on partnerships with local providers including university-based and vocational training partners (QAA 2018).

**Quality Assurance Systems for TNE in Hong Kong**

The Non-local Higher and Professional Education (Regulation) Ordinance (Chapter 493) was passed in 1996 and enacted in 1997 to serve three purposes: (i) to provide greater consumer protection; (ii) to provide greater transparency; and (iii) to enhance Hong Kong’s reputation and academic standards. Upon the enactment of this Ordinance, all programs leading to overseas academic and professional qualifications are regulated. The standard of a non-local program operated in Hong Kong has to be maintained at a level comparable with a program in the home country. However, this registration requirement does not apply to purely distance learning programs, which are encouraged to apply for registration and demonstrate that they fulfil the registration criteria. The authority to register non-local programs in Hong Kong rests with the Registrar of Non-local Higher and Professional Education Courses (EDB 2017a).
In 2008, the Hong Kong Qualifications Framework (HKQF) was officially launched upon the enactment of the Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications Ordinance (AAVQO) (Chapter 592). HKCAAVQ is the Accreditation Authority under the HKQF. Following the successful pilot exercise of non-local program accreditation in 2009, non-local programs become eligible to undertake the same accreditation tests as local programmes in Hong Kong and if successful, be included on the HKQR. The number of accredited non-local providers of TNE has steadily increased. This may be due to various incentives provided by the Hong Kong Government. Hong Kong is one of the few regions which provide bursaries to students on non-local programs (Ilieva et al. 2017). For example, students of full-time non-local programs are eligible to apply for financial assistance if admitted to a program accredited by HKCAAVQ. In addition, such qualifications attained by students are recognised under the HKQF as meeting the same standard of comparable qualifications at the approved HKQF level(s) obtained in Hong Kong.

Approach

The UNESCO Guidelines suggest that a coordinated effort among quality assurance bodies is needed to tackle the challenges brought about by the growth of TNE (Stella 2006). Knight (2007) also states that it is important to work in a collaborative and complementary fashion to build a system that ensures the quality and integrity of TNE and maintains the confidence of society in higher education. In 2018, QAA, on behalf of its funding bodies, conducted a TNE Review of Hong Kong. HKCAAVQ and QAA took this opportunity to advance inter-agency cooperation by conducting a joint exercise for differing natures of quality assurance activities: one is an accreditation while the other is a review. The following outlines the key aspects of the approach taken by QAA and HKCAAVQ for the joint exercises for the benefit of all stakeholders involved:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Panel formation</th>
<th>The HKCAAVQ accreditation panel included two QAA reviewers who acted as both HKCAAVQ panel members (including acting as Chair) and QAA reviewers.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Information submission before the site visit</td>
<td>The information set submitted for the HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise was also received by QAA to ensure it can be used to inform its TNE Review. Additional information had been submitted to QAA exclusively for the purpose of the QAA TNE Review.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The HKCAAVQ accreditation panel undertook a standard HKCAAVQ accreditation visit, asking providers’ representatives a set of questions with reference to HKCAAVQ standards and criteria. Some of these questions might replicate questions that the QAA reviewers would plan to ask to inform the TNE Review. In this case the QAA reviewers were able to use relevant information collected during the HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise meetings to inform the QAA TNE Review. This allowed them to avoid unnecessary duplication of meetings and questions.

QAA reviewers did require some additional information for the QAA TNE Review. This additional information was collected in a range of ways:

a) at the end of each HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise meeting, by asking additional questions to participants at the meeting, the responses of which were used only for the QAA TNE Review.

b) by setting up an additional meeting at the end of the HKCAAVQ accreditation visit program to explore with stakeholders not already included in planned HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise meetings any further questions not already asked by the HKCAAVQ accreditation panel. This additional meeting (if required) was only for the QAA TNE Review and did not form part of the formal HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise.

NOTE: During HKCAAVQ accreditation meetings, it was made clear to participants which questions were only for the HKCAAVQ accreditation exercise, which questions were asked for both HKCAAVQ accreditation and the QAA TNE Review, and which for QAA TNE Review only.

Outcomes

Separate reports were issued by individual agencies with reference to the relevant standards and criteria.

Outcomes

QBBG (2017) states that global institutions face a complex regulatory environment with quality assurance agencies, which typically have national focuses. As a result, additional work is created for those institutions and duplication of efforts arises due to the need to meet the requirements of separate quality assurance agencies. The planning for the joint QAA and HKCAAVQ exercises sought to identify commonalities and differences in the practices and processes adopted by the two agencies to allow for mutual recognition in future and reduce duplication of efforts.

The joint exercises identified that quality processes followed by HKCAAVQ are similar to that of QAA. The HKCAAVQ guidelines state four guiding principles in conducting the accreditation processes: threshold standard; peer review; fitness for purpose; and evidence based. These are similar to those used by QAA. As a result, there is duplication of effort and
overlapping documentation that has the potential to be simplified (QAA 2018). “This is particularly true in university-based and vocational training partners which have well-developed quality assurance systems used for both their own awards and those made by non-local providers” (QAA 2018, p.30).

A QAA TNE Review comprises two stages: desk-based analysis and visits. The reviewers conduct a preliminary desk-based analysis of the provider’s submission and other information. Review visits, either in the UK or overseas, are conducted by reviewers and managed by the International Review Manager. They normally take place over one day for each provider, and involve meetings with staff, including senior management, teaching and administrative staff, and students (QAA 2017b). For the purpose of the TNE Review, the HKCAAVQ panel also reviewed the submission followed by site visits to meet stakeholders including management representatives, teaching staff and students during two-day to three-day visits. The similar quality assurance process between the two agencies allowed for a single site visit to collect data on the delivery of TNE in Hong Kong to lighten the documentation load for providers.

The main difference between the practice of the two agencies in the joint exercises is that HKCAAVQ accreditation focuses on the program level while TNE Review focuses on institutional aspects. In the second stage of HKCAAVQ’s accreditation model, Learning Program Accreditation (LPA), the HKCAAVQ process provides an analysis of programs that is more in-depth than a QAA TNE Review, including an analysis of relevant institutional aspects with a focus on program-related matters (QAA 2018). In fact, such institutional aspects, including resources, quality assurance and internationalisation policies are also reviewed by HKCAAVQ in the first stage of accreditation, Initial Evaluation (IE), in which the partnership must demonstrate its competency and capacity to manage and resource effectively the development, delivery, assessment and quality assurance of its non-local programs (HKCAAVQ 2018a). The scope of the two quality assurance exercises is comparable, but not identical (QAA 2018).

To better understand commonalities and differences in the quality indicators or standards, a comparison between QAA indicators of sound practice under the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and HKCAAVQ accreditation standards and criteria for non-local programs was conducted. It was found that the two quality assurance agencies share similar quality indicators and standards. For example, one of the quality indicators used by QAA in its Quality Code is that “appropriate levels of resources (including staff) are committed to the activities to ensure that the necessary oversight is sustained” (QAA 2017a). Resources (including staff) at both institutional and program levels are key accreditation standards used by HKCAAVQ. This allows common issues to be identified and addressed in a single joint exercise to enhance efficiency and avoid duplication of effort from HKCAAVQ and QAA.

HKCAAVQ conducts accreditation with a definite outcome (i.e. approval vs non-approval) while QAA TNE Review sets out to identify best practices and provides recommendations. The two quality assurance agencies needed to consider the nature of each exercise based on the principle of fitness for purpose. Therefore, separate reports were issued to address the different reference points used for HKCAAVQ accreditation and QAA TNE Review. However, there are some commonalities in the outcomes of the exercises as the HKCAAVQ panel also made recommendations which have a continuous improvement purpose and which are directly related to the accreditation standards. In addition, the HKCAAVQ panel provided advice for the sharing of good practice in education and training among peers.
To some extent, HKCAAVQ accreditation outcomes are similar in nature to those of QAA Review.

These pilot joint quality assurance exercises allowed the two agencies to benchmark processes and reference points (QAA 2018). QAA also concluded that “through HKCAAVQ’s peer review panels and the use of the HKQF, QAA can confidently rely on HKCAAVQ’s accreditation decisions for UK TNE provision in Hong Kong” (QAA 2018, p.20).

Reflection

Stella (2006) states that much of the cooperation among quality assurance agencies results from informal exchanges of information. The UK and Hong Kong joint quality assurance exercises have proven to be a sound beginning to move the cooperation forward in a more formalised way. Such cross-border quality assurance collaboration gives rise to both benefits and challenges.

Benefits

Middlehurst (2001) states that most national systems are reluctant to cede power to supranational agencies. In this case, mutual recognition between quality assurance agencies may be a solution. The joint exercises provided the two quality assurance agencies with an opportunity to develop an innovative quality assurance framework and explore the feasibility of mutual recognition. Mutual recognition refers to an extension of acceptance of the decision of other quality assurance agencies (Woodhouse 2004). To achieve this QAA indicators and HKCAAVQ accreditation criteria were compared to show that the two quality assurance agencies have many commonalities in quality assurance standards, such as risk assessment and quality assurance control by award granting bodies. Through this pilot experience, QAA and HKCAAVQ have a deeper understanding of their respective standards and frameworks, a necessary pre-cursor to consideration of achieving mutual recognition.

From the quality assurance agencies’ perspective, engaging in cross-border quality assurance can expand their national and international profile and provide learning opportunities to improve their own processes and methodologies (ENQA et al. 2017). The UK-Hong Kong joint quality assurance exercise provided QAA and HKCAAVQ with the opportunity to gain more understanding of each other’s processes and methodologies. Woodhouse (2004) suggests that it would be desirable to avoid repetition or duplication when transnational programs are subject to external quality assurance. Single site visits were conducted to collect data, some of which could then be used by both agencies while others were specific to the individual agency.

The joint quality assurance exercise lightens the documentation load for providers, which only have to prepare one set of documents and gather different stakeholders together for a single site visit. The providers were also given flexibility in presenting their documents. For example, even though they were encouraged to use the same documents for HKCAAVQ accreditation and QAA Review, they were also allowed to submit additional information via different sets of documents to address specific quality assurance agency needs.
While different quality assurance activities were conducted by the two agencies sharing many similarities in terms of the guiding principles and major processes, there are differences in focuses. HKCAAVQ and QAA conducted various briefing and training sessions for specialists involved in the joint exercises to help them better understand the standards of each agency. In addition, HKCAAVQ and QAA colleagues worked closely to ensure the understanding of commonalities and differences. The two quality assurance agencies also provided each other with the opportunity to join quality assurance visits as observers. As a result, specialists and colleagues of the two agencies had the opportunity to gain quality assurance knowledge and skills required by the different agencies.

Challenges

Having providers buy into this joint activity is a challenge. This is a new way of conducting an exercise so different parties may be uncertain about how it works. When liaising with the providers involved, some raised concerns about how different standards applied by the two quality assurance bodies are used and to what extent the decisions made by one affect the other. To address their concerns, HKCAAVQ and QAA worked closely to develop an approach which allows streamlining and flexibility for each party to engage in a combined quality assurance exercise. For example, only one set of documents was required and a single site visit was conducted. Additional information was requested by individual agencies to address specific standards and criteria. Guidelines were developed for all parties involved to ensure the same understanding of the process and the eventual outcomes.

The two joint quality assurance exercises were undertaken by a single panel, with all members being part of the HKCAAVQ accreditation panel and one or two panel members also acting as QAA reviewers (QAA 2018). It must be noted that specialists who played dual roles as HKCAAVQ panel members and QAA reviewers faced some difficulties when participating in the joint exercises. The learning curve was quite steep as they needed to understand the commonalities and differences of the standards adopted by the two agencies. They also needed to be aware of the difference in education systems in Hong Kong and the UK. In addition, specialists/QAA reviewers were required to provide written responses and lists of questions within specific timelines. The workload of specialists/QAA reviewers was quite demanding. Therefore, there is a need to identify specialists who not only have quality assurance knowledge but also experience in Hong Kong and the UK. Training is also important to prepare them to perform dual roles in the whole process.

Conclusion

Each country context is unique and has its own purposes for quality assurance (World Bank 2007). However, there is significant potential for cooperation between quality assurance agencies to make quality assurance exercises more effective and to reduce the effort required on both sides. In addition, quality assurance agencies are encouraged to share and rely on the assessments and decisions of other agencies (QBBG 2017). To this end, HKCAAVQ and QAA, which have a long history of collaboration, are committed to exploring innovative ways to enhance the efficiency of quality assurance. The joint quality assurance exercises conducted in Hong Kong can serve as a starting point to illustrate how two agencies can work in a collaborative and complementary fashion to develop a joint quality assurance approach to reduce duplication of effort and achieve mutual recognition.
Cross-border collaborative quality assurance projects are needed to further improve the quality of TNE.

Woodhouse (2004) says agencies differ greatly in purpose and scope; therefore mutual recognition must take these differences into account. For example, in these joint exercises, TNE Review focuses on the quality of institutional systems while HKCAAVQ accreditation focuses on program offerings. Given the complexity of quality assurance of TNE, HKCAAVQ and QAA seek common ground while retaining differences. Throughout the joint quality assurance process, QAA and HKCAAVQ cooperated closely, including the sharing of data, information and intelligence on TNE Review and HKCAAVQ accreditation. Such close cooperation allowed the two agencies to deepen reciprocal understanding of commonalities and differences. As a result, reciprocal trust in each other's quality assurance system was strengthened (QAA 2018). This pioneer exercise is based on core values of trust and respect between two quality assurance agencies.

Knight (2007) states that internationalisation is transforming the world of higher education. In the face of internationalisation of higher education, quality assurance agencies have little choice but to make connections locally and globally to address these changes. Engaging in joint quality assurance exercises provide significant benefits and challenges for quality assurance agencies, providers and specialists involved. The conduct of successful joint exercises relies on close communication with different stakeholders. Through collaboration among different stakeholders, the quality assurance mechanisms for transnational programs can be further enhanced to ensure the long-term sustainability of higher education institutions and transform the student learning experience. The cooperation between QAA and HKCAAVQ in joint exercises can be regarded as an example of good practice in international cooperation as outlined in the Quality Assurance of Cross-border Higher Education (QACHE) Toolkit developed under the Erasmus Mundus Programme of the European Union and undertaken by a consortium coordinated by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA).

Acknowledgements

The Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications (HKCAAVQ) worked with the UK’s Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) to develop a joint quality assurance approach and conduct a joint quality assurance exercise in Hong Kong in 2018. The joint exercise could not have happened without the expertise and knowledge of colleagues and reviewers of HKCAAVQ and QAA. Particular thanks go to Dr Fabrizio Trifiro, Manager (International), QAA and UK and Hong Kong providers which took part in these joint exercises.
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Achieving regulatory alignment in initial teacher education accreditation

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Abstract

The PhillipsKPA report, *Professional Accreditation: Mapping the Territory* (2017) confirmed reports of the impact of the regulatory burden associated with the accreditation requirements for initial teacher education (ITE). The ‘burden’ brings direct and indirect costs, which compromise the purpose of accreditation by reducing resources available to achieving excellence in teaching and learning. The Queensland College of Teachers, a statutory authority responsible for accrediting and monitoring ITE programs in Queensland, conducted a review of the existing accreditation arrangements to identify avenues for streamlining regulatory requirements to reduce burden.

The review explored challenges associated with accreditation and conducted standard-mapping to identify instances of overlap, duplication and redundancy. Rather than direct removal of overlapping accreditation requirements, recommendations have considered areas of overlap as opportunities for more efficient, collaborative regulation and judiciously considers duplication and redundancy to propose the removal or alteration of professional accreditation requirements. Considering the Higher Education Standards Panel’s (HESP) recent advice to the Federal Government concerning removal of oversight by professional bodies from domains of higher education covered by the Threshold Standards, this paper provides a case study of one professional accrediting body’s approach to negotiation of the HESP recommendations. As such, the recommendations provided here and in the QCT’s larger report are relevant across higher education discipline areas.

Key Words: regulatory burden, accreditation, TEQSA, AITSL, ACECQA, higher education, regulation, initial teacher education, Higher Education Standards Panel, HESP
Introduction

Teacher education is high on the political agenda in Australia. The assertion that teacher quality is one of the most critical factors impacting student learning and growing concerns about Australian student performance on international measures such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), have driven this increased attention. The mobilisation of accreditation as a way to ensure the development of high quality teachers to improve student outcomes, has been a fundamental component of Australia’s policy response. This has occurred in the wider context of expanding regulation of the higher education sector by government and professional bodies, and the confluence of these regulatory agendas has created what is perceived by a number of stakeholders as an additional regulatory burden. In the case of initial teacher education (ITE), this has had negative impacts for many providers’ operations.

The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT) is a state-based statutory authority with the legislated responsibility, inter alia, for accrediting and monitoring ITE programs. The QCT is also the teacher regulatory authority for Queensland. The QCT conducted a year-long review of the existing accreditation system applying to ITE programs to identify avenues to reduce associated burden through adoption of more efficient and proportionate practices. The project considered the intersection between national accreditation and monitoring requirements for ITE in the Australian Institute of Teaching (AITSL) Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures (2015), program approval guidelines from the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), the regulatory requirements for institutions and programs/courses under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) (2015) and relevant internal institutional quality assurance requirements.

Background to the existing ITE accreditation system

In 2014, the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) was established to provide advice to the Australian Government on ways to improve teacher education to ensure new teachers had the correct mix of academic and practical skills required to be effective teachers. The report, Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers (2014), advised a number of changes to teacher education including: the adoption of more rigorous entry and selection requirements; improved and structured practical experience; more robust assessment of classroom readiness; introduction of literacy and numeracy testing; national research and workforce planning capability development; and improved integration of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers across the program.

These recommendations were implemented through the introduction of more rigorous accreditation requirements. The Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures (2015) (Standards and Procedures) replaced an earlier version and set specific and comprehensive expectations for the standard, delivery and content in ITE programs across Australia.

While the Standards and Procedures were designed to achieve national consistency in program quality, the responsibility for accreditation remains with state-based teacher regulatory authorities. Some jurisdictions have additional, state-specific accreditation requirements that are reflective of their particular policy priorities for teacher education and workforce planning. In addition, providers are required to meet regulatory requirements from the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) under the Higher Education Standards Framework (2015) (Threshold Standards). Early Childhood Education programs...
also require accreditation from the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA).

In 2017, the federal Department of Education and Training commissioned consultants PhillipsKPA to examine the extent and scope of accreditation practices in the higher education sector. The report *Professional Accreditation: Mapping the Territory* (2017) committed a section to the challenges associated with the accreditation of ITE programs. It found there were significant areas of conflict between the different requirements and providers were required to negotiate different compilations, formats, terminologies, and multiple sets of documentation to meet different accreditation standards. The report also explained that doing so involved significant time, financial and human resources, and that misalignment of accreditation cycles reduced scope for streamlining of processes. A number of other issues were raised in relation to the Standards and Procedures. Specifically, the magnitude of requirements, the ambiguity within Standards and the contextual differences between jurisdictions, were cited. These tensions have been attended to in the QCT’s full report, the ITE-specific nature of these issues means they will not be covered here.

Reform context – HESP advice on professional accreditation

In December 2017 the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) provided advice to the Australian Government about alleviating regulatory burden in the higher education sector. This included the recommendation that Government consider a legislated code of practice that limits professional accreditation bodies, such as teacher regulatory authorities using the Standards and Procedures, to matters that are profession-specific, rather than also examining issues already assured by TEQSA through the Threshold Standards (HESP, 2017).

While the Panel’s recommendations indicate positive steps in reforming existing accreditation systems, the advised delineation of regulatory oversight may pose a risk to assurances of nationally consistent and rigorous ITE programs and implementation of the TEMAG reforms. This is due to the nature of TEQSA’s risk-based and proportionate approach to regulation; despite its provision of sound and tailored sector-wide regulation, it does not provide equivalent oversight of all ITE programs, nor the level of specificity in expectations about areas of ITE relevant to the implementation of the aforementioned reforms.

Given the strategic importance of ensuring graduate teacher quality, implementation of the HESP recommendations needs to be attentive to the difference between overlap and duplication between the regulatory requirements shaping ITE. Failure to do so risks imposition of an artificial separation of a highly complex network of distinctive standards, potentially causing gaps in oversight. For example:

- discipline-specific requirements may be overlooked
- the detail and specificity that is deemed necessary for the development of classroom ready teachers may be lost
- limitations on professional input into accreditation processes
- broad standards would promote achievement of minimum standard and reduce impetus for continual improvement
- reduced scope for best practice sharing in all areas of initial teacher education
- risk of not fully implementing TEMAG reforms
- reduced assessment rigour, particularly in areas of importance for ITE such as program coherence, design, and professional experience
• close relations between teacher regulatory authorities and ITE providers weakened and institutional knowledge about accreditation lost

Accordingly, to alleviate issues of regulatory burden for ITE providers and to identify ways to implement the HESP recommendations while retaining quality and oversight of reform implementation, this work has:

• Surveyed ITE providers about the regulatory burdens and the challenges associated with accreditation to identify particular ‘pain points’.
• Conducted detailed standard-mapping to identify instances of overlap, duplication and redundancy.

Rather than strict removal of overlapping accreditation requirements, the recommendations have considered areas of overlap as opportunities for more efficient and coordinated regulation whereby a single submission of evidence and information satisfies multiple bodies. In addition, recommendations outline ways to judiciously manage areas of duplication to reduce redundancy.

Accreditation – helping and hindering

The QCT surveyed the ten ITE providers in Queensland to quantify the multiple submission requirements, identify instances of repeated information requests, and explore some of the different impacts of accreditation. The survey instrument was developed with the assistance of four Queensland Deans of Education.

Repeated requirements

The survey asked providers to consider a list of 103 different evidence pieces that may be requested by an authority for accreditation purposes (for example: Unit/Course Profiles, student cohort data, assessment outlines) and indicate if the evidence was produced in the ordinary conduct of business and/or was required for internal quality assurance processes, accreditation with the QCT under the Standards and Procedures, or approval under ACECQA’s program approval guidelines. The purpose for doing so was to understand the commonalities between accreditation and quality assurance requirements and the extent to which providers needed to produce additional or duplicated materials.

Interestingly, while there was an expected degree of variance in the evidence submitted to different regulatory authorities, there was also a noticeable difference in the evidence submitted by different providers to the same authority. This indicated some providers may be submitting more evidence than is necessary to meet requirements, pointing to the need to provide greater clarity as to what is required to support an accreditation judgement. Of the listed evidence, the average proportion required for accreditation and quality assurance requirements for different authorities was also considered. To meet the requirements of the Standards and Procedures, on average the providers submitted 71% of the 103 items. This exceeded the evidence produced in the ordinary conduct of business (61%), internal quality assurance requirements (58%) and ACECQA requirements (17%).

Across the ten providers, it was evident there are a number of commonalities between the evidence requirements of different regulatory authorities. There were 107 instances whereby a single item was submitted to the QCT, to ACECQA and for internal quality assurance processes and 434 instances where it was submitted to any two of these. This provides a clear illustration the great opportunity for streamlining evidence requirements and regulatory activities across accreditation functions to reduce repetition.
Benefits

Accreditation ultimately establishes a minimum level of quality and provides an incentive for continual quality improvement. It can prompt reflection on curriculum and teaching practices through supporting and structuring continuous improvement cycles (PhillipsKPA, 2017). This benefit was discussed by several providers surveyed and a number had made significant changes to program design and delivery. In particular, some providers explained that while changes were challenging to implement, the introduction of coherence and sequencing requirements forced deep consideration of the program’s ‘flow’, and academic staff became more cognisant of their colleagues’ work in other units. Moreover, the collection of evidence and data about program impact informed pragmatic changes and as a result, most providers agreed that their programs were more coherent and rigorous.

Accreditation also provides assurance that it is taught by an appropriately qualified and experienced staff body, and that sufficient resources are in place to support student progression and success. One provider explained that the need for successful accreditation supported requests for new facilities and infrastructure, while another highlighted the importance of second-party assurance of graduate quality. A number of providers noted that in meeting requirements, they engaged in deeper collaboration with school sectors and the local community. This resulted in the employment of teachers as sessional staff and communication with schools and school sectors about the quality of graduate teachers. The extent to which these benefits were observed varied between providers and the nature of their teacher education programs prior to 2015. Given the unique role accreditation has played in teacher education as a conduit for reform, the two issues were typically discussed in concert and this distorted articulation of the exclusive benefits of accreditation as distinct from the reforms delivered through accreditation requirements. Also, it must be noted providers experience a degree of ‘process burden’ – modification of processes to meet requirements inevitably introduces time and resource costs. The extent to which providers experienced such changes varied. A number adopted a pragmatic angle in recognising the evolutionary nature of implementation; they explained that with time, it would become a more streamlined and integrated process.

Consequences

Administrative burden

Despite the benefits, there are drawbacks associated with accreditation which compromise or potentially degrade its value. In particular, the need for providers to meet accreditation requirements from multiple regulatory authorities is problematic. This issue is amplified for smaller institutions with fewer staff and resources, however all providers surveyed as part of this work raised this concern. Furthermore, all providers expressed frustration about the level of overlap between the Standards and Procedures and the Threshold Standards or internal quality assurance requirements. This was reflected both in the findings around evidence submissions and in the PhillipsKPA Report, which highlighted that the requirements were set with minimal regard to each other (PhillipsKPA, 2017).

Accreditation has been considered by some to be one of the most expensive and least value-added processes for higher education providers. This is particularly the case when requirements are complex, extensive and overly focused on regulatory compliance (Malandra, 2008). Some sources have reported providers have been required to spend up to $100 000 on a course accreditation and that a faculty’s contribution to accreditation panels for other universities’ courses could reach up to $20 000 per annum (PhillipsKPA, 2017). These figures were confirmed by two providers surveyed and all expressed concerns about
the costs of employing more sessional and professional staff, printing, travel and stakeholder engagement costs for accreditation purposes.

The extensive documentation, collection of data and evidence, and management of program changes to satisfy requirements have been described as cumbersome and problematic because this time can no longer be spent on direct value-added activities such as teaching and research (Hoecht, 2006). The providers surveyed generally allocated one to two staff members to accreditation functions for between six and twelve months to meet the requirements of the Standards and Procedures. A number sought to perform internal quality assurance requirements simultaneously, or in the following or preceding year. In addition, the remainder of the faculty staff were kept abreast of accreditation developments and were required to make relevant amendments and changes to their teaching materials and assessment items. Given the high-stakes nature of accreditation, this time allocation was considered necessary; failure to gain accreditation could result in a program closing.

Another concern specifically related to the Standards and Procedures was with respect to time. For the staff involved, teaching, supervisory and research activities were restricted by this “never ending process” and as a result, experienced negative consequences in terms of stunted career progression. One Head of School noted they would prefer to see academic staff time invested in writing research grant applications, and the time required for accreditation represented a significant portion of staff time for which there was no allocated budget.

Compliance, academic freedom and flexibility

All providers highlighted the stress and exhaustion associated with accreditation; one explained a key staff member had even decided to leave teacher education in Australia. To varying degrees, all aired concerns around autonomy and academic freedom. In particular, the time allocations, mandated content requirements and the introduction of teaching performance assessments reduced flexibility within programs. One provider expressed disappointment they could no longer offer a specialised Indigenous professional experience unit, or engage with social justice issues, due to specified content requirements. All providers offering early childhood programs highlighted the frustration involved with managing the competing curriculum, professional experience time allocations, and age focus requirements for programs requiring accreditation from both ACECQA and teacher regulatory authorities using the Standards and Procedures.

Newton’s (2002) study of academics’ responses to accreditation demonstrated that when accreditation was considered tokenistic and focussed on managerialism and accountability, it led to impression-management and ‘game-playing’ by academic staff (Newton, 2002). This is unsurprising as historically academics have had the freedom to decide what and how their students learn, so accreditation compromises the fiduciary relationship between teacher and student (Eaton, 2010; Hoecht, 2006). It has also been regarded as homogenising due to its prioritisation of standardised outcomes over academic freedom, creativity and flexibility. Also, a focus on the measurement of educational outputs has been considered subversive of the purpose of higher education (Malandra, 2008). These tensions highlight the need for accreditation systems to be adaptive and responsive to the context and subject or regulatee, and for the perspectives and values of quality communicated through accreditation requirements to be shared by the institution.

Mapping – duplication, overlap and redundancy

Brown (1994) defines overlap as an instance where more than one government body operates in the same policy domain, providing similar goods and services to similar clients.
For example, one area of interest for TEQSA and/or internal quality assurance mechanisms and teacher regulatory authorities is program coherence. However, while TEQSA and any internal quality assurance requirements are interested in constructive alignment, assessment placement and adherence to the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), teacher regulatory authorities are concerned with the progressive development of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers, timing and length of professional experience opportunities, and logical construction of knowledge and skills. Nevertheless, the existence of overlap is a source of frustration due to the similarity of assessment and information or evidence required by different regulatory authorities for similar purposes.

Duplication is a subset of overlap and occurs when more than one government body provides the same goods and services to the same clients. Redundancy occurs when involvement of the additional level of government has no benefit. In ITE accreditation there are limited instances of duplication; nevertheless, these instances potentially generate redundancy which contributes to regulatory burden and general inefficiency. A summary of overlap and duplication is provided in Appendix A. Through mapping the Standards and Procedures against the Threshold Standards and ACECQA program approval guidelines, it was evident that there were approximately 42 instances of overlap and four of duplication with the Threshold Standards, and only four instances of overlap with the ACECQA program approval guidelines. For simplicity, this paper considers internal quality assurance requirements to be equivalent to the requirements under the Threshold Standards, as this is the standard self-accrediting providers are required to demonstrate their capacity to uphold.

Overlap and duplication are expressions of Australia’s federal system and frequent most policy domains. Rather than simply imposing legislated delineation of policy ownership such as the aforementioned recommendation by the Higher Education Standards Panel, overlap and to a lesser extent, duplication, can be managed in a more pragmatic and collaborative fashion to achieve the insurance benefits of two-tiered assessments and continuation of oversight to ensure implementation of TEMAG policy reforms, while reducing regulatory burden on higher education providers.

Recommendations

This paper has not included analysis of the part played by the Standards and Procedures in creating regulatory burden but has instead focused primarily on its intersection with the Threshold Standards and ACECQA requirements. The recommendations are reflective of this scope. In 2014, the Australian Government published a guide to assist policy makers to see regulation differently and sought to ensure regulation never be used as a default solution to a policy problem, but only as a last resort. The Australian Government Guide to Regulation (2014) was structured around ten principles for Australian Government policy makers, several of which are of relevance here:

- Regulation should be imposed only when it can be shown to offer an overall net benefit.
- The cost burden of new regulation must be fully offset by reductions in existing regulatory burden.
- Policy makers must consult with each other to avoid creating cumulative or overlapping regulatory burdens.
- All regulation must be periodically reviewed to test its relevance.

The recommendations seek to align with this wider governmental agenda and are complementary, but not mutually exclusive.
Coordinating accreditation

There are elements of the Standards and Procedures that duplicate the oversight of the Threshold Standards. In these instances redundancy is evident, so the removal of these elements is advised. In other instances, each regulator approaches the same aspect of teacher education with a different focus or scope. To add complexity, TEQSA’s light-touch and proportionate approach to the application of the Threshold Standards provides no guarantee to teacher regulatory authorities that the same aspects of a program are considered through TEQSA’s regulatory activities across providers. There is appetite, driven by reform in ITE, for continued rigorous oversight of a number of areas of teacher education.

Another issue relates to variations in required evidence and data for accreditation and quality assurance functions (including internal quality assurance) for oversight of the same aspect of initial teacher education. This point was articulated in the report by PhillipsKPA, which observed providers must engage in “significant negotiation to ensure avoidance of the need for different compilations, formats and multiple sets of complete documentation to meet various submission requirements, especially where providers operate over several jurisdictions” (p. 56). The survey conducted by the QCT revealed similar issues, as many providers pointed to the challenges associated with differing data aggregations, variations in the scope, quantity or type of evidence required to meet similar expectations, and the different accreditation cycles resulting in the need to submit alternative data sets. For providers with self-accrediting authority, these issues were paralleled in interactions with internal quality assurance processes at the faculty/school or institutional level.

In order to efficiently and effectively oversee and accredit aspects of the Standards and Procedures that fall within the scope of the Threshold Standards and internal quality assurance, the system-wide adoption of coordinated regulatory approaches is advised. There are two ways this could be achieved:
1. **The development and implementation of a national information-sharing platform where higher education providers upload relevant information and evidence about programs and operations to a single portal which can be accessed by different regulatory authorities for accreditation and benchmarking purposes.**

**Implementation: Facilitating platform development**

A number of legislative and policy changes would be required to facilitate the introduction of the platform to support regulatory authorities in their judgements, but also to protect providers from assessment overreach.

- Access to evidence and data would be restricted to an agreed accreditation remit to avoid regulatory overreach.
- Agreement between regulatory authorities and higher education providers about the scope and depth of evidence required in the portal would be required. Where possible, it is advisable that material submitted be aligned with that produced in the ordinary conduct of business and the requirements of internal quality assurance processes.
- Material provided would need to be able to support sound decision making by regulatory authorities to ensure ongoing quality.
- Amendments to accreditation standards and processes may be necessary (in the case of ITE, accreditation guidelines were developed to align with tailored evidence requirements and would require amendment to reflect a more streamlined and untailored evidence submission).
- In the case of ITE, accreditation processes are shaped by jurisdictions’ legislative and policy contexts. Any amendment to process and standards would potentially require legislative or policy change and changes to the Standards and Procedures would require agreement by Education Council.
- There are a number of potential risks associated with a platform, such as regulating use of evidence to make judgements, achieving national consistency and assuring confidentiality. These are not insurmountable and extensive consultation to inform implementation is required.
2. The introduction of a system of national, coordinated information-sharing among teacher regulatory authorities, TEQSA and ACEQCA to streamline areas of overlap to achieve desired regulatory outcomes without multiple submissions of evidence and data. Sharing would be complemented by recognition and understanding of regulatory oversight and interest between authorities to reduce ‘double-ups’. Such an approach would be supported by a framework to guide the remit for evidence submission and decision making across authorities without duplication.

Implementation: Coordinated information-sharing

A number of challenges inhibit greater information-sharing. The associated administrative burden, alternative evidence and data requirements, a lack of prioritisation of sharing and security concerns, all present barriers to change. The following recommendations seek to remedy some of these issues:

- Consultatively develop common vocabularies, formats and templates, and documentation expectations that satisfy the alternative requirements of different regulatory authorities.
- Consider streamlining accreditation cycles to align internal quality assurance cycles with accreditation cycles.
- Identify domains of higher education (ITE) that are best regulated by different authorities and allocate responsibility accordingly. For example, in non-self-accrediting providers, TEQSA seeks information about staff. Staffing of also of interest for teacher regulatory authorities using the Standards and Procedures, but TEQSA’s assessment of staffing is more rigorous and given staffing is a potential risk to students, this is an area that is best overseen by TEQSA.
- Undertake organisational networking and relationship building through the development of professional networks, collaborative project teams, awareness-raising activities, and cross-organisational placements or exchanges.
- Promote examples of good practice in information-sharing among regulatory authorities through case studies, media alerts, and reports and publications.
- Develop a stakeholder network to identify and discuss improved ways of working together and streamlining requirements.
- Establish agreed protocols for information-sharing to ensure timeliness.

Amendments to The Accreditation of initial teacher education programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures (2015)

The Standards and Procedures are the product of significant consultation and research. Implementation has been an evolutionary process, of which evaluation and refinement is a critical component. There is cause to streamline elements of the Standards and Procedures. The full report presents an evaluation of each Standard by considering whether requirements contribute to high quality teachers and align with best practice in ITE; the extent to which the standard is ambiguous and implemented differently among jurisdictions; and the efficiency and effectiveness of the accreditation processes related to the standard. This has informed the development of a suite of recommendations proposing minor amendments.
Risk-based regulation

To further alleviate regulatory burden, the adoption of a risk-based framework in the application of the Standards and Procedures not unlike that used by TEQSA, is recommended. At the time of writing, all ITE providers undergo the same accreditation process during stage one and two accreditations, regardless of their self-accrediting or non-self-accrediting status with TEQSA, accreditation history, or level of risk as indicated by student attrition, poor student performance, low enrolments, or other indicators. Using the ‘core/core +’ model applied to the Threshold Standards, identification of a set of core requirements could prioritise assessment of key reform and priority areas. Other requirements not already removed through streamlining discussed above could be demoted to ‘core +’ status. This could include those areas identified as overlapping the remit of the Threshold Standards/internal quality assurance requirements and areas related to the institution or faculty/schools. On a case-by-case basis, accrediting authorities could prescribe tailored assessments through considering the provider’s registration status, time delivering ITE programs, accreditation history and critically, information gathered through annual reporting to teacher regulatory authorities to develop a body of evidence and data. A proposed framework is provided in Appendix B.

Implementation: Representative Consultation Group

To guide the implementation of streamlining amendments and the adoption of a risk-based approach to the Standards and Procedures, it is advisable that a Representative Consultation Group be developed to consider, approve and oversee the changes. Given the importance of the Standards and Procedures as a conduit for reform, the inter-jurisdictional variability of their implementation and assessment, and the high-stakes nature of these requirements, the group should include representation from teacher regulatory authorities, AITSL, TEQSA, ACECQA, ITE providers, the Australian Government and school sectors. To inform consideration of changes such as those discussed here, an environmental scan and moderation of performance against accreditation requirements is required to support decision making. This would need to include consideration of existing annual reporting arrangements to support rigorous risk assessments. Critically, use of a risk-based approach must not weaken or reduce oversight of vital areas of ITE and so a highly pragmatic and cautious approach is advised. Also, the accreditation processes and remit of teacher regulatory authorities are shaped by legislative and policy environments and the authority’s level of accreditation experience. Any amendment to process and standards would require legislative or policy change and amendments to the Standards and Procedures would require approval from Education Council.

Arriving at an appropriate and rigorous approach to assessing risk is critical to implementing a risk-based framework. In order to conduct risk assessments of ITE providers, an appropriate assessment approach needs to be developed. Critically, refinements to annual reporting requirements would support the establishment of a relevant evidence basis from which risk assessments can be made. The pragmatic and proportionate use of MOUs or other arrangements between regulatory authorities would provide a further source of information from which assessments could be made.
Future work and limitations

This study considers Queensland only and findings relate mostly to the university context, so one limitation is the lack of representation from providers without self-accrediting authority with TEQSA. Therefore, it is advisable that similar work be conducted on a larger scale to ensure representativeness. Critically, it must also be noted that while this paper discusses regulatory burden, there are two other types of ‘burden’ at play. Surveys have illustrated there is a degree of ‘process burden’ associated with meeting requirements and have negotiated different ways of fulfilling them. Furthermore, given the number and magnitude of reforms delivered through the Standards and Procedures, ITE providers across Australia continue to experience significant ‘reform burden’ and these are often considered interchangeably with the ‘regulatory’ or ‘administrative’ burden. Investigation of these nuances is advised because over time as the reform and process burdens wane with time and experience, ‘regulatory burden’ may not be so significant. Sharing of good practice may speed and support this process.

Conclusion

This paper is part of a larger analysis of the accreditation and quality assurance requirements steering the delivery of initial teacher education in Australia. It contributes high-level recommendations and a case study of one professional accrediting body’s approach to negotiation of the HESP advice to reduce duplication and overlap with the Threshold Standards. As such, the recommendations provided here and in the QCT’s larger report are relevant across discipline areas. In the context of growing accreditation in the sector, regulators need to be cognisant of the implications of their requests and ensure systems and standards are responsive to context.

Acknowledgements

The Queensland College of Teachers and the author would like to thank the Queensland Deans and Heads of School and academic staff who participated in the survey. In addition, thanks are also due to the many individuals who gave their time and considered advice to the project.

The Steering Committee

- Dean and Head of School Prof. Donna Pendergast (Griffith University)
- CEO, Ms Gabrielle Sinclair (ACECQA)
- CEO, Mr Anthony McClaran (TEQSA)
- Dr. Peter Lind (Chair, Australasian Teacher Regulatory Authorities)
- Deputy CEO, Mr Edmund Misson (AITSL)
- Ms Deborah Fleming (Department of Education)
- Ms Renae Houston (Department of Education)

Critical friends of the project

- Emeritus Professor and Chair of the QCT Board Wendy Patton
- Professor Carol Nicoll PSM
- Dr Michelle Mosiere (TEQSA)
- Dr Karen Treloar (TEQSA)
- Mr. Chris Mason (ACECQA)
- Professor William Blayney
- Professor Stephen Winn
References


## Appendix A

Overlap and duplication between (i) the Standards and Procedures and (ii) the ACECQA Program Approval Guidelines and the Threshold Standards.

### Table 1

Summary of mapping illustrating overlap and duplication between (i) the Standards and Procedures and (ii) the ACECQA Program Approval Guidelines and the Threshold Standards.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program outcomes</th>
<th>The Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures.</th>
<th>The Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) (2015) and ACECQA Program Approval Guidelines</th>
<th>Duplication or overlap</th>
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Appendix B

The Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures Framework

Suggested risk-based framework for The Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures (2015). The full report proposes a number of changes to specific areas of the Standards and Procedures: for brevity these have not been discussed but are simply highlighted in the far-right column. Application of a risk-based framework in practice would need to be responsive to those changes if made.

Table 2

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About the Author

Phoebe Haywood

Senior Project Officer
Queensland College of Teachers

Phoebe Haywood is a Senior Project Officer in the Professional Standards Unit at the Queensland College of Teachers and a registered teacher. She is keenly interested in regulatory practice.
The Ties That Bind Are Quality Assured: Balancing Teaching Innovation and Compliance Requirements

Dr Tim Rogers

University of South Australia

Abstract

Universities across the western world are embracing innovation as a means to revitalise their teaching offerings and as a bulwark against the potential of disruption.

Yet stepwise innovation in teaching and learning is rarely reported. While the higher education literature often ascribes this stasis as a reluctance peculiar to the sector, it is argued here that it is a variant of a widespread dichotomy between the need for organisations to codify and systemise knowledge on the one hand, and innovate on the other.

This paper uses a causal loop model to 'map' the tension between the perceived freedom of academic teachers to innovate and the organisational need to codify knowledge for the integrity of the system, to aid dissemination, to demonstrate excellence, and to ensure compliance. It explores the premise that a central brake on innovation in higher education may be the unintended outcome of the interaction of two perfectly legitimate needs: for academic autonomy and for system integrity.

The model shows a number of feedback loops that support stasis as well as identifying factors that could be leveraged to encourage the system towards a more innovative stance.

Key Words: academic autonomy; compliance; causal loop diagram; theories-in-use; teaching innovation
Introduction

Innovation has been a cause du jour in higher education in the western world for much of the past decade. In the US, for example, there are now more than 200 innovation related positions across universities and colleges (Selingo, 2018). The 2017 NMC Horizon report, concerned with anticipating trends that will affect the higher education sector, lists as its first summary point “Advancing progressive learning approaches requires cultural transformation. Institutions must be structured in ways that promote the exchange of fresh ideas, identify successful models within and outside of the campus, and reward teaching innovation — with student success at the center” (Adams Becker et al., 2017, p. 2). In the Australian context a range of initiatives have attempted to accelerate the uptake of innovative teaching practices, and although the primary source of funding for these initiatives ceased in 2016 (Kift, 2016) the imperative has been maintained such that, at least at an espoused level, “teaching innovation’ has become the currency of job security and promotion” (Mathison, 2015, p. 98).

There are likely a range of factors driving this focus on innovation. No doubt some of this impetus is due to the advent of academic capitalism—the introduction of pseudo markets to manage university performance (Münch, 2014; Slaughter & Rhoades, 2004)—and the consequent need to attract students by offering a contemporary educational experience. Further stimulus has come from the related massification of higher education and the need to adjust to a larger and more diverse student body (Hornsby & Osman, 2014). Advances in technology have also played a part as academics seek to integrate teaching practices with the affordances of the internet and the near ubiquity of powerful computing devices (Siemens, Gašević, & Dawson, 2015). A range of approaches and techniques, from learning analytics (Siemens, Dawson, & Lynch, 2013) to MOOCs (Siemens, 2015), have arisen in response to these economic, cultural and technological pressures.

While these motivating forces could be described as proactive, there is an additional and powerful preservative impulse. Implicit in much of the current interest in innovation is the perceived need to revitalise teaching as a bulwark against disruption facilitated by advances in IT and modes of communication. Given several recent examples of industry-wide disintermediation and disruption, from photography, to home entertainment and publishing, there is a legitimate concern that agile new entrants into the higher education space may displace incumbents that have been largely satisfied with incremental improvements and have ossified organisational systems that are ill-equipped to respond to external threats (Ernst & Young, 2018).

Despite these pressures, and the panoply of exhortations to innovate, the track record of educational innovation in universities is poor (Blin & Munro, 2008). Stepwise changes that challenge underlying assumptions, values and practices are rarely reported. To be sure, there are exceptions. Alverno College in the US undertook a radical reinvention in the 1970s that has been maintained since (Ewens, 1979), there was a significant international movement in medical schools to shift to a problem-based learning approach from the 1960s to the 1990s (Polyzois, Claffey, & Mattheos, 2010), and there are numerous examples of courses and disciplines within particular universities shifting to methodologies such as peer learning and team-based learning (e.g. Styron, Michaelsen, & Styron, 2015). Many other examples at the institutional, discipline, and particularly the course level, are available. Nevertheless, these are the exceptions rather than the rule, and the sense that universities are slow moving, even moribund, is widely shared, leaving
the impression that “everything else changes, but universities mostly endure” (Clark Kerr cited in Committee for Economic Development of Australia, 2015 p.226).

The higher education literature often casts this ‘resilience to change’ as a problem peculiar to the sector (e.g. Lee, Thomas, Thomas, & Wilson, 2017). While higher education does have some unique characteristics and pressures (some of which are discussed below), this issue reflects an underlying dynamic tension shared across all industries that attempt to maintain their existing purposes and practices but also need to discover, and then incorporate, new ideas and practices. This tension is described in the strategic management literature using a variety of terms, including exploitation versus exploration (March, 1991) and operational versus dynamic capabilities (Helfat & Winter, 2011). While there are nuances to these terminologies (see Lichtenthaler & Lichtenthaler, 2009) they broadly describe a fundamental tension between the need to have an ordered, formalised organisational system to deliver products or services and the need to respond flexibly to a changing external environment.

Further, this tension cannot be resolved simply via a formula that statically apportions organisational resources. The interplay between exploration leading to experimentation and innovation, on the one side, and stable operational routines on the other, evolves in a dynamic relationship that is responsive to environmental changes (Romme, Zollo, & Berends, 2010). As members of an organisation seek to coordinate their activities to produce their intended outcomes they rely on the existing structures and practices. These are increasingly codified to supplement and reify tacit knowledge held by members of the organisation, simplify the organisational learning process, facilitate dissemination, and to clarify the expectations of the audience/consumer (Lipshitz, Friedman, & Popper, 2007). Codification produces dividends in terms of efficiency but also makes the organisation more rigid in response to exceptions (Romme et al., 2010). Hence, the efforts to formalise knowledge are a form of ‘exploitation’ of knowledge potential at some cost to the possibility of incorporating new knowledge and practices derived from ‘exploring’. In a changing environment both capabilities, the operational one concerned with the delivery of the organisation’s current purpose, and the dynamic one concerned with anticipating and responding to future scenarios, are required. The balance of investment in each capability may optimally correspond to the turbulence of the environment: in fast-changing environments an agile, adaptable and future oriented organisation has an advantage, but a stable environment favours the organisation that has committed resources to refining and codifying its existing knowledge and practices (Rahmandad, 2012).

While the strategic management literature typically focuses on the for-profit sector, this strategic investment problem applies to any industry concerned with ‘what to serve, to whom, how much, and when’ (Warren, 2008), including universities. To be sure, higher education has its own particular goals and constraints. For Australian universities, the broader system that constrains their offerings consists of a quasi-market of potential students and competitors, but also includes the policy settings of the Federal Government, the criteria of the international ratings agencies, and in some areas the proclivities of accrediting bodies (Productivity Commission, 2017). Codification is often externally developed via government policy in tandem with quality assurance agencies before being embedded in institutional policy and integrated with local practices (Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013). Nationally, these quality assurance efforts are designed to capture excellence (or at least minimum standards) and ensure that the main external stakeholders—the government itself, students, the taxpayer and industry—receive services that meet their various needs, and that additional values, such as equitable
access for students, are satisfied. Internationally these standards serve as an imprimatur that underpins transactional trust, such that international students and institutions have assurances of quality that can be factored into decisions about, for example, transferring enrolments or granting equivalence to a degree obtained in the Australian system.

The higher education analogue of exploration, insofar as it relates to teaching and learning, is the academic freedom to innovate. The tension between codification and compliance on the one hand, and academic freedom to innovate on the other, has long been acknowledged in the higher education literature (e.g. Harvey & Williams, 2010b; Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013; Trow, 1973). For example, (Berdahl, 1990), speaking of the British experience, fears the erosion of academic freedom and institutional autonomy as universities are increasingly subject to national policy straitctures, and advocates for a “…suitably sensitive buffer mechanism which can reconcile the Government's legitimate need for accountability and the universities’ vital need for maximum autonomy consonant with that accountability”. Most accounts do not present this tension in such a balanced way. The existing literature tends, rather, to polarise these impulses and expresses, often as a polemic, the lamentable loss of autonomy, or rail against its potential future decline (e.g. Jarvis, 2014; Milliken & Colohan, 2004).

This paper aims instead to ‘give reason’ (Bamberger & Schön, 1983) to both sides of this perceived opposition, treating each as holding reasonable assumptions and aims. In doing so, this paper attempts to reconfigure the debate as a dilemma that is embedded in, and springs from, systemic complexity. The interactions in this system can be characterised as complex in two senses, detail complexity and dynamic complexity (Sterman, 2000 p. 21). Firstly, they evidence the detail complexity of the enterprise: the sheer volume of information exchanged, via positions of varying power, across a range of administrative and academic functions, is daunting. Secondly, these interactions are dynamically complex, insofar as they contain feedback effects and delays between decisions and actions, undertaken by multiple actors with competing agendas. This complexity overwhelms human cognitive capacities and makes it difficult to predict the outcome of any particular policy.

Nevertheless, policies must be developed if the university is to pursue a particular strategic or bureaucratic goal, and then codified to enable adherence by academic and professional staff. These codified outcomes become the most visible examples of a university’s espoused theory, meaning the description that would be offered if a university was asked to explain the actions that its members take to fulfil their duties (Argyris & Schön, 1974). In many circumstances, particularly where there is little environmental change and members of the university community hold the same values, espoused theories are a sufficient explanation of the organisational activities. Take, for example, a payroll system. This is highly codified and serves to distribute wages to university employees in keeping with the entitlements of their formal university position. The espoused theory of how this happens, embedded in policy documents and computer code, is likely to fully account for the appearance of wages in an employee’s personal bank account.

Where the environment is subject to change, or its meaning contested, and where values diverge, espoused theories may provide an explanation that is disjunct from one derived from observations of the action taken. An organisational theory based on interpreting actions rather than policy documents or individual beliefs is called a theory-in-use, or more colloquially, ‘the way things are done around here’ (Argyris & Schön, 1974). Theories-in-use may come into direct conflict with espoused theories, and hence with
policy intentions, leading to unintended or perverse outcomes when policies are implemented (Friedman, 2001). Without an understanding of the sense-making of organisational actors (Daft & Weick, 1984) and the way this sense-making is shaped by, and then shapes, organisational theories-in-use, policy designers will be handicapped in their attempts to exert control over the system.

The analytic strategy pursued in this paper is to surface elements of the university theory-in-use via a map (Argyris, 1985; Friedman & Rogers, 2009) that can then serve as a reflective artefact (Schön, 1983). The particular approach taken is a causal loop model (Sterman, 2000) as this has been shown to facilitate enquiry in complex systems (Rusoja et al., 2018). The aim is to uncover the key variables, their interconnections and feedback relationships, and to identify leverage points in the system that can nudge it towards new equilibriums, or system states, where innovations in teaching and learning are more systemically viable.

The variables in the map were identified through the author’s experience, the existing literature, conversations with colleagues, and feedback on preliminary versions of the causal loop diagram. It is thus inductively derived and experientially informed.

For the purposes of this analysis the term ‘innovation’ denotes a change in teaching and learning practice that alters components of the current organisational theory-in-use. Under this definition, changes that are consistent with the underlying values and practices are not considered to be innovations, even if a technological change is involved. For example, a transmission teaching approach that is transformed from face-to-face delivery to a web-delivery would not qualify as innovative if it was still built on transmission teaching principles. Innovation thus represents a form of ‘double-loop’ change (Argyris, 2002), change that alters the underlying assumptions, values or goals that maintain the problem field, as opposed to ‘single-loop’ change that is confined to the immediate aspects of problem practices, ignoring systemic and other underlying causes.

The following section will describe the causal loop model, section by section. This is followed by a brief discussion that summarises the overall effects of the system on teaching innovation in higher education and unpacks some of the implications for policy. It concludes with an acknowledgement that further research is needed to understand how this system is in turn influenced by the broader system that includes, but is not limited to, Federal Government policy, accrediting and quality assurance agencies, and international university rankings.

**The Model**

The causal loop map is available in its entirety in Appendix A. While the following analysis unpacks the parts, it may prove helpful to keep in mind their connections, as captured in the full map. The map is also available online, where navigating is perhaps easier: https://embed.kumu.io/5957bc4551e7b0e3332e53918f11cc84

The analysis begins with a causal loop entitled ‘Viva La Status Quo’ (see Figure 1 below). When an academic exercises autonomy in a way that alters either formal or informal arrangements, their actions reconfigure the social space (Friedman 2011) and invite a response from the environment. These changes might be sanctioned and collective, for example, the departmental introduction of problem-based learning, or they might be the result of an individual or small team initiative. Either way, to the extent that these changes
are contested elements of the organisational theory-in-use, concretely in the case of required changes in rules and structures, and intangibly in the case of changes of beliefs and assumptions, they elevate the perceived risk to existing arrangements (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

Yet, these existing structures are not arbitrary. They exist to serve particular values, and their codification is designed to both facilitate organisational efficiency and to protect those values by preventing exceptions. They are often instantiated in the physical systems of the institution. For example, the university timetable, supported by a corporate software system, is designed to facilitate current linear learning arrangements rather than competency based approaches (Jeff Grann, March 19 2015, personal communication). They are often also internalised, as illustrated in examples of student resistance to active learning approaches because they do not fit their conception of learning (Seidel & Tanner, 2013). Thus, at a certain point or threshold in an ongoing process, or for changes that are seen to immediately intersect with system integrity, pressure starts to build to constrain an innovation through compliance processes. ‘Compliance’, in this context, refers to the full range of formal and informal responses, from official interventions by senior personnel, to IT system hurdles, to student complaints.

This process is captured in the causal connections between ‘Flexibility/Autonomy’ to ‘Perceived risk to rules/structures/values’ to ‘Compliance pressures’. These connections are represented here by solid blue arrows with a ‘+’ symbol. This signifies, both here and throughout the causal-loop diagram, a positive link: an increase in the cause will lead to

*Figure 1. The Balancing Loop 'Viva La Status Quo: Autonomy Compliance Balance'*
an increase in the target such that the target is greater than it would be otherwise, while a
decrease in the cause leads to a decrease in the target below what it would have
otherwise been (Sterman, 2000).

The build-up of compliance pressures over time leads university administrators to further
codify key aspects of teaching and learning: assessment, evaluation, and the timetabling
process. The increasing codification of these further constrains academic autonomy, as
indicated by the red arrows (with dotted lines) with a ‘-’ sign. This signifies, both here and
throughout the causal-loop diagram, a negative link: an increase in the cause will lead to
a decrease in the target below what it would be otherwise, while a decrease in the cause
leads to an increase in the target to above what it would have otherwise been (Sterman,
2000).

While these pressures towards compliance are powerful, they are not totalising. As the
system incorporates policies, rules and norms that underpin organisational performance
the pressures to constrain autonomy subside. The combination of positive and negative
links in ‘Viva La Status Quo’ create a ‘balancing loop’. When ‘Flexibility/Autonomy’ is
relatively high it triggers ‘Perceived risk to rules/structures/values’ and generates a
compliance response, which dampens down academic ‘Flexibility/Autonomy’. But this
dampening in turn reduces perceptions of threat, relaxing ‘Compliance pressures’ and
allowing ‘Flexibility/Autonomy’ to reassert. This then triggers a new round of compliance
responses. Balancing loops are homeostatic, representing the way biological and social
systems to keep competing forces within sustainable ranges to preserve system integrity
(Sterman 2000).

Of course, not all this pressure is internal to the university (Figure 2). National and State
policies and accrediting agencies exert their own demands (Harvey & Williams, 2010a;
Shah & Jarzabkowski, 2013). For example, policy requirements at the sector level require
universities to gather data on student perceptions of courses and teachers (Shah, 2012),
thereby codifying and entrenching a privileged position for student satisfaction in the
evaluation of learning initiatives, potentially leading educators to use less challenging
approaches to teaching (Bedggood & Donovan, 2012).

![Figure 2. Compliance pressures are also exerted by external agencies and National and State policies](image)

Compliance pressures also entail costs that militate against innovation (Figure 3). Change that breaks from the existing standard will have variously onerous ‘red tape’
requirements (Martin, 2016) and may not benefit greatly from the existing array of
organisational resources, or the efficiencies embedded in the pre-existing codified
practices. Innovating in the face of compliance requirements absorbs time, and time is a
finite resource. Planning, developing and implementing an educational innovation
requires a great deal of time (Muir-Herzig, 2004). Yet the available time may be largely
exhausted by the volume of existing teaching and research commitments, with their
concomitant bureaucratic requirements (Hirsch, 1998; Martin, 2016; Palmer, Holt, &
Challis, 2010).

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Figure 2. Compliance pressures are also exerted by external agencies and National and State policies

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Figure 3. Change that breaks from the existing standard will have variously onerous ‘red tape’ requirements
The central role played by time in the system is captured in the balancing loop 'Only Time Will Tell' (Figure 4). Here, the amount of innovation possible is assumed to depend on two things: the number of academics that have the motivation, skills and resources to innovate, and the amount of time available to do so. This is a self-limiting process: as the available time and the number of willing and able academics increases, more innovation activity is possible. However, this activity itself consumes time, limiting the scope for further innovation. It is not surprising, then, that time is a resource that several studies have identified as crucial for serious change efforts in teaching and learning (Hirsch, 1998; Muir-Herzig, 2004; Palmer et al., 2010).

As a key driver of innovation here is the number of academics innovating, the rewards for teaching innovation, especially in comparison to those for conducting research, are an important consideration (Productivity Commission, 2017). There are three factors identified here that increase the perceived reward for teaching. One is direct incentives from the institution. The second is the belief that the innovation will last i.e. that effort spent innovating will not be wasted. The third is new, institutionally sanctioned measures for evaluating innovations. Developing alternative measures to evaluate the impact of an innovation allows the innovation to be judged on its inherent goals. Hirsch (1998) has demonstrated via simulation that the failure to develop new measures in advance of the introduction of a teaching innovation seriously impedes its sustainability and potential for
diffusion. Existing measures, designed for the teaching and learning status quo, may not capture the purpose of the innovation, leading to unwarranted perceptions of failure.

New measures are also an important motivational adjunct that supports system-wide innovation. When an academic seeks promotion, undergoes an annual review, or is seeking funding, s/he has to have evidence to support his/her claims. Frequently the only measure available is a measure of the overall student satisfaction with the course and the educator (Wills, 2017). As mentioned, these high-level institutional measures are part of the institution’s reporting requirements and are therefore difficult to change. Yet innovation implies risk. Students may not understand or approve, and sometimes for good reason. An innovation may fail, at least initially. Or, it may be successful on its own terms but require students to adopt a new learning approach after they have invested in mastering the standard one. Without measures that capture the gains that the innovation can achieve, such as new levels of critical thinking, or transferable knowledge, then existing evaluative measures will exert their gravitational pull toward the status quo.

The reinforcing loop ‘What is Measured is Managed, and Rewarded’ attempts to capture the motivational role played by these new measures (Figure 5). The premise here is that measures, as indexes that can objectively determine success or failure, are key drivers of organisational behaviour (Kerr, 1995). Once these forces are set in train they create a virtuous loop, where more innovations increase the pressure to get measures (and thereby a mechanism for reward), leading to an increased development of measures and a greater number of officially accepted (codified) measures of innovation impact. These provide clear institutional support that improves perceptions of the potential rewards for innovating, facilitating the diffusion of any particular innovation, and more generally signalling an organisational willingness to promote innovation.

Figure 5. Reinforcing Loop ‘What is Measured is Managed, and Rewarded’
The difficulty is in kick-starting this virtuous process. An important aspect of reinforcing loops is that they amplify existing conditions: while innovations are rare there is little pressure to develop new measures, and so little incentive or potential to officially endorse any of these, fostering lowered perceptions of reward, which reduces the number of academics willing to innovate, and hence keeps the number of innovations low.

The development and endorsement of new measures therefore has an additional important impact, described in the reinforcing loop ‘Nothing Changes Until it Changes’ (Figure 6). The reinforcing process of ‘What is Measured is Managed, and Rewarded’ is shackled by a range of countervailing forces. As noted earlier, the existing codified practices associated with the evaluation of learning and teaching, and the assessment of learning, are powerful forces promoting stasis. Other compliance pressures, many originating from external sources, who are also powerful stakeholders, compound the potential for reticence with respect to officially sanctioning new measures of innovation impact. The resulting prolonged stasis fosters a sense that ‘nothing ever changes’. Thus, a learned helplessness, built on the experience of precedent, saps the expectation that changes will persist, fostering a self-fulfilling theory of change failure. The reinforcing loop ‘Nothing Changes Until it Changes’ illustrates that the key role played by sanctioning new measures is not just as a direct fillip to those academics who have the potential to innovate, but in leveraging a broader cultural change through the evolution of new precedents. As precedents are adopted, and particularly in tandem with a clear organisational goal, the debilitating effect of the existing precedent begins to recede.

**Figure 6. Reinforcing loop ‘Nothing Changes Until it Changes’**

In sum, the causal loop diagram as a whole (Appendix A) suggests that teaching innovation at the institutional level is possible, although the pressures exerted by compliance requirements, along with institutional responses to these pressures, make this difficult. A very deliberate institutional strategy that rewards academics directly, carves out time for innovation, and develops new measures of innovation success, would be necessary.
Discussion

The main thesis of this paper was that a central brake on innovation in higher education may be the unintended outcome of the interaction of two perfectly legitimate needs: for academic autonomy and for system integrity. The causal loop diagram presented here offers an account of the relationship between two apparent poles in higher education, academic autonomy on one side and compliance pressures on the other, to show how they are part of, and indeed drive, a larger self-sustaining system that makes innovation in teaching difficult to achieve in practice. In doing so it mapped elements of this system, noting feedback processes that stabilise the system and protect it from change. It represents a conjecture about the organisational theory-in-use of universities with respect to innovation. The map also identified potential leverage points in the system that could facilitate greater levels of educational innovation. One candidate was a greater recognition and reward for teaching innovation, a finding consistent with both general principles of motivation in organisations (Epstein & Manzoni, 1998) and recent developments in Australian university policy (Wills, 2017). Another was the need to provide sufficient time for academics to develop innovations (Muir-Herzig 2004). A less obvious key leverage point identified was the need to develop new evaluative measures that are able to respond to the changes anticipated by an innovation, and so to register success should those changes be achieved. Without these new measures, as Hirsch (1998) first noted in his simulation based investigation of innovation in US schools, innovations will likely be evaluated against existing measures relevant to the status quo, and therefore be found wanting.

The main limitation of the analysis presented here relates to its embryonic state. The work here is at the ‘exploratory’ level on Homer’s (2014) classification of evidence schema for system dynamics models. While justification was sought in the literature for the choice of variables and in some cases their relationships, the model developed is inductive and qualitative rather than empirical, based primarily on decades of first-hand experience in implementing learning and teaching innovations, and on many conversations with colleagues about their experiences also. In this sense, the causal relationships identified are clearly tentative. Nevertheless, a line of enquiry must begin somewhere, and this model is designed primarily as a reflective artefact to stimulate further conversation about an important topic of implementation that is rarely addressed holistically in the literature. To that end the model is available on the web (https://embed.kumu.io/5957bc4551e7b0e3332e53918f11ccbd4) with every variable, link, and causal loop coupled with its own discussion list.

There are several relevant issues that are not included in this causal loop diagram. It only tangentially refers to the obvious tension between teaching and research. Both in terms of competing for finite resources (including time) at the institutional and individual academic levels, and in the disparate organisational and social rewards that each confers, this tension is an important part of the broader story (Productivity Commission, 2017). Broader still is the national context that involves, but is not limited to, the perceived need for institutions to climb various international ranking ladders, the supposed value of these with respect to the capacity for universities to attract research active staff and international students, and the intersection of the latter with university budgets and the current federal funding policy. While these are important, any model must have a boundary. The argument embedded in this model suggests that the variables included offer a coherent causal story, largely endogenous to the universities themselves, that explains the difficulties in innovating in higher education. However difficult, it is possible, according to this analysis, for universities to develop innovative teaching cultures.
Nevertheless, the impediments to change are structural and pervasive, and many are external to the institution. Cause is not located in isolated variables, but “inheres within a pattern—that, in a manner of speaking, is the pattern” (Argyris, 1993, p. 264). This pattern interlocks across levels in the sector, from Federal Government policy, to accrediting and quality assurance agencies, to university policies and theories-in-use, and finally to individual academics and students. Attempting to change a variable in isolation is likely to provoke a reactive pattern elsewhere in the system until homeostasis, the status quo, is restored. This can be due to the inherent interconnectedness of the relevant variables, or because actors in different parts of the system operate from competing values, or both (Head & Alford, 2015). Further work is clearly needed if we are to understand the causal role played by aspects of the system that exist beyond the boundary of the university.
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Appendix A

Full causal loop model: ‘The Ties That Bind Are Quality Assured’

Figure 7. Full causal loop model: ‘The Ties That Bind Are Quality Assured’
About the Author

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Dr Tim Rogers is a Lecturer within the University of South Australia’s Teaching Innovation Unit (TIU). He has an extensive background in organisational learning and systems theories, particularly in relation to making data/evidence based changes that improve the learning and teaching environment. Tim's current work centres on improving student success via the uptake of innovative teaching, changes in second-order organisational systems, and the adoption of learning designs informed by learning analytics.
Sydney Data Stories: Embedding interdisciplinary research in undergraduate curricula

Dr Diana Warren and Dr Samantha Clarke

University of Sydney

Abstract

In higher education, there is extensive literature around the complex relationship between research and teaching, resulting in an ongoing, contentious conversation. While the value of the symbiotic teaching-research nexus is largely unquestioned by senior academic administrators (Neumann, 1992), the extent to which it is successfully implemented at a departmental level is varied (Elken & Wollscheid, 2016). The result of any siloing of research and teaching is that undergraduate students tend to view their lecturers as “teachers” rather than “researchers, and experience a personal disconnect between their learning experience and the research culture of their department. Not only does this impoverish the undergraduate curricula, but the curriculum itself can end up siloed, rather than demonstrating interdisciplinary transfer.

In this paper, we discuss the “Sydney Data Stories”, which is a new initiative across the University of Sydney which aims to champion and nurture the teaching-research nexus in data science. Given the highly collaborative nature of data science, the “Sydney Data Stories” showcases researchers from a diverse range of disciplines, allowing current research questions with their associated data to be embedded in the undergraduate curricula. Using a case study from a new data science course, we consider the benefits of this innovative, integrated approach for both students and lecturers, in terms of motivation, engagement and excellence.

Key Words: data science, curriculum, research, teaching, innovation
Introduction

In higher education, there is extensive literature around the complex relationship between research and teaching, resulting in an ongoing, contentious conversation (e.g. Elton, 1986; Geschwind & Broström, 2015; Neumann, 1992; Parker, 2008; Zubrick, Reid, & Rossiter, 2001).

In her seminal paper, Neumann (1992) argues for a positive perception of the teaching-research nexus. Based on interviews with 33 senior academic administrators across Australian universities, Neumann presents a largely positive account of the co-existence of research and teaching as “mutually enriching”, albeit with “subtle and diffused links”. Neumann’s research reveals a “symbiotic nexus” between research and teaching, leading her to propose a three-level framework: the tangible nexus, the intangible nexus and the global nexus.

In contrast, in a more recent review of the teaching-research nexus, Elken & Wollscheid (2016) argue that while “the idea of a synergetic relationship coexists on an intellectual level, this idea however, sometimes appears to be challenged at the department level where research and teaching can be treated as distinct activities competing for resources (i.e. time and funding)”. This observation aligns with research on the tension academics can experience in balancing their academic activity, resulting in what Colbeck (1998) calls a “fragmented identity”, despite evidence from three Australian universities that “staff who are able to integrate research into their teaching report higher levels of satisfaction” (Zubrick et al., 2001).

The potential teaching-research fragmentation is compounded by global university rankings (GURs) and league tables which increase the pressure on institutions to compete globally (Dill & Soo, 2005). As the main GURs, such as Quacquarelli Symonds (QS) and the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), assess the quality of teaching and research using different criteria and weightings, the result is what Barnett (2003) calls “competing ideologies”. Contrary to the claims of many universities, Robertson and Bond (2005) observe a widening gap between teaching and research, as “government and institutional policies increasingly treat research and teaching as separate entities”, supported more recently by Geschwind and Broström (2015), who argue that the “mismatch between incentives for research and education can have a negative impact on the relationship”.

The result of any siloing of research and teaching is that undergraduate students tend to view and experience their lecturers as “teachers” rather than “researchers”, which not only impoverishes the undergraduate curricula, but also perpetuates the culture of research trumping teaching, rather than celebrating the natural synergy between them. Moreover, the curricula itself ends up “unidisciplinary” (Waldman, 2013), rather than demonstrating interdisciplinary transfer.

In an international multi-institutional comparison, Turner, Wuetherick, and Healey (2008) concurred with Robertson and Blackler (2006) and “most others in this area”, finding that “undergraduates seem to feel excluded from the research community”, with a “personal disconnect” between their learning experience and research culture of their department. Following five-hundred students in three institutions in the UK and Canada, their findings support Jenkins’ (2004) view that while “students value learning in research-based environments, institutions are not necessarily providing students with appropriate research-based experiences to enhance learning, despite the research intensity of the institution”.

2018 TEQSA Conference and HEQ Forum – Selection of Papers 59
While acknowledging some of the challenges of the teaching-research nexus, including active researchers being disinterested in teaching or their research interest distorting what they teach, Turner et al. (2008) found that all three institutions in their study needed to “improve student’s feeling of inclusion in the research community”. To close the fissure between research and teaching, they argue that “academic developers have a key role to play in the effective integration of research, teaching and learning”, by enabling changes such as:

- Helping academics develop an integrated identity with regards their own research and teaching;
- Planning research-based learning in the curricula;
- Inviting students to research-based seminars.

In this paper, we discuss such a collaboration between an academic developer and academic lecturer that is championing the teaching-research nexus in data science at the University of Sydney. Given the highly collaborative nature of data science, the “Sydney Data Stories” is a new initiative which showcases researchers from a diverse range of disciplines, allowing current research questions with their associated data to be embedded in the undergraduate curricula. Using a case study from a new data science course, we consider the benefits of this integrated approach for both students and lecturers, in terms of motivation, engagement, and excellence.

**Background**

In 2018, the University of Sydney launched a new “re-imagined” undergraduate curriculum called the “Sydney Undergraduate Experience”. Led by Prof. Pip Pattison, Deputy Vice Chancellor for Education, the aim of the new curriculum is to provide a new flexible course architecture which “balances depth of disciplinary expertise with broader capabilities, and integrates authentic, real-world educational challenges and global perspectives for students” (Pattison, 2017). Based on contextualised learning, which has demonstrated success across the higher education, the new curriculum includes real-world learning, project-based learning, problem-based learning, case-based learning, research-integrated learning, and work-integrated learning (see Nugent et al., 2019).

The new curriculum is largely a response to a growing call to prepare students better for the “New Work Order”. Based on an analysis of more than 2.7 million job advertisements, the Foundation for Young Australians (FYA) found that students need a “portfolio of the right portable skills and capabilities required to succeed in an automated and globalised workplace” (Foundation for Young Australians AlphaBeta, 2017). As posited by the Executive Director of the Australian Centre for Innovation, "a person’s career will become a process of continual reinvention – reinventing yourself, reinventing your role and reinventing your areas of interest" (Johnston, 2017).

Underlying all these capabilities, is the ability to research; that is, a curious mind that can discover new knowledge. In addition, given the 21st century data deluge and massive employment opportunities in data science, a 2017 report from the Business Higher Ed Forum recommends that universities make data science courses compulsory for all students (Business Higher Education and PwC, 2017). Hence, a major strategic focus in the new curriculum is a new interdisciplinary major in data science, co-hosted by the School of
Mathematics and Statistics and the School of Information Technology, which is expected to attract an increasingly large and diverse learner cohort.

The first unit in the data science major is DATA1001 “Foundations of Data Science”, which is the flagship course in a new first-year suite of data science and statistics offerings taken by over 3000 students per year.

**Embedding research in teaching in data science**

As DATA1001 was developed from scratch, we had the opportunity to embed research into its educational design, conscious that “first-year students have lower levels of awareness of the research culture and few opportunities to engage in research” (Spronken-Smith & Walker, 2010). The literature suggests a link between undergraduate research engagement and improvements in student self-efficacy (Zambo & Zambo, 2007), and that student motivation for research is strongly related to merging current research into teaching (Vereijken, van der Rijst, de Beaufort, van Driel, & Dekker, 2018).

While there are many examples of integrating research into undergraduate curricula in the life sciences, including Spronken-Smith and Walker's (2010) three-fold case studies on enquiry based learning and Linn et al.'s (2015) review of undergraduate research experiences (URE) and course-based undergraduate research experiences (CURE), we wanted to develop a pedagogy consistent with the nature of data science; that is, a data scientist commonly finds insights in a colleague’s (rather than his own) experimental data.

We first considered a six-fold inventory of activities for engaging undergraduates in research (Brew & Mantai, 2017):

1. Undergraduate learning (“everything students do at university is research”);
2. Individual work, study and uncoordinated skills development;
3. Coordinated skills development through individual and group work;
4. Research-based scholarly experience/tasters;
5. Scholarly practice within courses; and
6. Integration into the scholarly community (holiday scholarships or internships).

Given the highly collaborative nature of data science, we developed a 7th option, which is a more general, interdisciplinary form of the fourth option: research “taster”.

7. Showcase research in masterclass, and embed in curriculum.

With the support of a University of Sydney Educational Innovation Grant (Warren, Yang, & Clarke, 2017), and colleagues across the institution, we launched the “Sydney Data Stories”, which is a series of 1 hour Masterclasses in which students meet a Sydney researcher and hear first-hand their “data story”, before later analysing their data.

Applying the six dimensions of the research-teaching nexus (Visser-Wijnveen, van Driel, van der Rijst, Visser, & Verloop, 2012), this innovation is tangible, (wider than) disciplinary research, current research, research content, learning about research, and (mostly) unidirectional.

Applying Neumann’s (1992) three level construct, the Masterclasses contribute to all three levels: the tangible nexus (dissemination of current research), the intangible nexus (student/academic attitude to research, creating a “stimulating and rejuvenating milieu”), and
the global nexus (demonstrating not just the department’s research but importantly, research across the whole institution).

A case study: Sydney Data Stories Masterclasses

To date, the rollout of the Sydney Data Stories Masterclasses initiative has taken place in three phases, with an increasing growth in scope and widening participation from both students and researchers alike.

Phase 1: Pilot - Semester 1 2018

During the pilot phase of the Masterclasses, we invited four University of Sydney researchers (see Table 1) to present on “how they use data in their research, and how they came to do what they do”. We set no other parameters on what should be covered in the presentation, instead letting the individual personality of the researcher inform the trajectory of the story. We aimed to get a cross-section of different researchers, both in terms of discipline and career stage, as demonstrated in Table 1, which shows the details of each speaker, with career stage evidenced by the level of their appointment.

For example, Dr. Emi Tanaka is an early career researcher and so not only spoke about “Modelling Agricultural Data”, but also her journey from undergraduate student to her current role as a statistics lecturer. Hearing the successfully stories of others ‘like them’ helps students to consider post-graduate research as a possible career path.

Similarly, Dr. Helen McGuire is an early career academic. As a Research Associate in a cutting-edge lab in Human Systems Biology, she is helping to launch mass cytometry onto the Australian medical research scene, with broader leadership as spokeswomen for the Australasian Society for Immunology. Dr. McGuire’s story not only demonstrated how statistics is being used in immunology, but helped to promote gender equity in STEMM, as female students saw future leadership possibilities, in line with the Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE) vision (Science in Australia Gender Equity, 2018).

Our final two presenters, Prof. David James and A/Prof. Tara Murphy are much sort after speakers, with very high profiles in their fields of Precision Medicine and Astronomical Physics respectively, and large research teams. Their talks were highly informative, but also incredibly accessible, testifying to their integrated academic identity, and therefore, a great model of how the highest quality research and teaching can successfully co-exist.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Research career level</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Talk title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Emi Tanaka</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>Mighty oaks from little acorns grow: what’s in store for statisticians tomorrow?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given the 60 minute timeslot, the presentations were around 40 mins, followed by a Q&A session of around 20 min. At the beginning of each Masterclass, we asked the students to come up with at least one question for the speaker during the presentation, and there was more than enough questions each time, with some students asking multiple questions. This is interesting to note, given the calibre of the researchers – the students didn’t know to be intimidated by them, like some of the researcher’s colleagues may be!

While attendance was voluntarily, students are asked to register for the Masterclasses via an online discussion board to create a “community” around the Masterclasses. As a result, students often posted comments for their peers after the Masterclass, “Tara is a hero … I learnt so much”. There was no formal assessment associated with the Masterclasses, but the students who participated received a certificate of completion at the end of the semester, signed by the Head of the School of Mathematics and Statistics.

Phase 2: Wider release - Semester 2 2018

Due to unexpected feedback from Semester 1 students requesting whether they could keep coming to the Masterclasses in Semester 2, we started Phase 2 by inviting more broadly using a mailing list of previous attendees plus first and second year data science students and staff. While the main focus was on Sydney researchers, we also included some International guests and an Industry speaker in the program, through collaboration with the School of Geosciences and Dr Garth Tarr (unit coordinator, second year data science) respectively (see Table 2).

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Research career level</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Talk title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dr Phoebe Meagher</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>The Australian Shark Attack File</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Robert Hazen</td>
<td>Established career</td>
<td>Geochemistry</td>
<td>The co-evolution of rocks and life: data-driven insights from the 'The New Mineralogy'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Shaunna Morrison</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Geosciences</td>
<td>Mars Science Laboratory: Exploring the habitability and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker</td>
<td>Career Stage</td>
<td>Discipline</td>
<td>Topic</td>
</tr>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Jean Yang</td>
<td>Established</td>
<td>Statistics / Data Science</td>
<td>The challenges and rewards of collaborative research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Liana Pozza</td>
<td>Early Career</td>
<td>Biology / Health</td>
<td>X-ray guns and pretty maps: Improving contaminated site assessment in urban areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr Saweng Lam</td>
<td>Early Career</td>
<td>Data Science</td>
<td>Industry speaker: Quantum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Danny Liu</td>
<td>Mid-Career</td>
<td>Educational Research / Data Analytics</td>
<td>Connecting People with Data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Phase 3: Embedding into curricula - 2019

In order to make the Sydney Data Stories more sustainable, Phase 3 began an adaptation of the live Masterclasses with fully recorded versions (Figure 1). Using funding from a Strategic Educational Grant (Warren et al., 2017), the university’s Media and Production Team spent two weeks filming full one hour Sydney Data Stories Masterclasses, as well as shorter interview style recordings with a wide range of researchers (Table 3). Having a collaboration between academic, academic developer, and videographer has resulted in very high quality, accessible videos.

The new online video versions of the Masterclasses allow the same data story to have much wider access and reach, and to be used in a number of different educational contexts. For example, the videos can be fully embedded into the DATA1001/1901 curricula, embedded into the e-Learning materials and resources for all data science and statistics courses, and cut and repackaged for new purposes, like a recent outreach workshop to NSW high school students for the new Extension Science course.

While the tone of the videos is very personal, we acknowledge one downside of the recorded format when compared to the real time version is that it necessitates a loss of “live” personal contact with the researcher. Hence, we plan to continue both a live version of the Masterclasses (4+ per semester), as well as increasing the recorded Sydney Data Stories.
Figure 1. Exemplar of (a) recorded Sydney Data Stories Video opening screen, (b) shot of a presenter during a Sydney Data Stories interview video (A/Prof. Tara Murphy), and (c) live Sydney Data Stories Masterclass. Image credits: Tim Harland, University of Sydney Learning Media Production Team.

Table 3.

Sydney Data Stories video list filmed to embed into 2019 curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Research career level</th>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Talk title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prof David James</td>
<td>Established career</td>
<td>Biology / Health</td>
<td>Precision health and metabolic systems biology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/Prof Tara Murphy</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Astrophysics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Patrick Filippi</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>Precision agriculture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Elliot Scanes</td>
<td>Mid-career</td>
<td>Marine Biology</td>
<td>Biology of marine invertebrates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Career</td>
<td>Field</td>
<td>Research Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------</td>
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<td>------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Melanie Keep</td>
<td>Mid-care</td>
<td>Healthcare</td>
<td>eHealth and cyberpsychology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Graham Mann</td>
<td>Established career</td>
<td>Cancer geneticist</td>
<td>Melanoma research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Phillip Gough</td>
<td>Mid-care</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Interactive data visualisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Jude Philp</td>
<td>Established career</td>
<td>Museum Curation</td>
<td>Museum collections and practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prof Michael Wheatland</td>
<td>Established career</td>
<td>Physics</td>
<td>Solar astrophysics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Phillip Gough</td>
<td>Mid-care</td>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Interactive data visualisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Ellis Patrick</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>Statistical bioinformatics and Biometrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Garth Tarr</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Statistics / Data Science</td>
<td>Statistical bioinformatics and biomedicine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Sarah Romanes</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>Statistical bioinformatics and machine learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Emi Tanaka</td>
<td>Early career</td>
<td>Statistics</td>
<td>Statistical bioinformatics and biometrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Phoebe Meagher</td>
<td>Mid-care</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>Australian Shark Attack File and Taronga Wildlife Hospital research</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To illustrate how the Masterclasses will be sustainably embedded in future curricula, we plan to implement three new assessment tasks in 2019:

1. **Critical reflection on discussion board**

   In Semester 1 2019 we will launch the advanced level DATA1901. Students will be required to attend four live Masterclasses, and then post a short critical reflection on their discussion board, to continue a conversation on the Masterclass amongst their peers.

2. **Written job application**

   Students in both DATA1001 and DATA1901 will have an assessment task based on a recorded Masterclass, in which they will summarise the importance of the researcher’s work, and give one example of how their current learning (in lectures and labs) is related to the researcher’s analysis of their data. For example, they might comment on the use of linear regression, heat maps, summary statistics or a chi-squared test. This assessment task will explicitly model interdisciplinary transfer, and so is likely to increase motivation for course
content. To make the task authentic, the task will be posed as an application for position advertised in the researcher’s team.

3. Client report

Due to the generous support of the researchers, we have started collecting the data related to each Sydney Data Stories video. For example, we have a fascinating dataset from Dr Melanie Keep on Instagram data. In late 2019, we intend to pilot a new assessable collaborative project in which students will be asked to watch a video, and then as a team, produce their own analysis of part of the researcher’s data for a chosen stakeholder. We expect the currency of using actual research data in conjunction with meeting the researcher in the video, to increase student engagement and inspire excellence, as students see the importance of drawing careful insights from the data.

Initial Feedback

To date, feedback about the Sydney Data Stories has been overwhelmingly positive.

In the Semester 1 unit of study survey, in answer to the question “What have been the best aspects of this unit of study?”, a number of students quoted the masterclasses, with one student saying “the data masterclasses were enjoyable to attend and gave interesting insight into the ways in which data can be used.” (DATA1001 student feedback, unit of study survey, May 2018). In another recent survey, current students noted that the masterclasses have provided opportunities to “develop their statistical thinking skills” (DATA1001 Student, research survey student feedback, June 2018).

We have also received a number of unsolicited emails from students telling us how much they enjoyed the masterclasses, that the experience was amazing, how they appreciated both the presenters and our own hard work to put on such an event, and to thank us for organising such a wonderful program. In addition, students have posted to the unit of study discussion boards about how much they loved certain presenters and how “cool” they were, with one student even going to the trouble of tweetng their thanks to one of the presenters!

When talking with students informally after the masterclasses in Semester 1, a common thread of conversation was that the presentations inspired them to consider new options for post-graduate study, research, and employment. As a result, students from Semester 1 all wanted to join the Semester 2 events, which is striking given students often report being time-poor. We were not expecting students to be so keen to voluntarily make time to participate.

Visiting researchers also praised the Sydney Data Stories. Many speakers thanked us for the opportunity to participate, with one even commenting that it was an “opportunity too enticing to pass up”. Many presenters have also signed up to the mailing list and have attended other events in the series.

Other feedback mostly concerns issues relating to the logistics of attending the event, as the somewhat irregular and untimetabled nature of the present program can cause difficulties for students.
Discussion on pedagogical benefits

So far, many benefits of the Sydney Data Stories Masterclasses have emerged. Here we consider six immediate, positive consequences for the students.

1. Students see their lecturer as interested in all research, not just his own.

While Turner et al. (2008) argue for the importance of an academic’s personal “integrated identity” in terms of incorporating research into teaching, this alone only results in a lecturer showcasing his own research area. The advantage of a Masterclass series with invited lecturers is that students see the importance of data science in a wide variety of fields, and even more significantly, the lecturer models his appreciation of another colleague’s work. In fact, when the colleague is from a very different field to his own, the lecturer becomes a “fellow-learner” with their students during the Masterclass.

This aligns with work on the co-creation of curricula in the e-Learning environment, in which Eustace (2003) asserts that “the old roles of teacher, student and researcher are now just functions of the life-long learner” causing “fuzzy” boundaries between the tradition roles. Similarly, Luckin et al. (2011) propose the “Obuchenie Context Model” in which there is an “agile” configuration in the process of knowledge construction so that “at any one moment, teacher may be learner, learner may be teacher, and both may become mutually conditioned co-learners”.

2. Students see another lecturer interested in their learning, not just their own.

A strength in having visiting lecturers is promoting an interdisciplinary approach to teaching across campus, as colleagues in many different faculties contribute to the DATA1001 learning experience. In fact, the novelty of a guest lecturer can add extra motivation to the learning.

This is very significant given data from Smith and Smith (2012) which shows that the discretionary practise of buying teaching relief has become “well-established in higher education” despite academics being “unusual among other groups of workers in their ability to choose to outsource parts of their own work in this way”. Consequently, many leading researchers rarely lecture undergraduates, especially first-year students.

However, while it may be common for researchers to “buy-out” their teaching, they seem very happy to “buy-in” to the Masterclasses. Whether early or late career, all the researchers we have approached were very interested in speaking at the Masterclasses, as it appears to leverage off their desire to tell their story. Hence, we suggest the Masterclass model could be expanded across the university, perhaps with reciprocal arrangements between lecturers of different units.

3. Top students get to meet their ‘future-self’.

The Masterclasses allow a very personal connection between student and researcher. As the masterclass is based on a researcher’s story, not a syllabus dot point, there is more revealed about their personal journey and milestones. Hence, the high-achieving students commonly ask the speaker about “how” she got to this point in her career, as well as “what” she is researching. This suggests another way to overcome students’ reservations about research, alongside time-intensive research experience (Guilbert, Lane, & Van Bergen, 2016) which requires support (Levy & Petrulis, 2012).
4. All students see a wealth of future pathways.

Given the plethora of possible data science jobs, students appreciate being exposed to some research areas in detail. While most students will not end up working as academic researchers, they may well “join the team”, as most of our presenters talk about the urgent need for more data scientists in their research labs. The value of investing in research is especially important for undergraduate students to see early in their studies, as data science is frequently referred to as the ‘hottest job’ (Business Higher Education and PwC, 2017), and the financial remuneration in industry makes academia look less attractive. Hence, it seems socially responsible to introduce students to the massive global importance of data science in research, such as precision medicine and repurposing contaminated land.

5. Students experience a completely authentic assessment, built around current research.

Educational literature is clear about the value of authentic assessments. By bridging the gap between the classroom and the world, authentic assessments promote “the interconnection and transfer of learning” and “problem-solving skills and high-level thinking” (Fauziah & Saputro, 2018; Kunandar, 2009). Compared to more standard forms of assessment, which can encourage a surface approach to learning (Trigwell & Prosser, 1991), the Masterclasses lend themselves to many authentic tasks, such as: writing a short citation on the researcher, producing a media release on the researcher’s work and designing a professional job description for a new data scientist for the researcher’s team.

6. Students recognise the reputation of their institution.

A final benefit of the Masterclasses is promoting pride in the institution and hence increased motivation for study, as students see the way society is benefitting from current research at their university.

Note that properly seen, all the strengths for students end up being strengths for the lecturer. That is, a cohort that is more motivated and engaged and striving for excellence, is more enjoyable and satisfying to teach. Seeing students turn up to an optional Masterclass and then report on it to their peers in the following lecture, can feel very empowering, especially when numbers in normal lectures naturally decline during semester. Moreover, involvement in the Masterclasses helps lecturers to develop a more integrated academic identity, and weave more research into their own lectures.

However, two challenges need to be acknowledged and considered. Firstly, it can be difficult to find a good time for the Masterclass. While an academic may have flexibility in their schedule, many undergraduates have very busy timetables, leading one keen International student to note on the discussion board, “I will reserve it for now. But ... Why every-time the M.C’s schedule is mixing with my tutorial time!”. To avoid this problem, the timetable of the DATA1901 will include the Masterclasses. Secondly, like any seminar series, the Masterclasses requires some organisation, from booking the speaker and room, to advertising. This is not normally accounted for in academic’s workload, but we have found it to be fairly minimal in context of the benefits, and a natural role for an academic developer.
Conclusions and Future Development

Given the importance of nurturing the teaching-research nexus in the undergraduate curricula, we assert that the Sydney Data Stories has been a successful way to foster their natural synergy in data science. Rather than just focusing on the few top students who participate in holiday research programs, the Masterclasses have given all first year students majoring in data science a personal window into collaborative research, and hence insight into how their current learning is foundational to future research and employment. Importantly, inviting a range of speakers from different disciplines demonstrates the importance of interdisciplinary transfer.

While Brew and Mantai (2017) report perceived constraints in implementing research based experiences for undergraduates, including particular institutional policies and structures, academics’ mindsets and lack of skills and questions of time and money, the Sydney Data Stories appears to be a simple, inexpensive, and reproducible model.

Moving forward, we look forward to further embedding the Masterclasses in the assessment structure of the suite of data science and statistics units. In addition, we have interest from colleagues at other institutions about collaborating on a series of “Australian Data Stories”, as well as “Global Data Stories”. Whether we proceed this direction will depend on weighing up the benefits of staying at an institutional level (easy organisationally and no dependent on funding) versus the advantage of giving student’s exposure to large national and international research projects.

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Academic risk and delegations: Innovative approaches to areas of difficulty in academic governance

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Abstract

Higher Education Providers (HEPs) find some aspects of academic governance difficult, particularly academic delegations and academic risk, whereas other requirements, such as academic policy and course (re)-accreditation, are well-understood activities of academic boards or equivalent bodies. Academic boards are developing innovative ways of maintaining oversight of these areas, particularly by embedding considerations of delegations and risk in other processes.

An overview of simple compliance mechanisms such as tagging agenda items with the relevant Higher Education Standard or an annual checklist provides context for more innovative approaches to areas of difficulty.

Good practice examples will be given from approaches to academic delegations and academic risk. Typically delegations are the responsibility of the corporate board and have been predominantly financial or human resources-related. A good practice example is where consideration of delegations is embedded in policy renewal. The delegations schedule lists the relevant policy, so that a change to one automatically triggers an alert to consider the other. An annual review of the academic delegations schedule by the Academic Board and major committees easily brings to light inconsistencies between theory and practice.

Similarly, academic risk is best considered together with quality processes. A good practice example is where the process of course review is seen through the lens of quality and risk, such that the quality of curriculum and indicators such as attrition or student dissatisfaction are viewed holistically, rather than as free-standing issues.
This paper brings together in-depth experience of one university with broader coverage from several reviews of academic governance.

**Key Words:** Academic Governance, Corporate Governance
Introduction

Academic governance is an area of considerable difficulty for Higher Education Providers. The national regulator, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), in a recent analysis found that 81% of applications for registration or re-registration were rejected on an aspect of either academic or corporate governance, amongst other factors (TEQSA 2018). Governance was by far the most frequent area of difficulty experienced, although others included management and human resources (73%) and responsibilities to students (32%); in relation to course accreditation and re-accreditation, the factors most affecting adverse outcomes were assessment (69%), course design (64%) and other aspects of teaching and learning (57%).

Governance is typically seen as inclusive of both Academic and Corporate authority and yet there remains confusion in many organisations as to the boundaries of each. Academic Governance relates to policies, structures and procedures that provide leadership and oversight to academic activities (TEQSA 2017a). Corporate Governance in contrast, relates to frameworks of structures, relationships, systems and processes that aim to identify, manage and control risks (TEQSA 2017b).

Figure 1 provides a simplified view of Governance for the Higher Education sector as defined by TEQSA.

**Figure 1. A snapshot comparison of Academic and Corporate Governance**

This paper examines these areas of difficulty with academic governance and outlines some pragmatic solutions, observed from one university in particular, but also from a range of universities and other Higher Education Providers where the governance has been the
subject of external review since the introduction of the Higher Education Standards Framework (TEQSA 2015) effective from 1 January 2017.

The Governance Triangle or the Tripartite Structure of Governance

Higher Education providers have a triangular/tripartite governance framework. *Figure 2* below presents a diagrammatical representation of the relationships between corporate and academic governance and executive management.

**System of Higher Education Governance**

![System of Higher Education Governance Diagram](attachment:image.png)

*Figure 2 Typical Governance Framework*

The “centrepiece” or apex of this is “a formally constituted governing body (e.g. a board of governance) that is collectively accountable for the governance and performance of the entity overall” (TEQSA 2017b) which in universities is usually the University Council (although sometimes called the Senate) and in private providers is the Board of Directors or Board of Governors. The governing body manages finances, risk, compliance, strategic planning and performance monitoring. The relevant Standards of the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) are 6.1 Corporate Governance and 6.2 Corporate Monitoring and Accountability.

The academic governance corner of the triangle generally has delegated responsibility from the governing body for the academic governance of the institution. Academic governance is defined as “the framework of policies, structures, relationships, systems and processes that collectively provide leadership to and oversight of a higher education provider’s academic activities (teaching, learning and scholarship, and research and research training if applicable) at an institutional level” (TEQSA 2017a). This is a nebulous concept which is often difficult to understand especially in organisations which are corporate and for-profit. The relevant Standard of the HESF is 6.3 Academic Governance.

The form of academic governance is not mandated, but it usually operates through a single body, such as an Academic Board or Academic Senate, or in smaller institutions, an Education Committee. The focus of the standards is on outcomes rather than on processes.
and structures. Furthermore, TEQSA emphasises that academic governance is a function separate from and independent of operational aspects of an institution: “Traditional functions of academic governance include rigorous scrutiny and peer review of academic activities” (TEQSA 2017a).

The third corner of the triangle is the executive management of the organisation which implements and operationalises academic and corporate policy. It is the management structure of the organisation, to which the management and administration are delegated from the governing body, usually through the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) (Hendrickson et al. 2013).

This tripartite structure forms a check and balance on executive management, as the corporate governance body sets strategy and the academic governance body should include the rigorous scrutiny and peer review outlined above, “carried out independently and separately from the staff who are directly involved in those activities.” (TEQSA 2017a). The three elements of the tripartite structure are interdependent and complementary.

It is often hard for management to understand that there should be oversight of their decisions by a group of staff which they employ and performance manage (Williams 2015). At best, this is a productive tension which leads to productive and innovative academic outcomes. At worst, there is outright conflict where executive management attempts to railroad dubious decisions through academic processes, or academic governance bodies block innovation.

The overall intent of the Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) 2015 regarding academic governance is to ensure that institutions “establish a system of academic governance that will provide competent academic oversight and monitoring of all academic activities at the institutional level” (TEQSA 2017a).

Areas of difficulty for Australian Higher Education Providers

A previous analysis of academic governance reviews in Higher Education Providers (Winchester 2017) showed that academic governance bodies were very effective at their traditional activities, particularly academic policy development, and the approval, improvement and review of academic courses. However, they were much less adept at dealing with areas of academic risk, and delegations of academic authority, which were often glaring omissions in their terms of reference and agendas.

Other areas which were areas of difficulty were definitions of academic leadership and discussion of educational innovations, but these were more likely to be buried in e.g. discussions of curriculum renewal or changing modes of delivery, or “taken-for-granted” given the composition of the Academic Board.

A study in the United States in 2015 found that organisations struggle with shared management and governance and that there are limited practical and clear delineations to address the issue (Williams 2015).
Academic Risks

The requirement to think about academic risk has proved difficult for most Higher Education Providers. Academic risk is a concept which had not been visible in the earlier version of the HESF. It is, perhaps unfortunately, tied to the same standard as that which relates to academic and research integrity, which has been the focus of sustained academic interest and research in the last two years (Bretag et al. 2018; Curtis & Clare 2017; Harper et al. 2018).

The difficulty arises when academic risk is equated with plagiarism and attention is focused solely on plagiarism identification. Not only is plagiarism a subset of academic misconduct which encompasses a range of activity including contract cheating on an industrial scale, but also academic misconduct is much broader including collusion and falsification of data. Academic integrity is only a small part of academic risk, but for many it has been the major, or even the sole focus.

Academic risk is a concept that is more all-encompassing than academic misconduct. It includes risks related to admission, attrition and progression, to academic quality and to enterprise risk associated, for example, with reductions in applications and enrolment due to government actions, changes in visa regulations, or international markets.

*Figure 3* below provides an organisational view of enterprise and academic risk and how it relates to the general higher education environment.

![Figure 3. Examples of Academic and other risks](image)

Institutional approaches to risk have generally focused on either corporate (enterprise) risks or financial risks. Usually these have been under the remit of the corporate governing body or a subcommittee, usually named “Audit and Risk” (Ntim 2018).

Many institutional risk registers are silent on academic risks, and whole-of-institution risk registers are never considered by Academic Boards. The institutions that consider academic risks may compile an “Academic” section of the risk register which can be detached from reality and which is difficult to understand. Where these are facilitated by embedded
discussions, organisations are better equipped and prepared to deal with implications from nominated risks.

A more effective approach to academic risk is to embed the discussion of risk in existing processes. For example, Course Performance Reports can identify risk in discussions of recruitment, retention (maybe of particular cohorts e.g. those entering via particular pathways) and completion (see Figure 4. Academic Risk Management Options).

Course Approval Processes should consider elements of competition from other providers and risks associated with mode of delivery. An awareness of risk is relatively simple to cultivate by adapting existing processes and templates. 

Figure 4 below presents an iterative way to understanding and managing Academic Risk.

An effective approach to compiling academic risk registers is to consider risks systematically in relation to the standards of the HESF. This is a particularly useful approach for providers new to considerations of academic risk. Working through the HESF, from Standards 1 to 7, is an effective exercise for members of academic governance bodies to consider and evaluate the risks associated with processes from advertising to graduation.

Figure 4. Academic Risk Management Options

Academic delegation is another area of difficulty for Higher Education Providers, which is new in the HESF 2015. As with risk, delegations have been traditionally within the purview of
the Audit and Risk Committee of the governing body and Delegation Registers have generally included corporate and financial delegations, and delegations related to human resource processes, such as approval of leave. In many Higher Education Providers, no academic delegations are listed in the registers.

Academic delegations do exist, for example, about which officer or body may approve minor changes to courses. However, they are often not contained in a register but may be buried within policies and procedures, or in position descriptions. Given the complexity of processes and positions in large institutions, these are often inconsistent, and the default position is for everything to revert to the highest authority, which is inefficient and time-consuming. It is also extremely difficult and time-consuming to compile an academic delegation register from scratch, and to ensure that the requirements of a position description (say, of an Associate Dean) match the delegations in policy.

The ideal position would be that the academic delegations are approved by the Academic Board, forming part of the institutional delegations register which goes as a consolidated whole to the Audit and Risk Committee of the governing body. In practice, this rarely happens. Attempts at academic delegations registers are riddled with gaps and inconsistencies.

*Figure 5* below offers a simple representation of how Higher Education Providers can deal with Academic and Corporate delegations and provides insight to good practice procedures.

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*Figure 5. Dealing with Academic and Corporate Delegations*

Work at one university includes as part of the workflow of policy approval a check against delegations registers. While this is imperfect, having a step in the flow diagram of the approval process means that there is at least a manual check for consistency. The university is working on an automated system flow through from policy change to delegation but has not yet managed to achieve this.
Demonstrating compliance

This paper has focused on risk and delegations but there are other simple ways of demonstrating compliance with the HESF. A number of Higher Education Providers have been able to optimise compliance with the HESF by incorporating a coordinated institutional approach.

By purposefully redesigning institutional templates, in this case meeting agendas, it is possible to involve committees and develop a keen understanding of applicable Standards. Each of the agenda items is accompanied by a short explanation or demonstration explaining compliance with the applicable Standard. This is particularly important for not only Academic Boards or Senates, but also for sub-committees responsible for delegated functions. By including an additional column on the agenda indicating specifically which Standard is being complied with, committee members (and other stakeholders) develop an understanding of the Standard, and more importantly, how the institution is navigating its operations to align with the requirements.

There are other areas where Higher Education Providers typically encounter difficulty with Academic Governance. These include Academic Integrity (Curtis & Clare 2017; Winchester 2017), Educational Innovations where terminology and practice collide (Paris 2012) and Academic Leadership (Hendrickson et al. 2013).

Figure 6 below provides a potential solution to establish a pragmatic environment aimed at addressing the governance quagmire for Higher Education Providers. The Governance Triangle or the Tripartite Structure of Governance discussed earlier remains a foundational component however it can be a challenge to ensure that both executive management and academic governance remain synchronised.

System of University Governance

![Diagram of University Governance System](image)

**Figure 6.** Leadership of subcommittee by portfolio & executive management
Including executive management staff as part of Academic Board subcommittees provides an opportunity for the organisation to remain in-step between the Governance Triangle or the Tripartite Structure of Governance. For many Higher Education Providers, the Chair or President of Academic Board is an elected position while for others, it is a position appointed by the University Council or other governing body. While an elected position provides independence, the Executive leadership and the Academic Board need to be complementary yet aligned. Many providers have subcommittees including Education (looking after quality and integrity of academic offerings), Learning and Teaching (Learning and Teaching policy enhancement and technology) and Research (policy, procedure and practice development) as a minimum. It is prudent to facilitate overlap of executive and elected members within committees to allow decision making through an informed yet independent process.

It is likely that Higher Education Providers will continue to struggle to demonstrate understanding and implementation of academic leadership for the foreseeable future. This could be brought along by challenges facing the sector including government policy, funding and cynicism about academic quality to name but a few. In addition, delegations of authority, risk monitoring and the implementation and evaluation of effective education developments remain areas of difficulty for many. The sector regulator is clear that in order to gain entry into Higher Education or maintain registration, Higher Education Providers must have appropriate corporate and academic governance structures in place, to ensure quality teaching, learning, research and research training, to safeguard the value for students and the reputation of the sector.
References


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Excellence
A working model for collaboration for HE institutions with diverse contexts across the Pacific region

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Abstract

The international development of regional qualifications and quality assurance frameworks in the Pacific region urgently requires strategic collaboration and action at the international, regional, and institutional levels, involving a range of key stakeholders in higher education. This paper will provide an overview of the findings from the Higher Education Pacific Quality (HEPQ) Project which was established in 2016-2017 to progress external referencing activity across the Pacific Region. Four HE institutions [Manukau Institute of Technology, National University of Samoa (NUS), The University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of Waikato] agreed to benchmark institutional processes in teaching quality, program quality and the student voice across their institutions.

This paper puts forward a working model for collaboration for higher education institutions across diverse contexts and countries in the Pacific with the aim of building capacity to collaborate on external referencing activity on key challenges in the sector. The working model aims to ensure that higher education institutions; quality assurance (QA) agencies; industry; and disciplinary organisations in the Pacific region can benchmark, compare and share practice to improve and enhance quality. The QA agencies become enablers in the HE sector in facilitating quality improvement projects which would be part of a Pacific learning community.

Key Words: Benchmarking, quality assurance frameworks, qualifications
Introduction

The international development of regional qualifications and quality assurance frameworks in the Pacific region urgently requires strategic collaboration and action at the international, regional, and institutional levels, involving a range of key stakeholders in higher education. The increasing need for this multi-regional, multi-agency and cross-institutional collaboration is linked to three strategic imperatives for the Pacific. The three strategic imperatives are: 1) economic; 2) social and cultural; and 3) educational. Firstly, the economic imperative is about ensuring that the Pacific region does not lose its Pacific learners to other countries for employment and study purposes which dramatically impacts on the economy of these Pacific countries (Booth, 2018). Added to this, there are high unemployment rates, increasing concerns with these regional countries’ fragile environments and susceptibility to natural disasters (UNESCO, 2015). Secondly, the social and cultural imperative, is linked to acknowledging both the social and cultural traditions, knowledge and skills of the Pacific region within degree qualifications. Lastly, there is an educational imperative to ensure that the quality of the degree qualifications in the Pacific region are regionally and internationally benchmarked (Booth, 2018).

To understand the context of the Pacific region, it is important to recognise the geographical constraints and diverse contexts of each HE institution within the Pacific’s higher education system, an overview of the countries is provided below (Bateman, Holstein & Kubuabola, 2016). The Pacific Island Forum (PIF) includes the following countries: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu. Other members and observers include New Caledonia, French Polynesia, Tokelau, Wallis and Futuna, American Samoa, Northern Nations (Bateman et al, 2016). The PIF also includes other countries and territories, including Australia, New Zealand, French Polynesia, Guam, New Caledonia, Pitcairn Islands, France and the United States of America. A UNESCO published report (2015), The Pacific Education for All 2015 Review, identified the Pacific as a sub-region of the Asia-Pacific region and reported that the population was 9.7 million, with 90% of the population living in three countries: Fiji, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands. The Report also noted that population growth varied considerably across the Pacific region, with six countries with less than 20,000 people [Cook Islands, Nauru, Niue, Palau, Tokelau and Tuvalu]. This paper will focus on the Pacific region, rather than the Asia-Pacific region which is a much larger conglomeration of HE quality assurance activity.

Added to these geographical constraints, there is an urgent need to develop an external referencing process across all key stakeholders in the Pacific which addresses the mutual recognition of learning and standards in the region. The mutual recognition of learning is a challenge for many countries across the globe, particularly with the massive increase in students moving countries to seek different employment options and opportunities abroad. Mutual recognition can be defined as:

By two or more external quality agencies is an affirmation by each that it accepts the decisions and judgements of the other (either entirely or for some defined purposes). Such recognition may be based on the agencies having comparable aims and procedures, so it is likely that they would reach the same conclusion in reviewing and passing a judgement on an institution, program or qualification (cf. The Washington Accord between engineering associations). (Woodhouse, 2008, p.28)

Currently, there is a Pacific Register of Qualifications and Standards (PRQS) program in place that all Pacific countries prescribe to. The initial aim of the PRQS was to provide an understanding of how national qualifications compared across the Pacific region to support labour mobility as well as ensure consistency and relevance in the quality of qualifications.
The Australian Government’s Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) had provided over AUD $3million in funding (2009-2016) to support the PRQS program.

In 2017 DFAT commissioned an international strategic review of PRQS to understand the extent the PRQS program across the Pacific region. The international review team found there had been limited progress towards the overall intended outcomes. As a result, DFAT withdrew financial support for the PRQS program. An alternative Pacific Model was put forward by the international review team (Bateman et al, 2016) which included:

- A robust external referencing process that includes key stakeholders [NGFs, NGAFs, PQF, PQAFs] which was fit-for-purpose taking into consideration the size and scope of the qualifications systems;
- Development of agreed and consistent quality assurance processes, including rigorous self-assessment by professional bodies which are externally evaluated on a periodic basis;
- A focus on supporting mutual recognition process of professional body decisions on aligning accreditation processes for the accreditation of qualifications and registration of providers to enable the benchmarking of qualifications and recognition of foreign qualifications as well as increase the transparency of information;
- Strengthening the relationship with other Regional Qualifications Frameworks, and with national qualifications frameworks [e.g. Australia and New Zealand]; and
- Strengthening the ownership by the Pacific Island Forum (PIF) countries and territories so that there are clear benefits and outcomes across the Pacific region. (Bateman et al, 2016).

The international review team also recommended funding for the Pacific Model over the next 3-5 years. What was clear from this review was the noticeable gap of evidence-based reporting on external referencing activity across the Pacific region.

For collaboration to work across the Pacific region it is also important to strengthen the diverse relationships with other regional qualifications frameworks in Australia and New Zealand, particularly in terms of external referencing. Australia’s higher education institutions are regulated through the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), which in 2017 implemented a transition process for a revised Higher Education Standards Framework (HESF) (2015). This Framework positions external referencing, including benchmarking activity as an essential part of all HE providers review activity. External referencing is ‘a process through which a higher education provider compares an aspect of its operations with an external comparator(s)’ (TEQSA, 2016). The purpose of external referencing activity is varied, but includes:

- Providing evidence of the quality and standing of a provider’s operations;
- Offering an external evidence base as context for the development of internal improvements, especially student outcomes; and
- Establishing and fostering collaborative improvement efforts across providers (TEQSA, 2016).

Similarly, New Zealand’s Academic Quality Agency (AQA) is responsible for quality assuring its eight universities. In the Cycle 5 academic audit, no commendations were made with respect to the guideline statement on program benchmarking. Initiatives already underway were affirmed for two universities and panels made recommendations in the audits for four universities. A Cycle 6 audit program was approved in 2017 which included a strategic quality assurance theme to be undertaken by all universities as part of their audits. Interestingly, the cross-jurisdictional impact of Pacific learners has been embedded in the first enhancement theme for the Cycle 6 audit, ‘Access, outcomes and opportunity for Maori students and for Pasifika students’. The topic was identified as a strategic area of priority for
all universities and is an issue of national importance. This enhancement theme was also consistent with 'System Expectation's in the Tertiary Education Strategy (2014-18) which reported that system-level performance improvement requires 'work[ing] together to improve outcomes for students and for New Zealand (p.21).

Furthermore, New Zealand’s National Centre for Tertiary Excellence, Ako Aotearoa, has strategic goals to enhance teaching and program quality in New Zealand and the Pacific. Ako Aotearoa also has an international collaborative partnership with the Advance HE [originally Higher Education Academy] which is critical in building capacity for academics in Pacific and New Zealand HE institutions to improve the quality of their teaching and program quality.

This paper will provide an overview of the findings from the Higher Education Pacific Quality (HEPQ) Project which was established in 2016-2017 to build capacity for external referencing activity across the Pacific region. Both Ako Aotearoa and AQA have closely supported the implementation and progress of the HEPQ Project. Initially, six HE institutions agreed to undertake the HEPQ Project, but two universities from Papua New Guinea withdrew due to the lack of funding. Four HE institutions [MIT, National University of Samoa (NUS), The University of the South Pacific (USP) and the University of Waikato] agreed to benchmark institutional processes in teaching quality, program quality and student voice across their institutions.

Methodology

The methodology for the HEPQ external referencing project [known as the HEPQ project] was informed by the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and e-learning (ACODE) Benchmarks for Technology Enhanced Learning (2014). The structure for institutional external referencing activity includes: a scoping statement; good practice statement; key performance indicators (KPIs); key performance measures (KPMs); rationale, rating and evidence to support the assessment; and recommendations for improvement or further development (ACODE, 2014). Each institution undertakes a self-review of each of the nominated KPIs.

The KPIs and KPMs for the HEPQ Project are outlined in Appendix A (Table 1). The KPMs for the HEPQ Project were rated by each institution as part of the self-review phase and used again in the Peer Review Workshop. The KPMs facilitate the self-review process with key questions listed under each KPI. The questions are designed to elicit information and provide guidance to review teams. The ratings for the KPMs are outlined in Appendix B.

External referencing activity at the program level was also established and included information on: the identified program of study; program coordinator; institution coordinator; and contact details. Evidence for the self-review exercise was collected through the online Peer Review Portal [See https://www.peerreviewportal.com] and themes were coded and analysed by the Project Coordinator from the University of Tasmania.

The specific aims of the HEPQ Project were to:

• Benchmark institutional processes on teaching quality; programme quality and student voice;
• Benchmark assessment inputs/outputs in a range of disciplines using the online Peer Review Portal;
• Build capacity for HE institutions to identify a gap in the self-review process and develop policy and/or process to address this gap;
• Build capacity for HE institutions including industry and regulatory agencies to participate in external referencing activity to improve their own processes;
• Build capacity for institutions to participate in external referencing activity to improve their own educational performance; and
• Develop institutional and international recommendations, evidence-based enhancement-led projects and share good practice with other HE institutions and key stakeholders.

The HEPQ Project was completed in nine months (May 2017-January 2018) with five key phases.

Phase 1 (May-July 2017): This phase was about establishing external referencing protocols and project teams with all participants in the HEPQ Project. Overall project coordination was undertaken by the University of Tasmania in Australia. This phase included each HE institution signing a collaboration agreement as well as submit payment for the coordination of the project. Each institution allocated an institutional coordinator who was responsible for organising institutional teams to begin collecting and validating the evidence for the self-review of teaching quality, program quality and student voice. There was an online demonstration of how to use the Peer Review Portal so that institutional teams could upload evidence for their self-review.

Phase 2 (June-August 2017): This phase was the self-review phase undertaken by each institution. Evidence was collected through focus groups, interviews, email and meetings. Each institutional team reviewed the evidence and mapped this to the project’s KPIs and KPMs. Institutional reviews were signed off by the senior executive responsible for oversight of the project. This phase also included meeting with faculty staff to identify programs for external peer review. Only NUS and USP undertook this external referencing phase at the discipline level, as Waikato had other internal commitments and deadlines and MIT did not participate in program review.

Phase 3 (July-October 2017): This phase was informed by Phase 2 whereby the institutional teams identified a self-improvement activity as part of the self-review exercise. This phase focused on a needed ‘strategic change’ that was identified during the self-review and which had a scope which was manageable and achievable by the end of the project. Each institution provided a presentation on this strategic change activity as part of the Peer Review Workshop.

Phase 4 (6-7 November 2017): The international Peer Review Workshop was held at MIT’s campus in Auckland. A critical feature of this workshop was the importance of strategic networking, not only with the four institutions discussed above but also representatives from HE organisations in the Pacific. Representatives that attended the workshop came from the tertiary sector and regulatory agencies [such as the Tertiary Education Commission, Samoan Qualifications Authority, Fiji Higher Education Commission, and local New Zealand Government] were included in discussions on key challenges as well as areas of good practice across the Pacific.

Day 1 of the Peer Review Workshop was undertaken by the HE institutions only, so that they had time to discuss and present their institution’s findings but also compare with each other the KPIs and KPMs in a reflective and cooperative way. Day 2 of the workshop showcased each institution’s different contexts and demographics as well as their shared learnings and key challenges to the other HE sector representatives. There was also a group Talanoa to discuss the key challenges across the Pacific and how to move forward on these challenges as an external reference group. Observations of the two-day workshop were noted and discussed by Emeritus Prof Sheelagh Matear, Executive Director for AQA. An evaluation of
the workshop was also undertaken to inform improvements on external referencing activity for future projects.

**Phase 5 (December 2017-January 2018):** A draft Final Report with institutional and international recommendations, areas for sharing and good practice was sent to the four participating institutions and Ako Aotearoa for feedback. The Final Report was shared with key representatives from the HE organisations that participated in the project. A copy of the Final Report is available on the Ako Aotearoa website [Go to: https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/hepq/research-report-higher-education-pacific-quality-benchmarking-project/].

**Findings**

The HEPQ project involved the comparison of four HE institution's missions and contexts [MIT, USP, NUS, and Waikato] which varied in size and diversity from 3,500 to 20,490 students and 377 to 1,670 staff, however, they were comparable at the time they were established [1964-1987]. Three of the institutions were universities and one was an Institute of Technology and Polytechnic (ITP). What become apparent during the Peer Review Workshop was that the diverse institutional contexts plus the various quality contexts [for e.g. AQA, FHEC, SQA and NZQA] brought out similarities but also differences because of their respective quality frameworks and regulations. The key themes identified at the Peer Review Workshop are provided in Table 3 in the Appendices.

The key outcomes from the HEPQ Project included: an international Peer Review Workshop and documentation; individual strategic change projects across four institutions; and a Final Report with 4 international recommendations, 31 institutional recommendations for improvement and 22 areas for sharing.

Two international recommendations put forward (See Table 4 in the Appendices) by the workshop participants which related to the two key points: 1) international benchmarking of programs in the Pacific region to ensure mutual recognition of learning as well as capacity building for academic staff in external review; and 2) a working model for collaboration to address shared strategic challenges in higher education.

This paper argues that HE institutions across the Pacific region need to be urgently provided with opportunities to build capacity to undertake external referencing activity to: 1) improve the overall quality of teaching across the institution; 2) and improve the achievement of student learning outcomes. A key discussion point at the Peer Review Workshop was the importance of mutual recognition of learning across different HE quality assurance contexts as the Pacific HE institutions face challenges around their graduate students’ admission into international universities, particularly in Australia and New Zealand. In turn, educational outcomes significantly impact on economic outcomes for the Pacific region.

This paper puts forward a working model (Matear & Booth, 2017) for collaborating on key challenges in the HE sector (See Figure 1 in Appendices) which involves the establishment of an annual Higher Education Pacific Collaborative Exchange Forum [HEPCEF] for HE institutions, quality agencies and industry and disciplinary organisations in the Pacific region and partner countries to benchmark, compare and share practice. This forum would also include external referencing projects which had a systems or themed approach which was agreed by the Pacific region. The QA agencies would become enablers in the HE sector for facilitating quality improvement projects in partnership with HE institutions.
Conclusion

HE institutions in the Pacific are explicitly linked to the region’s strategic imperatives (economic, social, cultural and educational). To build access, equity and capacity for all Pacific learners and teachers, HE institutions need to collaborate to strengthen the Pacific region as a global player in higher education. External referencing and peer review are essentially an evidence-based approach based on rigorous discussion and calibration with peers. This paper has provided one example of a working model for building capacity for key stakeholders from diverse contexts to collaborate on key challenges in the HE sector which have institutional, regional and international recommendations and actions for the Pacific and New Zealand. As one institutional participant noted in their evaluation,

‘It was extremely helpful and thought-provoking to share our experiences as well as learn from the good practice of our partner organisations. It is also exciting to think about what can come out of this network. I particularly like the sense of a “Pacific learning community” that is emerging from this project.’

Added to this, one QA agency representative noted, ‘We need to look at strategic discussions for the improvement and empowerment of HEIs, making the QA agencies enablers in the HE sector and the Pacific brothers and sisters in developing policies and sharing knowledge.’

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the commitment, support and effort from Ako Aotearoa and the four participating higher education institutions involved in this research project. All participants did so in a spirit of collaboration, openness and professionalism.
References


Appendix A
Key Performance Indicators and Measures for the HEPQ Project

Table 1

*Key Performance Indicators and Measures for the HEPQ Project*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI: 1.1 Support for teaching staff in teaching quality and course quality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 1.1 Does your institution provide professional development to teaching staff on learning and teaching?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 1.2 Does your institution have in place processes to support program coordinators and program teams on program review and professional accreditation activities?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 1.3 Does your institution have in place processes for teaching staff to work with industry representatives on program quality and professional accreditation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 1.4 Does your institution have in place processes to evaluate learning and teaching?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI: 2 Process for reward and recognition of teaching staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 2.1 Does your institution have an institutional process for rewarding and recognising teaching staff?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 2.2 Does your institution have external [national/international] processes in place for rewarding and recognising teaching?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>KPI: 3 Processes to support student voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 3.1 To what extent is the student voice embedded in your institution’s processes and structures?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 3.2 What evidence shows that student voice has made a difference to decisions and to the quality of provision?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 3.3 Does your institution encourage students to have an active and independent student voice?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 3.4 How does your institution demonstrate that it is listening to student voice? Do you consult students early in decision making processes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KPM: 3.5 Are student representatives trained, supported, well informed and prepared for their role?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix B

Ratings for KPMs

#### Table 2

*Ratings for KPMs*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Effective strategies are implemented successfully</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Yes, but</td>
<td>Good strategies in place, some limitations or some further improvement needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>No, but</td>
<td>This area hasn’t been effectively addressed, but some work is being done</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No effective strategies, e.g. not addressed, addressed only in isolated pockets, notionally addressed but major barriers to implementation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix C

Peer Review Workshop Key Themes

**Table 3**

**Peer Review Workshop Key Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
<th>Areas of Good Practice</th>
<th>Areas for Improvement/Further Development</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Teaching quality       | • Comprehensive processes in place to support program review and professional accreditation activities  
                             • Each institution had program advisory committees which included industry, national and international experts  
                             • Policies and plans to support the evaluation of learning and teaching; the administration of evaluation of learning and teaching across the institution | • Ongoing staff participation and engagement in professional development activities. |
| Reward and recognition | • Vice-Chancellor’s award and other awards  
                             • Promotion process which recognises teaching excellence | • Lack of reward and recognition in learning and teaching at the international level for Pacific universities |
| Student voice          | • Student voice is embedded in regulations and policies; student evaluation processes; student membership on University committees and Council; Student Associations and class representative systems; and University Management meetings | • Strengthening student voice for Maori and Pasifika students  
                             • Significant gap in the support and preparation of student representatives on committees |
| Program quality        |                                                                                         | • Strengthening external referencing of programs across the Pacific and internationally |
### Appendix D

**International recommendations**

**Table 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>International recommendations</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation#1:</strong> Develop explicit processes for the formal recognition of programs for Pacific universities in association with other countries [such as New Zealand and Australia]. As part of this recommendation, provide training for peer review of programs for participating Pacific and New Zealand universities using the Peer Review Portal, so that there is consistency in all program reviews which are connected to international networks for review.</td>
<td>AQA, TEC, SQA, FHEC, TEQSA, NZQA Participating Pacific, New Zealand and Australian universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Recommendation#4:</strong> Consideration be given to developing a working model for collaboration across HE stakeholders in quality in the Pacific region. Part of this consideration would include the development of an annual Higher Education Pacific Quality [HEPQ] Exchange Workshop across the Pacific to discuss shared strategic challenges in higher education quality assurance, including input from a range of key HE stakeholders.</td>
<td>AQA, TEC, SQA, FHEC, TEQSA, NZQA Participating Pacific, New Zealand and Australian universities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E

Working Model for Collaborating on Key Challenges in HE

*Figure 1. Working Model for Collaborating on Key Challenges in HE (Matear & Booth, 2017)*
About the Author

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Director, Academic

Online Peer Solutions Pty Ltd

Dr Sara Booth has worked at the University of Tasmania with strategic oversight of quality assurance and external referencing activities. She is now part of a virtual team working on the implementation of the Peer Review Portal across the higher education sector. The Peer Review Portal has been endorsed by TEQSA as an online support mechanism for external referencing activity and curriculum review.
Failing the future: are Australia’s MBA programs up to the climate change challenge? Initial investigations

Dr Lorne Butt
Professor Elizabeth More, AM

Australian Institute of Management Business School

Abstract

A key question within the climate change context is whether aspiring business managers and leaders have the knowledge and skills to lead the scale of organisational transformation required to respond to the risks and opportunities of climate change. Analysis of adoption of the International Financial Stability Board’s Recommendations on Climate-Related Financial Disclosure squarely focuses on the Australian corporate sector’s failure in relation to climate change adaptation responsibilities. However, little attention appears to be focused on how education institutions’ business programs are responding to the challenges of climate change adaptation by ensuring curriculum evolves in step with how business itself needs to transform. The Sustainable Development Goals and Principles for Responsible Management Education provide the context within which it is imperative that Australian business education providers respond to climate change adaptation and business transformation pressures.

With a focus on the MBA and EMBA qualifications, this initial investigation presents the results of a systematic review of Australian higher education program curricula, exploring the extent to which higher education institutions are ensuring that postgraduate business education programs are responding to the climate change adaptation challenge. A case example from the Australian Institute of Management Business School MBA Program is also presented. The Leading for Innovation and Sustainability elective is designed specifically to support aspiring business managers and leaders to learn about the risks and opportunities of climate change, why adaptation is at the core of efforts to transform business strategy and models, and the leadership capabilities required to effect business transformation efforts of this magnitude.

Key Words: climate change, MBA, higher education
Introduction

“Sustainability is no longer a target. It’s everything” | Peri Macdonald, Executive General Manager Retail, Frasers Property Australia (2018)

Background to the research

Recent research indicates that humanity is causing changes to the Earth System at 170 times faster than large-scale planetary systems such as earthquakes – this is roughly equivalent to a meteor strike and may herald the introduction of a new geological age – the Anthropocene (Gaffney and Steffen, 2017). The Earth System is shifting in ways without precedent in human history (Hamilton, 2017; Carrington, 2018).

The 2007 Stern Review concluded that the cost of stabilising a climate impacted by rapid human-induced change would be high, and the cost of delaying action higher, equivalent ‘to losing at least 5% of global GDP each year’, and potentially rising to ‘20% of GDP or more’ (Stern, 2007, pp xv-xvi). However, the Stern Review’s message appears to have gone largely unheeded. In 2017, the International Task Force on Climate-Related Disclosures noted that climate change remains ‘one of the most significant, and perhaps most misunderstood, risks that organisations face today’, citing a 2015 study published by the Economist Intelligent Unit which estimated that the value of the ‘total global stock of manageable assets…at risk as a result of climate change…to range from $4.2 trillion to $43 trillion between now and the end of the century’ (Watts, 2015, cited in Task Force on Climate Related Disclosures, 2017). Whether the findings of the Task Force resonate with organisations is also debatable – the previous decade has seen an extraordinary level of irresponsible business practice, manifested in a range of banking, insurance and finance scandals, with the apogee being the Global Financial Crisis of 2007. As Gittins noted in 2017 ‘the world is still picking through the wreckage, deciding what should be kept and what dispensed with. What needs to be done differently to restore normality and ensure there’s never another disaster like that one’.

The same behaviour and practices that resulted in the near-collapse of the global economy also appear to be manifest in the global response to the impacts of a rapidly changing climate – particularly in Australia. While Smee (2018) notes that many Australian organisations are adopting renewable energy – in some cases 100% – Cox (2018) reports that overall, Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions ‘continue to soar’. The Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Reference Committee (2018, p10) has identified climate change as a ‘current and existential national security risk’, with clear threats to human health, and the viability of communities, business and the broader economy (Doherty, 2018). Vincent (2017, p1) comments that generally ‘…mis- or non-management of climate risk is rampant in corporate Australia’.

This raises the question of how those responsible for the governance, leadership and management of business and industry are being educated about the risks and opportunities posed by rapid human-induced climate change, and how they can reposition their organisations to meet the challenges these risk and opportunities present. The transformation of business models and performance standards is critical to envisioning and realising sustainable futures (Sukhdev, 2012; Gore, 2013; Visser, 2015; Nimbalker et al., 2018), within a broader context of the need for more responsible business practice by a wide array of organisations, not just in relation to climate change impacts. However, management education – particularly MBA programs – is rightly criticised for its contribution to the status
Quo and questions continue to be raised about the ongoing role of business schools in a rapidly changing world (for example, Adombent et al., 2014; Boon et al., 2015; Parker, 2018). Where efforts are being made by providers of business education to make curriculum more responsive to global issues, these efforts face the twin difficulties of persistent diffusion of misinformation about climate change, and inadequate political support to change energy strategy and policy (for example, Hess and Collins, 2018). Sterling (2014, p90) observed that:

“...in the sustainable development debate, the key role of education in realizing sustainable development is often ignored, downplayed and underestimated – or viewed in isolation from the other instruments of change...education is rarely regarded as a major factor in making the world more sustainable, and its potential is overlooked”.

Most Australian and many international higher education business and management programs are mired in a dominant instrumental pedagogy. While some progress has occurred, integration of sustainability issues (including development, production, consumption and entrepreneurship) into business education programs is an area requiring significant improvement (for example, Wiek et al., 2011; Tilbury et al., 2005; Sterling, 2014; Gupta and Vegelin, 2016; Cullen, 2017; Jorge et al., 2017; Parker, 2018; Thistlethwaite and Wood, 2018). Graduating more socially responsible MBA graduates remains a central challenge in business schools (for example, Adombent et al., 2014; Manning, 2017; Parker, 2018). In addition to the general failure to integrate broad issues of sustainability education with business education, the literature indicates there is little evidence that business education programs are responding to the specific need for graduates to understand, and be able to operationalise, the risks and opportunities of climate change as examined by Stern (2007), Watts (2015), the Task Force on Climate Related Disclosures (2017) and others. Jorge et al. (2017, p2) provide evidence to suggest that ‘business schools included in the Financial Times ranking have not changed their view based on a shareholder approach, which is focused on providing an economics-centred training’.

The Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME) were developed in 2007 to provide a voluntary framework for responsible leadership, and their intent is echoed in the 17 Sustainable Development Goals adopted in 2015. The PRME focus on six areas (PRME, 2018):

1. **Purpose:** we will develop the capabilities of students to be future generators of sustainable value for business and society at large and to work for an inclusive and sustainable global economy.

2. **Values:** we will incorporate into our academic activities, curricula, and organisational practices the values of global social responsibility as portrayed in international initiatives such as the United Nations (UN) Global Compact.

3. **Method:** we will create educational frameworks, materials, processes and environments that enable effective learning experiences for responsible leadership.

4. **Research:** we will engage in conceptual and empirical research that advances our understanding about the role, dynamics, and impact of corporations in the creation of sustainable social, environmental and economic value.
5. Partnership: we will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.

6. Dialogue: we will interact with managers of business corporations to extend our knowledge of their challenges in meeting social and environmental responsibilities and to explore jointly effective approaches to meeting these challenges.

The voluntary principles – with over 720 signatories worldwide – provide a framework for educating future managers and leaders about successfully combining profitability, sustainability and social justice (O’Connell and Sweeney, 2015). Signatories are required to submit progress reports every two years, and may be removed from the list of signatories if the PRME does not view progress in implementing the principles, and reporting on same, as satisfactory.

As business and industry must change, so does higher education need to change how it prepares the business leaders of the future. Voluntary principles such as the PRME are an important step, yet they are insufficient on their own to challenge ‘today’s dominant neoliberal paradigm’, which ‘pervades the vast majority of schools with its narrative of profit maximisation, free markets and limited government. Its proponents view competition, growth and consumerism as the defining characteristics of society’ (Laszlo et al., 2017, p108) – despite the increasingly severe impacts and associated risks of rapid human-induced climate warning (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2018).

As Laszlo et al. (2017, p108) notes, ‘in contrast, the emerging and inchoate “economy in service to life” narrative aims at freedom and dignity for all achieved through shared well-being on a healthy planet. Business schools are increasingly caught between these narratives or paradigms’. Surely, as these authors emphasise, we have a duty to ensure that our management students understand their responsibilities as managers and leaders to learn of the ecological limits to growth and understand climate change and sustainability as core to the success of individuals, societies, and business; and the integrity of the wider socio-ecological system. Consequently, a program level outcome of being a PRME signatory business school must be to develop students as global leaders for building a sustainable world (Sroufe et al., 2014).

**Research Scope and Questions**

This initial investigation aims to explore the extent to which aspects of climate change and sustainable development are evident in postgraduate business course information available in the public domain. This investigation is the first part of a multi-component study investigating the extent to which generic Master of Business Administration (MBA) and Executive Master of Business Administration (EMBA) program curricula in Australia integrate climate change adaptation content from both strategic and operational perspectives.

MBA and EMBA qualifications offered by Australian higher education providers (HEPs) registered under the *Higher Education Standards Framework* (2015) and approved by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) as self-accrediting institutions are selected as the focus of this initial investigation, given:
1. The sustained popularity of the MBA in particular as the postgraduate business education program of choice, and the resources invested in global (Financial Times Top 100, The Economist Top 100, QS Top MBA, Forbes Best International Business Schools) and local (Graduate Management Association of Australia, BOSS MBA and EMBA) ranking systems (Byrne, 2014; mbanews, 2018; Ortmans, 2018; Pozniak, 2018); and

2. The fact that self-accrediting providers have control over, and responsibility for, their program curricula.

This exploratory phase does not examine climate change adaptation from the perspective of faculty professional development; conduct a systematic investigation of constructed alignment within units, or between units in the overall course structure (for example, Biggs and Tang, 2011); or investigate curricula at overseas universities operating in Australia, or non-self-accrediting HEPs. The investigation does not examine MBA or EMBA programs that are offered in specialisation mode only.

Research Questions

From the perspective of course information available in the public domain:

1. To what extent do Australian MBA qualifications integrate climate change adaptation content into curricula? How?

2. To what extent do Australian EMBA qualifications integrate climate change adaptation content into curricula? How?

3. Where climate change adaptation content has been integrated into curricula, is the focus of integration content, teaching and learning activity, assessment and/or learning outcomes?

Methodology

Research Approach

The investigation primarily adopted a cross-sectional design, which supports the collection of data (MBA and EMBA program curricula content) across a large number of cases (self-accrediting Australian HEPs) at a single point in time (Bryman and Bell, 2015). The study also presents a case example from the Australian Institute of Management Business School (AIMBS) MBA program. While the investigation is primarily qualitative in nature, there are quantitative elements to the data collection and analysis, and consequently a mixed methods approach was adopted in order to maximise the degree of insight into the research questions (for example, Moran-Ellis et al, 2006; Bryman and Bell, 2015).

Data Collection Part 1: Critical Review

A critical review was conducted of the website-based coursework curricula content of the 40 self-accrediting Australian HEPs as listed on the TEQSA National Register for Providers and Courses that offer MBA and EMBA programs. The sample is purposive in nature, with direct reference to the research questions, and criterion-based in approach (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Of the 40 HEPs examined, four were excluded due to the non-generic/specialised
nature of their MBA/EMBA programs, leaving 36 HEPs for review. Source material utilised for the review included course and unit descriptions publicly available on HEP websites, including course outlines/guidelines and handbook entries where these were available. Active core and elective units were examined.

Data Collection Part 2: Unit Case Study

A brief case study is presented for the elective unit Leading for Innovation and Sustainability in the AIMBS MBA program. The case study incorporates evaluation of aggregated unit evaluation data to provide the student perspective on the unit. Unit evaluation data incorporates both open comment, and Likert responses to a series of questions about teaching and resources – aggregated data ensures that no student can be individually identified.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was originally proposed to be undertaken on the program curricula and unit evaluation open comment using Leximancer v4.5. Leximancer is able to analyse natural language text data and uses algorithms to identify concepts and create thematic networks. However, initial exploratory analysis using Leximancer on the MBA and EMBA content for two of the universities (both top-10 ranked Australian universities, with two of the oldest business schools in the sector) indicated insufficient content for Leximancer to be able to generate meaningful concept and thematic networks. A further attempt to refine the input data using the Kill Concept function in Leximancer (to remove non-related concepts such as ‘study’, ‘unit’, ‘outline’, ‘handbook’ and ‘students’) did not improve the analytical quality. A decision was then made to adopt a systematic matrix review approach to the curriculum content analysis, using the following search terminology derived from the literature: ‘sustainability’, ‘sustainable development’, ‘climate change’, ‘ethics, corporate social responsibility’, ‘CSR’, ‘resilience’, ‘Anthropocene’, ‘Planetary Boundaries’, ‘Great Acceleration’, ‘responsible leadership’ and ‘risk’. Copies of relevant content have been retained in a dataset for further analysis as part of the next steps of the multi-component study.

Unit evaluation data was also insufficient to support meaningful conceptual analysis (n=10), with students providing only brief comment in both formal and informal feedback processes. Selected quotes are provided to illustrate student views on LIS.

Descriptive statistics were prepared using Excel for Likert response unit evaluation data, in order to examine the level of agreement or disagreement with statements on teaching and unit resources that are relevant to this study.

Case Study: Leading for Innovation and Sustainability

LIS is a multidisciplinary 10-week elective within the ABS MBA. It is delivered via online, face to face or blended delivery, and supports both synchronous and asynchronous learning with students as social participants (Hrastinski, 2008). LIS aims to provide students with the leadership skills to be able to critically evaluate how broad concepts and practices of sustainability, innovation and resilience can enable organisations to redesign their strategy,
business systems and operating models to adopt a more responsible and transparent approach to how they design and develop products, processes and services. Exploration of and reflection on students’ own leadership style is a critical component of the unit.

LIS comprises 10 topics as per the unit schedule in Table 1.

### Table 1

**LIS Topic Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Week 1</th>
<th>Week 2</th>
<th>Week 3</th>
<th>Week 4</th>
<th>Week 5</th>
<th>Week 6</th>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>Week 8</th>
<th>Week 9</th>
<th>Week 10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

The unit content is anchored to four threshold concepts, described by Biggs and Tang (2011, pp 83-84) as those that ‘relate previously disparate ideas, and that give students a broader view of the subject’ and which ‘changes the learner’s perception of a range of ideas’:

- **The Anthropocene, Planetary Boundaries and The Great Acceleration**: students are introduced to the ‘Big Science’ underpinning the changing face of our world, the magnitude of humanity’s impact on the Earth System, particularly in terms of climate change, and the extent to which human influence on Earth is now exceeding that exerted by planetary systems such as earthquakes and volcanoes – this system state is without precedence in human history (Waters et. al., 2016; Gaffney and Steffen, 2017; Hamilton, 2017;

- **Sustainability, Responsible Business and Sustainable Innovation**: these concepts encompass the complex systems understanding of sustainability (rather than simply ‘going green’), and the need for business to adopt a transformative approach to its strategy, business systems and operating models that integrates environmental and social considerations into the design of processes, products and services to ensure a long-range capacity to respond to opportunities and threats within a context of increasing uncertainty (Hargadon, 2015; Visser, 2015);

- **Sustainability Leadership**: constructs of sustainability leadership focus on long-term performance, creation of integrated value and importantly, integrate environmental
and social stakeholders into the leadership decision-making paradigm (for example, Avery and Bergsteiner, 2010);

- **Sustainability Worldviews**: moving away from simplistic conceptualisations of ‘humans are more important’ or ‘nature is more important’ and accompanying arguments of right and wrong, towards a deeper appreciation of holism (for example, Visser, 2015; Davis and Stroink, 2016).

LIS has been redesigned to shift its focus from standard definitions of sustainability, to a deep investigation of concepts of sustainable practice, innovation, leadership, responsible business, social change and organisational transformation. Supporting students to reflect on their own leadership style and personal brand was a key evolution of the unit’s pedagogy. A further update in late 2017 incorporated a stronger focus on integration of business strategy and operations with the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals, innovative value creation, and curative practice.

The 2018 update during January – May has focused on improving the constructive alignment within the Structure of the Observed Learning Outcome (SOLO) taxonomy (Biggs and Tang, 2011), of the unit in terms of its learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, assessment tasks and marking rubrics.

**Results**

**Critical Review**

The critical review of MBA and EMBA curricula revealed some initial results of concern. Review of program information available in the public domain indicated that:

- None of the 36 HEPs referred to climate change risks, impacts or adaptation in program descriptors. Only three referred to ‘climate change’ in general terms in unit descriptors - two of these were elective units, and one was a core unit.

- None of the 36 HEPs referred to the Anthropocene, resilience or the Great Acceleration in unit descriptors, while only one referred to Planetary Boundaries (in a core unit).

- Of the 45 MBA and EMBA courses examined in terms of publicly available course and unit descriptions, in one or more units:
  - 51% refer to ‘sustainability’;
  - 29% refer to ‘sustainable development’;
  - 31% refer to ‘responsible leadership’;
  - 87% refer to ‘ethics’;
  - 56% refer to ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’.

- Of the 257 units incorporating one or more of the search terms above, 141 (55%) were core units, and 116 (45%) were electives.

- Of the 257 units incorporating one or more of the search terms above, 44% were predominantly concerned with issues of ethics, which were not necessarily related to issues of sustainability or sustainable development.

- 34 of the 45 programs examined were MBAs, and 11 EMBAs. At the program level, MBAs tended to incorporate descriptors in both core and elective units across the
range of search terms above to a greater extent than EMBA programs. At least one EMBA program did not contain any descriptors, in any unit, related to sustainability, sustainable development, ethics, responsible leadership or Corporate Social Responsibility.

- Only five of the 45 programs reviewed – all MBAs – incorporated all of the search terms ‘sustainability’, ‘sustainable development’, ‘responsible leadership’, ‘ethics’ and ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ across the full program structure in core or elective units.
- Only one program – an MBA – required all students to undertake a capstone unit in ethics and sustainability.

Case Study

Only a small number of evaluation survey results were obtained for the initial phase of this project (n=10). However, the results give a preliminary indication of student opinion about their experience studying LIS (refer Table 2). Open comment feedback tended to focus positively on the capabilities of the LIS facilitators rather than the content itself, commenting on facilitators’ knowledgeability, and ability to make LIS a thought-provoking learning experience. However, some students provided additional feedback on further reflection:

“...if we don’t start instilling that responsibility for sustainability, who’s going to?”

“...it’s really obviously challenged me personally...it’s so much bigger than just the environment”

“...the most challenging unit in my MBA so far”

“...one of the more fulfilling [units] from a learning perspective”

“...it is one of the most enjoyable, interesting and thought-provoking units I have done so far...I have changed the way I look at new projects as a result of this unit”

Table 2

LIS Evaluation Feedback (n=10)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>No response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator explained ideas and concepts clearly</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator encouraged my active participation in the unit</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator was</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
approachable and responded to student needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Facilitator demonstrated quality teaching</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Timely and useful feedback on my work</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching resources were useful to my study</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Research Questions

This research project set out to answer the following questions from a perspective of initial investigation of program information available in the public domain:

1. To what extent do Australian MBA qualifications integrate climate change adaptation content into curricula? How?

2. To what extent do Australian EMBA qualifications integrate climate change adaptation content into curricula? How?

3. Where climate change adaptation content has been integrated into curricula, is the focus of integration content, teaching and learning activity, assessment and/or learning outcomes?

The critical review provides an early indication that, based on assessment of publicly available information, self-accrediting Australian HEPs do not appear to be integrating explicit climate change adaptation content into either MBA or EMBA curricula. Given the importance of business, industry and government in supporting climate change adaptation, and their vulnerability to same as a result of the risks to organisations and communities from climate change impacts, it would be concerning if further research substantiated this early indication that the higher education sector does not appear to be responding to the extent needed to support the leaders and managers of both today and the future to develop the capabilities to build organisational and community resilience in the face of the impacts of rapid, human-induced climate change. This is not about putting recycling bins in the office or installing solar panels on the roof – valuable as these activities are, they are not the education required and responses needed in the face of the level of risk posed by the magnitude of climate change that is impacting the Earth System as a result of human activity.

Contributions to Learning and Teaching

This initial investigation highlights a potential gap in the development of postgraduate business education by self-accrediting Australian HEPs, specifically in relation to two of the
most popular programs – the MBA and the EMBA. There is an urgent need for postgraduate business education programs to be more responsive to the critical issues facing organisations and communities in the face of climate change impacts.

This investigation also provides some anecdotal evidence of interest for the LIS teaching team as to how students have experienced the unit. However, while it is important for facilitators to receive positive feedback about their delivery of the unit through a variety of avenues, there is clearly more work to be done in increasing student responses to evaluation events in order to obtain comprehensive, formal feedback from students about their LIS learning journey.

Ethical Issues, Privacy and Confidentiality

This research has been conducted with the approval of the ABS Research Committee (19 April 2018).

Limitations on the Research and Future Directions

The scope of this exploratory work was limited to information about MBA and EMBA programs available in the public domain, in part to ensure the research could be completed within the required timescale. The next phase of the research will involve conducting semi-structured interviews with AIMBS faculty and experts in the field, to obtain further insights into the findings of this first phase of research. Interviews with AIMBS Alumni, including those who did and did not undertake LIS, could generate additional insights and value; and also support the LIS teaching team to continue to develop the unit, and understand more about how students have benefited from undertaking the unit / what learnings they have applied in their lives and professions.

The scope of the research can also be expanded to other programs within the postgraduate business education context, including international business, accounting, supply chain and finance; MBA and EMBA specialist programs; and also to undergraduate business education programs as well.

Conclusion

The impacts of rapid, human-induced climate change on business and society are real. Learning process must change in order to grow the sustainability paradigm and acceptance of climate change. As Pinker (2017) emphasises – the twin challenges today are climate change and nuclear war. That education must play its part in ensuring the world can address these challenges is recognised globally, most recently through the establishment of Agenda 2030 – Transforming Our World, and the creation of the UN 17 Sustainable Development Goals, in 2015 (UN Sustainable Development Knowledge Platform, 2018; UN Sustainable Development Goals, 2018). However, Sterling (2014) argues that ESD must move from the dominant models that are the legacy of the UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) – transactional (learning factual content) and transmissive (more interactive and participative) – to a transformative approach, which ‘leads to deeper personal and social change’ (Sterling, 2014, p. 91).
This initial investigation indicates a potential lack of effort being devoted to integrating explicit content on climate change adaptation, risk and opportunity into MBA and EMBA programs offered by self-accrediting Australian HEPs. Further, while program information available in the public domain highlights issues of ethics, sustainability and Corporate Social Responsibility in curricula, there appears to be less attention paid to issues of sustainable development and responsible leadership.

The LIS case study presented as part of this initial investigation incorporated anecdotal evidence that shed some individual insights into student views of their learning journey in this unit. However, the teaching team needs to continue to work on strategies to increase responses to formal evaluation events to gain more comprehensive feedback on the LIS student experience.

Business schools are being accused of failing to educate future leaders and provide clarity on key competencies and curricula redesign (for example, Adombent et al., 2014). Yvon Chouinard, founder of Patagonia, noted in 2006 ‘if you want to understand the entrepreneur, study the juvenile delinquent. The delinquent is saying with his actions “This sucks. I’m going to do my own thing”’. This initial investigation indicates that, potentially, students might also decide that business schools “suck”, and it might be time to “do their own thing”. While the entrepreneurial spirit is to be encouraged, business schools may need examine what changes they need to make in order to ensure their students do not adopt Chouinard’s advice as a result of dissatisfaction with their learning experiences.
References


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Governing for Quality Assurance: from good practice to best practice to excellence?

Associate Professor Graham Forsyth

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Abstract

Australian universities are increasingly operating in complex and evolving governance environments, which use protocols and standards to mandate minimum expectation across a wide range of areas, from financial processes to information management. In any regulatory environment, there can be a tension between the management of risk through mandating of protocols, policies and procedures and the more general goal of supporting excellence. This tension plays out not merely as higher education institutions engage with the Higher Education Standards Framework, but also internally as the formal role of Academic Boards to define and maintain quality standards becomes increasingly disconnected from a whole range of university activities and strategic imperatives.

This paper will explore the ways in which notions of excellence are re-framed in processes of academic governance, and address opportunities (and risks) for excellence in governance. In particular, it will look at the impact of some of the key disruptors in the sector; which include internationalisation, increased competition, and the use of partnerships, alliances, and joint ventures. Each of these has the impact of “unbundling of the university”, as Collis has put it, making the formal governance of the university increasingly disconnected and less able to play a significant role in supporting excellence in an agile and disrupted world.

Keywords: Academic governance, Higher Education Standards Framework, quality assurance, risk
Introduction

Higher education institutions in Australia, and internationally, are increasingly subject to powerful forces of disruption. The complexity of new technologies, increasingly diverse student cohorts, competition from both the sector and new private players, globalisation, and the growing ‘outsourcing’ of teaching through partnerships, alliances, and joint ventures, all challenge the capacities of institutional decision-making processes overall. More particularly, these disruptive forces provide a fresh focus for debates around conceptions of academic governance and the ways in which conceptions of academic governance, which are largely mandated in Australia through the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 [HESF], are fit for purpose and supporting academic quality and excellence in an environment of disruption, innovation and change.

It is commonplace to argue that the standard concept of academic governance is slow, inefficient, and unresponsive to the environment (Kezar, 2005), with Academic Boards who are charged with a key role in academic governance by the HESF, being seen as obstructions to rapid decision-making, limiting agility and out-of-step with contemporary models of corporate governance (Tomar, 2007; Kezar, 2005). Made up, at least partly, by academics whose areas of expertise are in specific and often technical disciplines, and working within frameworks of collegiality and consensus, Academic Boards can seem incapable of the rapid and strategic decision making required in this disruptive environment. One consequence is the perception that the most important decisions occur outside the formal governance structure (Tierney, 2004), and although in Australia this is limited through the requirements of the HESF and the Federal Government’s Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency [TEQSA] compliance checking, it is also true that many key decisions are taken at the level of management and bypass the formal academic governance processes.

This paper will explore the ways in which formal (HESF-mandated) and informal notions of academic governance are being challenged. And it will argue that the challenge is more complex than simply one of management vs. governance, or business models vs. academic standards. Notions of quality built into Standards 6.3.1 and 6.3.2 are increasingly contested and themselves disrupted by expanded notions of quality, opportunity and excellence that are emerging. In this emerging context the question is how to make the formal governance of the university connected and able to play a significant role in supporting excellence in an agile and disrupted world.

Governance in Higher Education Institutions

TEQSA has described academic governance as “the framework of policies, structures, relationships, systems and processes that collectively provide leadership to and oversight of a higher education provider’s academic activities (teaching, learning and scholarship, and research, and research training if applicable) at an institutional level” (TEQSA, 2017). TEQSA explicitly narrows this from a broader sense of governance that would include the tripartite relationships between academic boards and corporate governance and management by focusing on the Academic Board, although it does allow for a wider variety of academic structures that are measured by their activities and not just their composition:
“The collective oversight of the academic community is usually exercised through a single body (e.g. an academic board, with or without sub-committees) and/or a variety of other structures (e.g. faculty boards, teaching and learning committees or course advisory committees). [TEQSA, 2017]

Oversight is defined as the central task of academic governance by the HESF. Standard 6.3.1 requires that a Board provide “effective academic oversight”, and “monitor” benchmarks for academic quality. Standard 6.3.2 provides a set of areas of operation for this oversight, such as course approvals, academic and research integrity, and academic policy. These fundamental areas are also broadened out to incorporate the quality of academic activities, the effectiveness of educational innovations and academic risks.

Challenges to Effective Governance

Although in some ways the Standards are deliberately general, such as stating that academic governance has the authority and responsibility to advise corporate governance and management on “academic matters” (HESF Standard 6.3.1d), which is broad enough to incorporate emerging issues, it is not necessarily clear that the standards do provide an appropriate framework for academic governance to address some of the emerging and potentially disruptive issues and challenges that will be discussed below.

There are three aspects to this. One aspect stems from what Winchester has argued is the need for institutions to catch-up even with the expectations built into the standards (Winchester, 1007, p.179). Winchester’s four “areas of difficulty” in implementation of the Standards are academic leadership, educational innovation and academic delegations and academic risk. Each of these are relatively new to the required Standards and a step beyond the standard academic board activities of course and policy approval. Academic risk is a particular concern to Winchester, as “there appeared to be little general understanding of academic risks, or of their potential impact” (Winchester, 2017, p.180). However, even here she expects an integration of academic risk into academic governance to become standard over the next decade.

Secondly, the very openness of the Standards has tended to mean that some of the historic tensions between administrative decision making and academic decision making have been unresolved, and the pressure to narrow academic governance has continued. Administrative authority is usually clearly delineated by delegations of authority from Councils, and by ‘positional authority’ (Baird, 2007), ultimately derived from legal authority (Toma, 2007,58). On the other hand, academic governance, even taking into account the HESF Standards, relies on committees with a mix of management expertise and discipline-specific expertise in their members, and on cultural assumptions as to what is considered relevant to academic oversight as opposed to administrative decision making. As Baird has put it:

Despite the powers assigned to academic boards, internal university governance structures which rely on expert authority appear to be struggling to compete with those based on positional authority (or a combination of positional and expert authority). (Baird 2007, p.112)
The pressure to narrow academic governance, even where the Standards seem to mandate academic authority, derives largely from the fact that most models of academic governance sit poorly with the accountabilities and responsibilities needed to manage complex and often large institutions and are also largely out of step with the corporate structures and cultures that are predominate outside the academy (Toma, 2007; Gayle et al., 2003). Contemporary focus on the need for agile organisations with rapid decision-making processes and just-in-time outcomes also has tended to ensure institutions err on the side of restricting the purview of their Academic Board rather than expand it.

Thirdly, and following on from the last aspect, are changing paradigms for what can be understood as an ‘academic matter’ [Standard 6.3.1d], which will be the focus for the remainder of the paper. Two related conceptions of the contemporary university are relevant here. One is the notion of “peripheral activity”, developed by Toma to describe “the significant expansion of activity at the periphery of institutions of all types, including academic programs” (Toma, 2007, p.57) and the other is the notion of “unbundling”, developed by Craig, using models from software development, telecommunications and television, to describe the “unbundling” of higher education, so that “universities will have to transition from selling degrees to unbundling or providing “Education-as-a-Service: (Craig, 2015), p.90).

Disruptions and Excellence – challenges to curriculum

We saw above that one of the Higher Education Standards specifically addresses innovation, and specifically requires academic governance bodies to “critically evaluating the quality and effectiveness of educational innovations or proposals for innovations” (HESF, 6.3.1f). Yet we also saw that this is an area of difficulty for institutions (Winchester, 2017, p.179), although she does claim that “well-functioning Boards are fulfilling this requirement almost instinctively” (Ibid). What I want to argue is that there are genuine challenges in addressing this Standard which stem from deeper questions around meaning of excellence in higher education and the nature and limits of academic activity.

Many reports have written of the increasing recognition that higher education is integral to national economic objectives, promoting the education of a flexible, adaptable and mobile workforce capable of tackling global issues, and working in the yet to be realised workplaces of tomorrow (Kiash, 2014; Marshall, 2017 p.3). The demands on, and challenges for, higher education are as never before.

Although technology is often cited as the most significant challenge (see, for example, Marshall, 2017 p.3) it’s capacity to disrupt higher education emerges more from how it interfaces with and facilitates the more significant challenge, which is addressed by Marshall and by Craig and Toma. This is the expectation that Universities will design and deliver a relevant and ‘connected’ curriculum but that this will be highly individualised and adaptive curriculum of tomorrow. As Marshall puts it, quoting one of her respondents:

the challenge is to provide programmes that allow individual students to construct their own subject combinations, according to how they see their role in the changing world of work, and to provide learning platforms and schedules that are sufficient and flexible to be customised to suit the individual’s life situation. (Marshall, 2017 p.4)
The idea of student choice is now not just a ‘nice to have’, but inextricably linked to ensuring that education and opportunity are fitted to the new century. For Craig, this is part of a “Great Unbundling” that sees fixed, take-it-or-leave-it network TV give way to watch when and what you like streaming services, big full-service enterprise software packages give way to cloud-based “software for rent”, and full-service airline tickets give way to unbundled, pay for what you get travel (Craig, 2015).

Education unbundling is a response to not only the new technologies that allow smartphone access to teachers and classes, and adaptive and partly automated online teaching technologies (most fully realised in the MOOC-model [Massive Open Online Courses] for mass marketing and delivery of online learning), but also the shift in power from institutions to individuals, and from universities to employers. Future students expect greater choice, and increasingly expect to be able to “unbundle” their education to focus competencies that they need to get or keep a job. Employers and employees are increasingly able to use competency management platform, which are online databases that can independently link the competencies required by the employer and the skills of the applicants, clarifying the specific gap that education needs to fill. As Craig writes: “Then students will be able to map the most efficient path from here to there. And unfortunately for universities, that path is not likely to be a degree.” (Craig, 2015, p.86).

These developments can be seen in the emergence of micro-credentials, which are increasingly offered not just by non-university providers but also by external delivery platforms that are not recognised educational providers, including FutureLearn, edX, Coursera, companies and professional associations. None of these micro-credentials are recognised under the AQF qualification framework, or subject to the usual national regulatory models. International competitors, such as Harvard and MIT are also able to easily compete in the micro-credential / unbundled market.

Clearly, there are significant implications for an academic governance framework structured around licensed providers which are subject to the “collective oversight of the academic community” [TEQSA, 2017], through an Academic Board or the equivalent. These implications are partly competitive in nature, and a number of Australian universities are developing micro-credential strategies in order to meet the competitive challenge and establish a new revenue stream. But, just as importantly for Academic Boards, is that these new unbundled, stackable and just-in-time credentials are a new paradigm of academic excellence.

This model of curriculum is often described as “innovative”, “internationally relevant”, “career focused” and “contributing to lifelong learning and professional development” and an example of higher education and industry working together. However, this model of curriculum is far from the traditional model of an integrated, whole-of-degree learning experience, in which learning outcomes and graduate attributes are carefully staged across the three, four or five years of full-time study. Credentials may be “stackable”, but this simply says that the consumer/student is able to take it as a credential on its own or choose to put it with any other credential. This is effectively outsourcing curriculum development to the consumers who, as quoted by Marshall above “construct their own subject combinations, according to how they see their role in the changing world of work” while educational
providers “provide learning platforms and schedules that are sufficient and flexible to be customised to suit the individual’s life situation” (Marshall, 2017 p.4).

The important point here is not that this is a trend that needs to be fought against, but that the move away from University-managed to consumer-chosen curriculum, where the University’s role is to provide a quality service (Marshall, 2017, p.6) is something with real opportunities and a strong argument for excellence and relevance. Yet it also has clear implications for academic governance, focused as it is, around approval of degrees and the quality of qualifications. The speed of design and delivery for these sorts of credentials also shifts the paradigm from the slowness and consideration of the academic governance model, to the speed and agility of corporate decision models, embodied by university management processes (ideally, if not in reality).

Universities, however, have recognised that there are brand implications as well as quality concerns if they do not seek to regulate this emerging category of credential which currently sits outside their academic governance frameworks. And universities have a genuine advantage in terms of usually robust existing systems for the proper design, delivery and governance of academic programs, evaluation of teaching quality and assessment of students. The implications for academic boards and higher education governance frameworks are not yet clear and will need to be carefully thought through. Most universities appear to want to ensure that micro-credentials have some form of academic governance approval and oversight, however, there is no single approach and it is likely that market forces will tend to reduce, rather than enhance, academic governance oversight.

My argument is that this can be understood as an example of the increasing distinction between the management of risk through mandating of protocols, policies and procedures and the more general goal of supporting excellence, now understood as enhancing social and economic goals, supporting student and business needs and flexibility. Revised conceptions of excellence can fit uneasily with existing models and ways of measuring and monitoring educational quality.

**Disruptions and Excellence – partnerships and peripheral activities**

The issues raised by micro-credentials are often overlaid with those raised by the use of non-academic partners by higher educational institutions. MOOCs are the classic example of academic institutions partnering with usually private companies to provide educational experiences for students. And this aspect of the model has continued even as Universities around the world move away from the Massive and Open component of online learning. What has grown is the use of Online Program Management companies such as Pearson Online Learning Services, Keypath and Wiley Education Services.

These companies typically are for-profit organisations that help Universities and other providers develop online programs by providing services including marketing & recruitment, enrolment management, curriculum development, online course design, student retention support, technology infrastructure, and student and staff call centre support (Hill, 2018).
Toma describes this increasing use of external organisations as partners in the provision of education as part of a significant expansion of "activity at the periphery of institutions", which includes academic courses and programs (Toma, 2007 p.57). Significantly, Toma sees this hybrid activity on the border between the higher education provider and a private company as tending to increase the role of managers in decision-making and decreasing that of academics and academic administration (Toma, 2007 p.57). This is partly because, even if approval processes for courses are still managed through academic governance, such as an Academic Board, a wide range of nevertheless academic activities around curriculum development and course design, and including student academic support, are outsourced to a contractual organisation. The university's engagement with those activities will tend to be that of contractual and partnership management, rather than academic governance.

Toma’s argument that these peripheral partnerships change the balance in managerial and academic decision-making also sees it as much as a symptom as a cause. Higher Education institutions in the US and Australia have suffered reduced government support and have instead increased their focus on revenue and market responsiveness. Toma argues that on its own, this focus on markets and revenue has changed the balance of between academic and administrative governance considerations, with management expertise coming to the fore and being more highly valued (Toma, 2007, p.62).

Collis (2004) also focuses on the impact of the increase in the range of goals and complexity of activities, often marked by the increasing use of outsourcing, which he argues creates ambiguity and unclarity around roles and responsibilities, which he terms the “paradox of scope”:

Why does the “paradox of scope” matter for the governance of higher education? The answer can be put simply as less control over more things. The expanding periphery and contracting core of today's colleges and universities stretches the already limited adaptive capability of governance structures to the breaking point. (Collis, 2004, p.4)

A whole range of more general academic activities (beyond the core of teaching and research) form part of this expanding periphery.

Although academics and scholars have always had roles to play as public intellectuals, we have seen a significant push across the sector to organise and coordinate the ways in which university scholars present their research to the public, with marketing coordinated public programs, news media, talks and events.

We also see this expanding periphery in the increasing focus on linkages with industry and on universities being industry-engaged, with industry working in universities and researchers embedded in industry. This is often tied to a focus on universities as "enterprises" with the need to develop products from research, provide services for fees to government and business and protect their IP.

And beyond research collaboration, the massive increase in provision of work-integrated learning for students has meant an increasingly complex situation where aspects of teaching and the curriculum are organised and offered by non-academic organisations, albeit under processes coordinated by the academic institution.
The Paradox of Governance

As we saw with the re-shaping of the concept of curriculum, and in particular the reduced and uncertain role of academic governance structures and academics in establishing, approving and critically evaluating curriculum, the increase use of partners, the expanding range of academic tasks and projects has considerably expanded the peripheral areas of university operation, while also relatively shrinking the core. This not only stretches governance structures as Collis (2004) argues, but also challenges the centrality of academic governance by increasingly managing these peripheral activities through administrative and managerial networks and governance.

And, as was also argued in relation to challenges to notions of curriculum, this expanding periphery need not be seen as shift away from quality or excellence, even defined in academic terms. We are seeing a more expansive model of the academic mission appropriate to a university, which has meant that industry-engagement and collaboration, students having opportunities to learn in the workplace, increased higher education positioning in public debates, the provision of services to industry and government and the use of specialised partners to support course development and delivery are not just somewhat unfortunate ways of raising revenue while core funding diminishes, but actually important parts of the contemporary university’s academic rationale and mission. Although the concept of “peripheral” as developed by Toma and Collis does focus on those external forces driving institutions to move from the original core, we see the new areas of focus as themselves becoming core.

However, as was discussed above, this makes the issue of the “paradox of scope” (Collis, 2004), where already limited adaptive capability of academic governance structures is stretched to the breaking point, even more pertinent. The answer has often been to treat these “peripheral” zones as not academic at all, but operational, and requiring standard corporate management by role, not management by the collegial processes characteristic of an academic board.

In this sense Collis’ paradox should be updated to a “paradox of governance”, where the increased expansion of academic activities, as well as increased flexibility in teaching, reduces the capacity of academic governance to either understand or regulate.

Conclusion – Excellence and a New Definition of Risk

Universities are institutions with an extremely long history (second only to the Catholic Church in the European context) and, as might be expected, the governance frameworks they have developed reflect older value-systems and are often ‘cultural expectations’ rather than explicit rules. The 2015 Higher Education Standards Framework provides for Australian institutions at least, a structure which underpins the original and uniquely academic conception of “the collective oversight of the academic community” (TEQSA, 2017) as central to academic governance.

The challenges I have outlined, from changed conceptions of the academic mission, and changes expectations of students and curricula, have meant that this collective oversight is
being tested and redefined even where there is agreed clarity about the importance of academic governance to higher education institutions, strongly reinforced by TEQSA.

The concern is about the willingness of higher education management to properly allow academic governance to have the independence and authority required for oversight and about the capacity of our model of academic governance to adequately provide leadership and advice in the face of disruptive forces in the higher education sector.

The answer to this concern is not to ignore or resist these disruptive forces, but to embrace them as they are often presented - as expectations of excellence, and academic excellence in particular.

Excellence is being increasingly redefined in terms of agility, capacity to be open to opportunities, openness to risk, (Harman & Threadgold; Marshall), and capacity to be open and embrace rapid change (technological, and institutional). We see this in outsourcing, developing partnerships, allowing students to establish their own curriculum and learning experiences, using platforms - MOOC and Keypath – to expand opportunities.

Yet excellence in terms of the Standards and the traditional model of an academic governance structure framed around collegiality, discipline-specific expertise of board members, and the distinctive nature of both the body and decision-making, which focusses on academic quality. The beginnings of an answer is for conceptions of academic excellence to shift from traditional versions of teaching and research to incorporate the new "peripheral" activities in its remit.

In the Australian context, the HESF in many ways has already provided a framework for a broader and more inclusive conception of academic excellence, through the references in 6.3.2d to oversight over risk. The monitoring of academic risk should be a central activity of academic governance, and a mechanism by which the more collegial and slower governance processes inherent to academic governance can make a significant contribution to properly understanding and monitoring these disruptive and, apparently, peripheral activities of universities. Monitoring academic risks does not involve inserting the academic board into all approval processes but does require that the board remains aware of "non-core" initiatives and developments and is able to both require reporting and provide feedback on implications for academic risk.

Yet as Winchester has argued “even in established institutions, there appeared to be little general understanding of academic risks, or of their potential impact” (Winchester, 2017 p.180), but there is much benefit from “a more widespread understanding of academic risk”, allowing it to be standard practice, much as course approval and review has become.

Critically, structures to consider academic and research risk across academic governance forums need to be established, along with clarity regarding the extent to which academic board should be involved in academic and research risk management processes and the nature of information required from faculties to ensure adequate visibility of faculty academic and research risk management processes.

By incorporating a clear definition of academic risk into governance processes, with a more consistent understanding of such risks and when / how these risks should be escalated to
academic governance forums, academic governance processes can become key components of broader approval and monitoring. The lack of clarity regarding the extent to which the academic boards should be involved in academic and research risk management processes and the nature of information required from faculties and the rest of the university can be seen as not just a risk to the interests of academic governance, but a broader and more substantial risk to the capacity of large and increasingly complex organisations to manage the new disruptive landscape.
References


About the Author

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Associate Professor Graham Forsyth is Deputy President of the Academic Board at the University of New South Wales and has been Associate Dean (Academic) in the Faculty of Art and Design. Graham has been a member of the Academic Board of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School since 2012, and has been awarded a Citation for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning by the ALTC.
Steps toward excellence: Retention pilots for student success

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Abstract

Retaining students to successful outcomes is complex and challenging, with recent high-profile reports highlighting the need for action across the sector. The fundamentals are well documented in the research and yet many institutions have struggled with strategic implementation, particularly with an increasingly sessionalised workforce.

International College of Management (ICMS) has developed a set of Student Success Levers to lift student outcomes, by drawing on decades of literature on the first year experience, transition pedagogies and the factors most likely to support students successfully through their studies. This paper provides an overview of the first phase of ICMS’s Student Success Project in which these success levers were piloted by a group of sessional academics.

Five subjects, three from undergraduate and two from post-graduate programs, were selected on the basis of their traditionally low pass rates and their positioning as typically in the first semester of study. A fast-paced pilot was conducted, where the lead academics and their managers were involved in developing, implementing and monitoring a set of interventions. The project began in the middle of one semester and interventions were piloted in the next.

The process of undertaking a current state analysis, with 42 data sources and a mix of qualitative and quantitative data sets is described, along with a summary of how the interventions were implemented.

The results of the pilot are still emerging however early indications are positive, for example an average increase of 12% in pass rates in comparison with the prior corresponding period.
These results were attained by introducing developmental activities without altering the summative assessment tasks, reduced marking time for academics and more immediate diagnostics on student progress toward outcomes. There are lessons which will be relevant for other higher education providers, for example policy directions to embed quality and consistency.

**Key Words:** retention, student success, interventions, sessional staff, transformation
Introduction

For decades research has been conducted into how best to support higher education students to success. In June 2017 the Higher Education Standards Panel published a discussion paper on *Improving retention, completion and success in higher education*, which summarised research since the 1950s on strategies and recommendations for improving students’ likelihood of completing their studies. Barriers to retention include lack of student engagement, lack of student support and personal factors relating to the student, such as financial, mental and physical health and other factors extraneous to the study environment (Seidel & Kutieleh, 2017).

Several research projects have been undertaken in recent years to explore the causes of student attrition and possible retention strategies for institutions to pursue. In particular, the first year experience and its importance for student retention has been the focus of much research. Some of the themes emerging from these studies are explored in the next section.

First things first; engaging with the community from the outset

From their first engagement with the university community, students’ sense of belonging is important in encouraging them to continue with their studies, particularly in relation to non-traditional students. The effort students made in applying themselves to their studies, joining the university community and making friends was strongly influenced by whether they felt this engagement (Trowler and Trowler 2010). For many students from non-traditional backgrounds, this sense of connection or engagement is especially challenging (Trowler and Trowler 2010, Devlin 2011, Vardi 2015). These students may be the first in family to attend post-secondary study and therefore have less support from their community, family or peers. Non-traditional students often have additional family or work commitments, making them time-poor. Studies at Australian universities between 2005 and 2010 highlighted the importance both of the quality and extent of interaction between the student and the institution in the first year, (Kift, Nelson and Clarke; 2010), and particularly the first six to eight weeks of a program (Wylie 2005, Willcoxson, et al. 2011), therefore activities to help students ‘transition in’ to the university are critical.

The curriculum

Research from Australia and the UK indicates that curriculum development is a key strategy available to institutions for improving student retention and success. For example the Higher Education Academy’s Retention Collaborative Project (2017) and Queensland University of Technology on students’ first year experience leading to success and retention. Kift, Nelson and Clarke (2010) have noted the importance of an ‘intentional first year curriculum design that carefully scaffolds, mediates and supports first year learning’ (p.11). In particular, research on transition pedagogies (Kift, et al, 2010; Nelson, K. et al, 2014) highlights the importance of:

- a) Active learning and teaching strategies to promote engagement;
- b) Formative assessment, providing scaffolding and feedback on student progress;
- c) Courses which are seen to be relevant for learners, highlighting the benefits of completion, and with transparent information about how the program fits together;
- d) Evaluation to monitor progress and design support.
Griffith University’s ‘Student retention and success’ project, focusing particularly on the first year experience, advises that ‘design of our programs and courses, our assessment practices, the culture of our classrooms and our teaching strategies can all make contributions to scaffolding students’ capacity for independent learning (Lizzio & Wilson 2013).

Connections with teachers and peers

Making meaningful contact with others and building of social connections are factors which contribute to student retention (Rovai, 2002; Betts, 2008; Ali and Leeds, 2009). Several studies suggest that institutions can foster retention by embedding opportunities for students to make friends and connect with their peers (Tinto, 1975; Thomas, 2000). Teachers’ attitudes and behaviour are also central to fostering this sense of community connection (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Betts 2008).

Student support services

Students’ experience of a supportive learning environment, with pro-active support services and positive relationships with staff have been linked with student success in several studies. For example, Griffith University implemented a Strategic Student Support Framework, which included identifying those students at risk of failure and providing additional assistance. The processes of academic skill development and reflection were found to have positive impact on the subsequent grades of the students identified as ‘at risk’ (Lizzio & Wilson, 2013).

While all these aspects to encourage engagement are important, the importance of an holistic approach to the issue of retention is a common theme in the literature. Lizzio (2006) from Griffith University proposed a ‘lifecycle’ approach, with focus areas of connections with teachers and peers, authenticity, the students’ confidence in their capability and their supporting resources, whether physical or virtual. He also cautioned against cursory efforts to address retention issues; citing that institutions often undervalue the importance of ‘touch points’ with students, fail to detect their concerns and do little to address those that are identified.

This holistic approach was implemented in a study undertaken by Spies et al (2018) and is also aligned with the findings of various studies into learning analytics. For example Kahu (2013) positions retention as an outcome of student engagement with the whole ‘complex, interdependent, interconnected network’ system (Colvin, Rogers et al. 2016, p.3). There is also room for institutional differences in how these themes of retention are interpreted. As suggested by Zempke (2013) ‘the themes emerging from the research are generic…. It is up to teachers and institutions to interpret and shape such ideas for specific and unique contexts, subjects and, most importantly, learners’ (p. 1).

ICMS is a private higher education provider on the Northern Beaches in Sydney. In early 2018 a project was established to develop a set of interventions to improve student outcomes in their first year of study with a view to improving overall retention.
ICMS Student Success Levers

Drawing on this significant body of research, ICMS developed a set of Student Success Levers to underpin a strategic approach to improving student outcomes, illustrated in the graphic below.

![Student Success Levers Graphic](image)

**Figure 1. Student Success Levers.**

A College retention plan had been implemented during 2016-2017 which primarily focused on orientation activities, encouraging connections and increasing student support, therefore in this pilot the *curriculum, activity, assessment* and *teaching* components were the specific focus; those building student *capability*. Graphic 2 highlights these components.
Figure 2. Components prioritised in the pilot.

Teachers are key representatives of ICMS for our students, so involving the teaching academics along the journey toward improving student outcomes was essential. Skilled and supportive teachers foster a sense of connection between students and the content (Betts, 2008; Chickering & Gamson, 1987). Although similar strategies are well documented over several decades in research such as ‘transition pedagogies’ and those associated with ‘the first year experience’ (Kift, Nelson and Clarke (2010), institutions have found building teacher capability around enhancing student outcomes to be a challenge with an increasingly sessionalised workforce. Part of the challenge of professional development is establishing a shift from a focus on content toward ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ (Beswick, Fraser and Crowley, 2016); bringing the teaching academics along the journey toward sustainable transformation (Fullan 2003).

This paper reports on the initial results of a pilot conducted at ICMS in 2018 to bring sessional academics along a professional development journey; from analysing the critical issues in their subjects to evaluating the effects on student learning outcomes. The process of identifying the issues and then planning and implementing a series of interventions is explained along with key lessons learned for application to other contexts.

Method

Once the Student Success Levers were developed, a set of subjects were identified to pilot the interventions. Five subjects were chosen with a high proportion of student failure rates. All were first year for maximum impact on retention:

three AQF level five subjects, Management, Accounting and Marketing. These are subjects which students study in the first year of a Bachelor of Business Management degree (third year is AQF level 7); and
two post graduate subjects, Accounting and Economics. These subjects are (AQF level 8) and form part of the first year of a Master of Management degree.

The first phase of the project involved analysis of the current state. The framework for analysis was developed based on a successful model piloted in earlier research (Spies, et al 2018), exploring a range of data sources as part of a ‘deep dive’ to identify the main issues with the subjects and plan which interventions to introduce. Data sources included:

- Unit outlines
- Student pass rates over 3 years
- Average grade over 6 trimesters
- Grade distributions over 6 trimesters (per task)
- Student survey results over 6 trimesters
- Assessment task descriptions and rubrics
- Attendance rates
- Classroom observation documentation

The full framework for analysis of the current state is attached in appendix A.

The results of the analysis indicated a set of initial priorities relating to developmental activities to prepare students for summative assessment tasks. For example, relatively high failure rates for complex tasks involving multiple component parts and sometimes in groups. Students in the first year of their course were underprepared for these complex activities. Strategies for demonstrating what is required for success along with scaffolding to build confidence were top priorities.

**Planning the interventions**

From this analysis, a set of interventions was developed for each subject, drawing on the literature and designed to be introduced without requiring permission through the College governance process. For example, the summative assessment tasks remained the same but the formative, scaffolding tasks were introduced. The summary of the interventions for each subject is included in Appendix B.

In order to implement the interventions, the Senior Learning Designer from the L&T team worked closely with subject leads to implement the changes such as developmental activities to build skills for assessment tasks, models and templates to demonstrate requirements, and providing practice opportunities prior to the final exam. Other interventions are important, such as possibly reviewing the overall assessment strategies however these would need a longer lead time to implement, and were hence not part of this first phase of the project.

**Implementing the interventions**

To implement the immediate interventions, an initial meeting was held in March 2018 with the College Dean, the Senior Learning Designer and the subject leads to explain the process and the interventions to be addressed. Fortnightly meetings between the Senior Learning Designer and the subject leads were then established. A time commitment of approximately three hours per week was agreed with the subject lead for the ten-week period of development. Conversations at these meetings focussed on the set of changes as
explained below. A communication strategy was developed to disseminate information about the launch of the pilots, the progress against key milestones, quick wins as they emerged and the impact on student results.

**Structuring tasks for relevance, clarity and understanding**

Constructive alignment promotes a strong narrative to explicitly link the content and activities to the intended learning outcomes (Biggs & Tang, 2011). From the investigation of assessment task instructions and the student results, there were cases where students were unclear as to what was required for success. Activities were chunked, where possible, to reduce cognitive load and increase visual pathways for students to access information. The following example is developed in H5P to guide students through drafting each section of the assessment task.

![Assignment 1 - Part A - Complete Here](image)

*Figure 3. Guiding students through each section of an assessment task*

**Developmental activities to build skills for assessment tasks**

When students are ‘doing something besides listening’, they ‘learn more material, more quickly, and retain what they have learned longer’ (Ryan & Martens, 1989, p 29). Well-designed assessment combine formative and summative tasks to support student learning. In some subjects, the first task in which students received feedback was not until week six of the teaching period. Therefore, formative tasks were planned to provide earlier feedback for the students on their progress and early diagnostic information for the academics. Examples of activities include in-class quizzes as comprehension checkpoints but also to provide students with opportunities to use the Moodle quiz tools and experience the question types before the summative task. Other activities included a Moodle glossary of terms to which students contribute.

In another subject with a relatively large cohort, the academic found it challenging to observe all groups working through a paper-based accounting procedure as illustrated in the worksheet below.
An activity was planned where the groups participated in a Socrative quiz which enabled the academic to gauge their progress through the procedure. Student groups nominated one team member to submit a series of answers via their mobile device so the teacher could see how groups were progressing. Completion of each part was displayed through Socrative on the interactive whiteboard.

Red highlighted responses signalled those groups requiring support from the academic, while the others could continue on.
In one subject the quiz software Kahootz was used, with groups being allocated a name which was then used to monitor group responses and performance. Discussion and explanation followed each question and groups could see how they progressed.

**Models and templates to demonstrate requirements**

Assessments should have explicit criteria and standards, have a developmental sequence (Forster, Mendelovits & Masters, 1994), with early, low stakes and affirming first tasks (Nelson, Creagh, Kift & Clarke, 2014). Model answers and exemplars should guide student work (Ormond et al, 2002). For all assessment tasks, a model of a past examples with commentary to describe the components to students, or a template for them to follow in development were recommended. For example, in one assignment, an example where the academic demonstrated expert thinking was created using a screencast video, for students to observe how components such as referencing could be addressed. In the example below, exemplars of high-quality work were provided online using the H5P annotation tool, where clickable hotspots provided an overlay of information for students to find out more.

![Annotated example](image)

**Figure 6. Annotated example**

**Rubrics to guide improvement**

Rubrics for all assessment tasks, available beforehand to guide improvement and enable students to understand assessment requirements, were clearly articulated. As part of the College’s new assessment policy, all assessments in first year subjects will be started in class, with explanation of the rubrics.
Students could click on the hotspot to see the rubric, as displayed below.
Practice opportunities prior to final exams

The final exams were identified as the major barrier to students passing in all subjects. As a result, practice opportunities were introduced prior to all final ‘closed-book’ exams. In some cases, students in pairs worked through a past paper the week prior to the final exam and then the whole class came together to discuss the results and in some cases demonstrate processes. In another subject, pairs of students worked through the past paper and could access an annotated Screencast-o-matic recording of the teacher demonstrating expert thinking in working through accounting problems. These recordings were developed as 5-7 minute videos to cover key procedures that students have typically found challenging.

Figure 9. Screencast-o-matic recording demonstrating expert thinking

Although the academic acknowledges that there is no direct correlation, she reported that none of the students who watched at least one of the videos (and in most cases these students also attempted the practice quizzes), failed the subject. This will be helpful in promoting the benefits of the formative tasks and additional resources with future cohorts.

Indicators of success

Evaluating the effects of curriculum interventions is a complex task and although more longitudinal data will be required for definitive results, the initial impact of the Student Success Pilots is positive. There were improvements in both student pass rates and also academic perceptions of students’ engagement. All subjects were identified for the pilot because the student pass rates had been lower than the target of 20% which was set by ICMS as a threshold for investigation. After the implementation of the pilot interventions, all subjects reported a reduction in the percentage of students failing by between 8% to 16% and the failure rates in all the assessment tasks in which interventions were conducted were reduced. It is important to note that the summative assessment tasks as approved previously through the governance processes remained the same for the pilots; the interventions focused on:
Providing formative opportunities for feedback early on – setting students on the right course for success in the tasks;

Building student confidence in knowing what they need to do and seeing what success looks like;

Alerting teaching academics to struggling students early in the teaching period;

Familiarising students with assessment processes such as submission of documents through Turnitin

Guiding students through rubrics and essential components such as academic integrity and referencing

As well as the impact on student pass rates against the corresponding teaching period in the previous year, all academics involved in the pilot reported positive effects on their teaching practice. An undergraduate academic reported that her students were more engaged in the activities and she appreciated the opportunity to monitor their progress. Another who had developed the videos to model expert thinking was surprised and delighted at the uptake from the students; almost three quarters of the cohort (n=70) viewed at least one video.

Practice quizzes also resulted in improved student results and they reported the benefit of seeing the types of questions and identifying their learning gaps prior to the summative task. The quizzes were designed to provide detailed feedback on incorrect answers and this was identified as particularly useful by the students.

The approaches taken to capability development, of working with the lead academics to build their skills in evaluating their students’ success and developing strategies for improvement, were designed to be transferable. One lecturer of a post-graduate economics subject reported that his undergraduate class results had improved in the same teaching period, as he implemented his learning from the pilots to his other subjects. Once notions such as transition pedagogies and effective curriculum design are understood, they can permeate and enhance practice as part of sustainable transformation.

Lessons learned

The project was undertaken in less than two teaching periods and yet has already generated some key learnings. Some relate to the design of the interventions to capture the process as vignettes for scalable professional development and others to policy implications to embed sustainability. Key lessons learned include:

Engaging staff as part of capability development is essential. The project enabled the academic teaching staff to learn how to evaluate the aspects of their subjects that most affected student outcomes and work collaboratively to plan interventions. In some cases these involved analysing the instructions or the sub-sections of requirements which are skills they can apply to other curriculum contexts. Given that the academic teaching staff involved were all sessionals, scheduling times to suit them, often using technologies such as zoom to connect was critical to engagement;

An holistic approach to evaluation, using a diverse range of data points enabled analysis of the issues and the planning of intervention helps build academic capability. This does take
time and needs to be resourced. In an environment where teaching observations might be seen as overly managerial or in which the teaching academics may feel threatened, a clear communication strategy and support for the project from senior management is essential;

Equipping teaching staff with efficiency strategies was also key. While there are many activities that teachers can undertake to guide students, those that are more scalable and sustainable are likely to be implemented in the longer term. The project captured the processes of developing and implementing the interventions as vignettes for professional development;

Co-creation is key. Often Learning Designers or Educational Developers work to build learning objects or digital activities which are then expected to be implemented by the academics without full understanding of why they were chosen, how they work or how they can be adapted. This shared understanding was a key aspect of the capability development. The teaching academics involved all reported that they would take this new knowledge into their subsequent teaching; a sign of sustainable transformation;

Lastly, pilots can often be seen as short term so designing communications strategies to report on progress and achievements, as well as adapting policies and procedures to reflect the findings are some strategies that can build in sustainability. For example, ICMS’s assessment procedures have been adapted to embed early, low stakes formative tasks and practice opportunities before closed book exams.

Conclusion and next steps

Given the focus on retention across the sector, ICMS has developed a set of Student Success Levers to lift student outcomes, by drawing on decades of literature on the first-year experience, transition pedagogies and the factors most likely to support students successfully through their studies. This paper presented the first phase of ICMS’s Student Success Project in which these success levers were piloted by a group of sessional academics.

Of the five subjects targeted, all reported improvements in the overall pass rates of students and pass rates in individual assessment tasks. The lead academics, all sessional, reported satisfaction with their own learning about transition pedagogies and their students’ engagement with activities.

The results of the pilot are positive, for example an average increase of 12% in pass rates by introducing developmental activities without altering the summative assessment tasks, reduced marking time for academics and more immediate diagnostics on student progress toward outcomes. These percentage increases are in comparison to the prior corresponding period and further studies will be conducted to monitor whether the improvements are sustained. There are lessons which will be relevant for other higher education providers, for example policy directions to embed quality and sustainable transformation.
References


Rovai, A. (2002). Building a sense of community at a distance. *International Review of Research in Open and Distance Learning, 3*(1), 1-16.


## Appendix A

### Table 1

*Full framework for analysis of the current state*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Success Element</th>
<th>Lever</th>
<th>Statement of Good Practice</th>
<th>Data Points</th>
<th>Data Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Structured and relevant curriculum</strong></td>
<td>Aligned learning outcomes, activities &amp; assessments</td>
<td>Learning outcomes, activities and assessments are clearly aligned</td>
<td>Alignment of outcomes, activities and assessments</td>
<td>Subject outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coherent content and structure</td>
<td>Teaching explicitly brings out the structure of the topic or subject</td>
<td>Flow &amp; developmental sequence of topics, clear narrative in each class</td>
<td>Class outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Authentic, appropriate and relevant content</td>
<td>Relevance of the subject to the students’ work and study goals are explained</td>
<td>Explanation of relevance</td>
<td>Class observation evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Volume of work is applicable for context</td>
<td>Amount of content and activity to be covered each week.</td>
<td>LMS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Range of curriculum resources and media</td>
<td>Textbooks and other resources are accessible to students</td>
<td>All students have access to textbook and resources</td>
<td>Interview with teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Active and engaging learning environments</strong></td>
<td>Learning design</td>
<td>Classrooms and online spaces should be active where students engage with course content, with their teacher, &amp; with other students.</td>
<td>Online subject check:</td>
<td>LMS analytics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Subject guide available</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Narrative in the online environment</td>
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<td>- Welcome video</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Activities to link in class &amp; online learning</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Activities to practice &amp; receive feedback</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Tools to support conversation between student &amp; teacher</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tools to support conversation between students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student engagement</td>
<td>Attendance should be above policy target of 80%</td>
<td>Attendance reports</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students engage with the subject regularly in the online space</td>
<td>LMS Analytics:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Analytics are embedded in QA processes</td>
<td>- How often students logon?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Know your student requirements</td>
<td>Teaching builds on what students already know</td>
<td>- How long do they spend?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher uses strategies such as concept checking &amp; checking student understanding of tasks</td>
<td>What do they do when they are online (passive or active uses; learning or social)?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities for students to articulate their conceptions and check their understanding</td>
<td>Lesson plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Class observation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2018 TEQSA Conference and HEQ Forum – Selection of Papers 150
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classrooms strategies for inclusivity</th>
<th>Tasks cater for diverse students</th>
<th>Cultural/ ability mix International students performances compared to local students performances</th>
<th>Class observation Interview with teacher Trimester Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Depth of learning, rather than breadth of coverage is emphasised</td>
<td>Depth of discussion in class and online</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classroom spaces</th>
<th>Teaching spaces are engaging &amp; foster collaboration and participation</th>
<th>Room configuration</th>
<th>Class observation Online subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

### 3. Well-Designed Assessment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student results</th>
<th>Student pass rates should meet target of &gt; 75%</th>
<th>Student pass rates</th>
<th>Trimester Review</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pain points</td>
<td>Challenging assessment tasks are acknowledged &amp; scaffolded</td>
<td>Tasks where average grade &lt; 50% are identified &amp; prioritised for review</td>
<td>Distribution of grades for task Rubrics &amp; feedback to students Interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low stake first assessment</td>
<td>The first assessment task is early in semester, low stakes &amp; affirming.</td>
<td>Weighting for first task Grades for first task</td>
<td>Subject outline Grades for first task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tasks designed to build expertise/ confidence</td>
<td>Assessment tasks are started in class &amp; formative feedback are given to ensure students are on the right track to succeed</td>
<td>Assessments are started in class Formative feedback given in class</td>
<td>Lesson plan (if available) Feedback on first task</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developmental assessment design</td>
<td>Assessments are sequenced such that they scaffold students’ skills development</td>
<td>Developmental assessment tasks Timing of the assessment tasks across the semester Mix &amp; weighting of tasks across the semester</td>
<td>Assessment schedule in subject outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit criteria and rubrics</td>
<td>Students are clear on the requirements of each assessment &amp; how to succeed</td>
<td>Rubrics explicitly encourage students to demonstrate relational understanding Examples / models of assessments available for students</td>
<td>Rubrics (if available) Examples / models of assessments available for students plans Student evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 4. Timely and Affirming Feedback

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of feedback</th>
<th>Personalised, Constructive, Aligned &amp; Future Focused (Macquarie University, 2017)</th>
<th>Feedback quality – sample feedback for high, mid &amp; low performing students</th>
<th>Examples of feedback given to students Student evaluation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formative assessment built into class</td>
<td>Classroom culture is positive, where students can make mistakes and learn from them (Biggs 2003)</td>
<td>Teachers provide formative feedback on activities in class</td>
<td>Class observation Lesson plans (if available)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>Feedback is given to students at least one week before the next task is due so they have time to incorporate feedback</td>
<td>Timeliness of feedback</td>
<td>Assessment schedule in subject outline LMS analytics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 5. Integrated Skills Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Embedded English and Academic Skills</th>
<th>Activities are designed to scaffold English &amp; academic skills development Improvement on academic skills is demonstrated across tasks in the trimester</th>
<th>English and academic skills explicitly embedded into the curriculum Explicit criteria on skills in rubric Track student</th>
<th>Activities schedule in subject outline Student evaluations Interview with teacher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Skilled and Supportive Teachers</td>
<td>Clear teacher expectations and role clarity</td>
<td>Teachers are clear about their role &amp; expectations</td>
<td>Position descriptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and selection</td>
<td>Teacher has at least 5 years’ experience teaching undergrad, international students &amp; in the discipline.</td>
<td>Process for performance management, review, discussion</td>
<td>Years of experience:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing development and reflective practice</td>
<td>Evidence is available that teacher has engaged in PD, reflected &amp; improved their practice.</td>
<td>Evidence of reflective practice (portfolio)</td>
<td>Engagement in PD programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic performance management processes</td>
<td>Performance plans &amp; management strategies are embedded into college processes, with a focus on student outcomes &amp; success</td>
<td>Engagement in PD programs</td>
<td>PD reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Policy and process to support good practice</td>
<td>Policy and procedures</td>
<td>College policy and process supports good practice, eg:</td>
<td>Policies and procedures are available &amp; embedded in practice</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Appendix B

### Table 2

*Summary of interventions per subject*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task &amp; trimester</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Deliverable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>MGT101</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T1: Introduce practise for final exam</td>
<td>Provide clarity on topics for study. Develop and deliver a mock exam. Make adjustments to final exam.</td>
<td>A fully developed mock exam, delivered to students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2: Simplify the individual report assignment. Scaffold completion with an early part A submission, ticking off at least two criteria.</td>
<td>Simplify the report. For example, reduce the number of references required. Provide guidance on research sources. Scaffold the reports completion with H5P documentation tool and include one early submission at the end of week 3. Break the assignment into constituent parts and create clear instructions for each.</td>
<td>A redesigned and simplified first assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2: Create a detailed rubric of the simplified report to guide improvement.</td>
<td>Design a teacher and student-facing rubric that details each standard. Divide this rubric up to align with the early and later submission.</td>
<td>A teacher and student facing rubric for assignment 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2: Construct annotated samples of high and pass level individual reports. Link to rubric and unpack in class and/or screencast video.</td>
<td>Use de-identified previous student reports as samples to help students understand what an HD and a pass look like. Annotate and link to the student-facing rubric to demonstrate your expert thinking. This could also be run as an in-class activity or as a screencast video for those who miss the class.</td>
<td>Annotated samples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T2: Implement an activity that provides students with practice in the construction of long answer FEX questions.</td>
<td>Deliver a classroom activity that elicits and raises students’ awareness to the underlying structure of the long answer exam questions. Focusing on definitions, why it’s important and using examples. Encourage work in pairs and small groups to use their notes to source information to answer the question. Then have students write their report following the guidelines above in class and to finish at home. Students upload to Moodle forum for</td>
<td>A classroom-based activity plan subsequently delivered with written product assessed with very light touch feedback.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## ACC100

**T1: Exam changes including the construction of working examples of high level exam question responses**

- Introduction of a mock exam, expert thinking video in Screencast-o-matic of annotated sample answers and workings uploaded to LMS in week 12.
- Video uploaded to LMS for students prior to T1 exam

**T2: Introduce online practice quizzes (non-weighted) in week 2 and 6 to familiarise students with the format (for the weighted quiz) and provide immediate feedback.**

- This quiz will consist of 10 questions covering content in previous designated topics. This will familiarise students with the online quiz assessment format in week 4 and 6 which is weighted. It will also provide immediate and extended feedback on wrong answers.

**T2: Build on intervention number 1 by splitting instructional videos across the final three topics of the course -**

- Expert thinking recorded in Screencast-o-matic of critical concepts. Design, develop and embed a series of instructional videos to walk students through final exam questions.

## MKT100

**T1: Mock exam designed and implemented**

- Design, develop and implement a mock test to give students practice in answering the different types of questions in the exam.

**T2: Convert paper worksheets from tutorials into regular online quizzes with immediate feedback using an interactive technology**

- Ensure progressive understanding of new material with regular quizzes using H5P technology, embedded into Moodle. Tech provides immediate feedback and data can be analysed, freeing up teacher time.

- Online quizzes in H5P with immediate feedback
<p>| T2: Simplify the individual report assignment. Scaffold completion with an early part A submission, ticking off at least two criteria. | Simplify the report. For example, reduce the number of references required. Provide guidance on research sources. Scaffold the reports completion with H5P documentation tool and include one early submission at the end of week 3. Break the assignment into constituent parts and create clear instructions for each. | A redesigned and simplified first assessment |
| T2: Scaffold submission of the Product Report assignment and develop a student submission checklist. | To provide opportunities for regular feedback as students complete the Product Report, incorporate milestone submissions using H5P technology that include a completed checklist for that particular part. | A Product Report which students complete step by step. A checklist for inclusion of all required components. |
| T2: Develop model / sample answers for individual assignment at pass and HD level and deliver to students. | Linked to the above, students either do a classroom activity or watch a screencast video which distinguishes the difference between a pass and an HD sample Product Report. This could take the form of an annotated model assignment or an activity in class that asks students to use the rubric to identify the differences. | A pass level and HD level sample Product Report annotated with comments connected to rubric criteria and checklist |
| ECO600 | | |
| S1: Create exam question rubrics to guide improvement. | For the final exam in T1, we need to give the students transparency around how questions will be assessed, especially the longer answer ones. A clear rubric that shows HOW students can move from a pass to credit to HD will assist this. | A full student-facing rubric for exam questions. |
| S1: Construct working examples of high level exam question responses and provide exam practice in class. | In tandem with the rubric, use the exam marking guides plus previous student samples at two to three different levels. Create an activity for students to apply the rubric to the samples. Then show annotated sample answers to demonstrate the difference in responses. | A set of 2-3 annotated sample answers in H5P hotspot tool. A planned activity using these resources in class. |
| S2: Introduce a low stakes assessment in week 4. | A low stakes assessment in week 4 of the course at approximately 5% of the mark will give students confidence and also help identify those who need more support. The assessment could be | A low stakes assessment including change to unit outline documentation, and check of references |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACC600</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1: Final exam changes and inclusion of exam practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2: Build activities to support students with accounting terminology in the earlier stages of the course.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2: Transfer quiz 1 and 2 to be online. Create several formative online quizzes to practice and build skills in taking online quizzes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| S2: Create scaffolded developmental activities to support students in the completion of the individual report | The instructions for the individual report and the stages for completion can be broken up so that each is completed step by step but keeping the final submission. This could be done in the documentation tool in H5P. A short rubric could be used to assess each stage. This builds in opportunities for peer review. | Instructions broken up into stages. Current rubric broken up to form a checklist for each stage of the report. H5P annotation tool embedded into Moodle to house instructions and rubric. Tool embedded in a clear narrative in Moodle so students clearly know how and what to do. |
| S2: Use Socrative to track progress and provide feedback on weekly paper-based problem solving. | Track progress of paper-based group tasks by asking students to input answers into Socrative on their phones, to be displayed on the white board. This will enable the academic to track progress and provide targeted feedback on problem areas. In large classes it had been challenging to monitor completion and to provide feedback. | Create a class Socrative account and embed into paper-based weekly problem-solving activities. |
| S2: Create screencast videos of key concepts being worked through with opportunities for students to ask and answer questions (time-stamped to video) | Demonstrate expert thinking by talking through key threshold concepts. Short screencast videos added to content and embedded in Q&A functionality to allow just-in-time feedback from peers and teachers. Available online to be viewed at time and place of students' choosing. | Create 2 screencast videos demonstrating expert thinking around threshold concepts. |
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Margot is responsible for leading academic operations, innovation, student support and work integrated learning at ICMS. She has held a range of senior management positions and consultations in both higher education and vocational sectors, public and private, in Australia and New Zealand. Her research interests and many leadership roles have related to technologies for learning and teaching and change management to implement these technologies as a driver of transformation and staff capability building. She is a Principal Fellow of the UK’s Higher Education Academy.

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Ethical Excellence of Assessment

Emeritus Professor Janet Verbyla

University of Southern Queensland

JLMV strategy coaching and consulting

Abstract

There is an ongoing question of how “poor” assessment practices might fuel student disengagement, dissatisfaction, stress and even dishonesty. There is also increasing scrutiny of the outcomes of academic assessment practices with respect to quality and progression. At the same time, as an occupation “academics” lack much that would be expected of a modern profession. This includes a code of ethics serving as a benchmark for professional endeavour. Regulatory standards plus institutional policies and procedures are currently the means by which academic ethical standards are indirectly and only partially defined. This paper provides an initial overview of how this is not an approach that underpins excellence in the “high stakes” academic activity of coursework assessment. Gaps are identified that an academic profession identity and entity might address. These include the principles underpinning the approach to assessment, proportionality of expected student workload, grade pollution and plagiarism. A professional framework including code of ethics would serve as a defensible benchmark for professional endeavour. It would provide a common foundation for sectoral discussion, innovation and critique. Critically, in a time of much external pressure and disruption, it could enhance the influence and creditability of academics as a professional collective.

Key Words: assessment, policy, ethics, profession, regulation
Introduction

The occupation of academic within Australian currently lacks the features associated with a modern profession including a professional code of ethics. This lack was the broad consideration that triggered the specific deliberation which is the subject of this paper. That is, could this lack of a professional code of ethics for academics within the framework of a profession, lessen the professional quality, the ethical excellence, of coursework assessment overall?

Coursework assessment was chosen because it is arguably a core activity and culminative quality measure of the professional performance and importantly, professional judgement of the academic practitioner. The ethical excellence of this assessment concerns its defensibility based on the application of good decision-making principles, articulated and shared across academic practitioners; principles that thereby engender stakeholder trust in the decision making. This defensibility is increasing important because for a range of other stakeholders, coursework assessment is “high stakes” such as students with respect to their futures, institutions with respect to their reputations and possibly more their finances, and funding agencies such as governments with respect to return of investment.

This paper draws out explicit points, mainly questions, relating to a consideration of a professional approach to the ethical excellence of such assessment. These points highlight the excessive (almost contradictory) diversity of approaches to aspects of assessment that arise in absence of a professional (ethical) framework. It is for this reason, that this consideration of professional ethics would seem crucial, arguably overdue.

It is furthermore argued that the lack of a professional ethical framework is not sufficiently compensated for by the regulatory and instructional ethics climates imposed by sector-wide regulations and standards nor by institutional policies and procedures.

The other missing aspect of academic as a profession is an overarching professional body that can both facilitate relevant discussion and then capture the outcomes of that discussion into professional guidelines and standards, if not the professional code of ethics itself. This absence means that the many (and varied) publications and conferences around such themes are not an adequate (impactful) alternative. Also, those publications and presentations are not shaped by the more pragmatic questions that arise from the potential of adoption by the profession.

The Concept of Profession

The dictionary definition of “profession” is one of an occupational group, that is, “paid occupation, especially one that involves prolonged training and a formal qualification” (Oxford University Press n.d.). This definition fails to capture the commonly held sense as evident in the relative use (and esteem) of the term that a profession is more than just an occupation.

This common notion of “more” involves in addition to skills, notions of ethics and service as evident in much of the literature on professions and professionals, for example, Eriksen (2015), Flood (2017) and Frowe (2005). That is, an occupational group is a profession because there is a commitment to provide an important service to the public in a morally motivated way. These two differentiators of a profession, namely, “ethics” and “service”, are evident for instance in the original “learned professions” of divinity, medicine and law.
These characteristics also appear in modern day meanings provided by relevant authorities. For instance, the Australian Council of Professions states that a profession involves (italics added) “a disciplined group of individuals who adhere to ethical standards and who hold themselves out as, and are accepted by the public as possessing special knowledge and skills in a widely recognised body of learning derived from research, education and training at a high level, and who are prepared to apply this knowledge and exercise these skills in the interest of others.” (Australian Council of Professions n.d.).

To codify this “more”, members of a profession normally “are governed by codes of ethics, and profess commitment to competence, integrity and morality, altruism, and the promotion of the public good within their expert domain.” And they “are accountable to those served and to society.” (Australian Council of Professions n.d.).

The code of ethics, otherwise termed code of conduct or professional standards, can be voluntary or mandatory for ongoing membership of the profession. In this context, the code is about “systematizing, defending, and recommending concepts of right and wrong conduct” (Fieser n.d.), in this case for members of the particular profession in the context of the distinctive services that profession delivers.

In “professing” and then following the specific ethical code, the members intend for the profession to have a good (and mutually beneficial) reputation, for the profession to be trusted with respect to the services that it delivers (Frowe 2005). If many members do not follow the code, then it questionable whether there is a profession. Individual personal ethics need to be broadly accommodated within the professional ethics, or it would seem questionable as to how individuals successfully function within that profession. At the same time, personal ethics with respect to practice often are shaped or filtered by the applicable professional ethics.

Professional ethics are usually a mandatory part of the education and training required for entry-level membership of the profession. Such inclusion is normally required for professional accreditation of the education program, for instance, in engineering, computing and nursing.

Academic Standards

In the case of academics, within Australia at least, there is no evidence of the required features of a modern profession as outlined above. (An interesting aside at this point is who is an academic? While this requires a separate discussion, for the sake of this paper, drawing on a very preliminary informal survey, it is proposed that someone might be so termed if they regularly engage with teaching and learning, including student supervision, within a higher education context.)

Overseas, there has been some effort to establish aspects of an academic profession but nothing comparable to that of medicine, law, and engineering, for instance. Perhaps the most relevant in these efforts is the Statement of Professional Ethics that the American Association of University Professors (AAUP 2009). This is based on a 1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure (AAUP 1940). (A separate future exercise would be to use that statement as a starting point for a discussion about a modern Australian standard.)
It could be argued that the alternatives to a professional code of conduct for academics are externally sourced regulations, such as in Australia, the Higher Education Standards (Commonwealth of Australia 2015), and the institutional responses to these, captured in policies and procedures. But these are not alternatives; similar exist for professions which do have codes. Furthermore, they exist for different purposes; for example, regulations detail “minimum acceptable requirements” for provision by registered providers (Commonwealth of Australia 2015). That is, they are targeted at institutional level (regulations) or as a response to regulations and other stakeholders (policies). They address far more than professional ethics but do cover to varying level of detail, some aspects of ethics but from a different perspective.

Within whatever overlap of focus there is, external regulations, institutional policies and professional code should align with each other. Arguably, that aspect of regulations and policies needs to be based on (and certainly not in conflict with) professional ethics.

For professional excellence, regulations and policies might be seen as necessary but not necessarily sufficient. This is evident for instance when regulations themselves state that they are not the source of the applicable principles, for instance, academics should be skilled in “assessment principles relevant to the discipline, …” (Commonwealth of Australia 2015).

Individually (professionally) owned ethics can be expected to be stronger in influencing behaviour and decisions than just an external requirements climate (Gorsira et al. 2018). In the best circumstances, if aligned, the climate should reinforce ethical behaviour (Gorsira et al. 2018). This situation is reinforced because obtaining membership of a profession, being inducted into and signing up to the applicable code of ethics, further strengthens the sense of personal ownership. On the other hand, regulations and policies are often negatively seen to be externally (to the practitioner) composed and imposed.

Before proceeding, it should be stated that there is evidence that a significant role can be played by personal virtue ethics within academia, such as in decisions relating to individual student behaviours (Bretag & Green 2014). But without an overarching professional ethics code, this seems unconstrained, opening up the potential for inconsistency, even contradiction, lack of transparency, intended and unintended bias, and, lack of professional defence. An interesting consequence of this is that it constructs an ambiguous thereby weakened ethical climate for students which research suggests may facilitate poor behaviour more readily (Gorsira et al. 2018). This point will be revisited in the last part of the following analysis.

In the remainder of this paper, aspects of coursework assessment-related regulations and institutional policies of assessment are sampled, and initially analysed within a professional ethics framework. Coursework assessment was chosen because it is a core activity for multiple stakeholders. Other aspects of academic practice could be subject to the similar consideration.

**Assessment Considerations**

The current Higher Education Standards focusses on assessment as a means of demonstrating achievement of learning objectives, in particular, to quote (Commonwealth of Australia 2015, Section 1.4):
3. Methods of assessment are consistent with the learning outcomes being assessed, are capable of confirming that all specified learning outcomes are achieved and that grades awarded reflect the level of student attainment.

4. On completion of a course of study, students have demonstrated the learning outcomes specified for the course of study, whether assessed at unit level, course level, or in combination.

It is also required that the course (award) specification include, again to quote, (Commonwealth of Australia 2015, Section 3.1):

e. expected learning outcomes, methods of assessment and indicative student workload

From the point of view of both excellence in assessment and the professional ethics of assessment, the following is a brief gap analysis as to what these regulations arguably should not and do not address. The gaps identified will be briefly discussed. Each gap has been chosen to illustrates a type of gap that a professional code of ethics (and associated guidelines etc) might directly consider and address.

The first gap might be characterised as that of principles or manner of approach. Given their purpose, regulations avoid prescribing how the requirement is to be addressed. It is to be noted that university policies can and do attempt to fill this gap; but this again leads to inter- and intra-institutional diversity and, in reality, questionable awareness of the expectations. This is all a difficult balancing act - often to fix this especially as students complain, policies have associated procedures that can attempt to be quite prescriptive; thereby diverting away from the initial purpose and also potentially undermining professional judgement.

A survey of the various “manners of approach” specified in the assessment policies of Australian universities, suggests that there are four dimensions to the approaches prescribed. These can be characterised as regulatory, equity, content/process, and learning. This analysis will be fully covered to a companion paper but these dimensions are here briefly summarised as follows:

• Along with the not surprising (almost) universal expectations of compliance with applicable external regulations, “auditable” appears as a regulatory principle in some assessment policies.

• Arguably again reflecting regulatory expectations (but not to deny institutional commitments), equity principles consistently appear in assessment policies with “equitable” and or “inclusive” being most commonly used. An occasional alternative or addition is “impartial”, “objective”, “consistent” and the rare “ethical”.

• From a content/process perspective, the most consistently mentioned principle is one of “transparency” (for both students and staff involved). Other more infrequent references are to “manageable” with the rare “effective and efficient”.

• From a learning perspective, there seems to be no dominant manner of approach expressed. This is in part due to institutions articulating differing perspectives on the purposes of assessment. Principles such as “reliable”, “consequential”, “valid”, “aligned”, and, “academically rigorous” (or just, “rigorous”) occur with perhaps the requirement to “promote” or “ensure” academic integrity a common addition in more recent times.
The diversity of approach principles that appears across the policies highlights the lack of an over-arching positioning by the academic profession itself. Furthermore, the differences between them, even when subtle, for instance, “equitable” compared with “inclusive”, arguably become most evident when it applied in practice. (That there are differences is not argued in itself to be problematic but it opens the possibility of problems with respect to biases, inconsistencies detrimental to learning and the student experience, and, unreliability in the measuring of achievement.)

The differences do not even require alternate terms to have consequences with respect to variations in practice. By far the most common (but not universal), approach principle specified in Australian universities’ assessment policies was “fair”. But what does “fair” mean especially when, to quote Killen (2005) as cited in Macquarie University’s policy (2018, section 5.5), it “should be considered from at least three perspectives”. Consequently, the accepted good (ethical) standard for “fair” is left unaddressed in the context of academic practice across the sector. For instance, is it treating all students exactly the same or is it giving all students access to the same variations, the same “reasonable accommodations” so that they can be treated differently. And then, how much different is fair? This is a debate not yet officially had at the profession-level. Even the tone variations across institutional policies and procedures, suggest that differing stances are taken between institutions, no doubt cascading down to differences between academics and their practices.

A common focus of teaching practice is curriculum. Interestingly, the current (Australian) Higher Education Standards do not contain the word “curriculum”. The term “content” is only mentioned twice. From a teaching perspective, it is the integrated package of learning outcomes, content, learning activities and assessment, that is curriculum, which constitutes the teaching and learning experience.

It is this curriculum inter-relationships that highlight the ethics of preparedness – should students be assessed on knowledge or skills that they have not been taught (in the sense of enabled to learn), directly or indirectly? This is addressed in some assessment policies through principles of “aligned” and “valid”. For example, relevant considerations include should there be surprise questions in an examination or should it be possible to map all parts of exam back to where it has been taught and indeed, formatively assessed? Another example is that while many awards include a capstone that involves significant group-work, there is often no identifiable component in the program where students have actually been taught about how to do group-work.

Along with the differences in manner prescriptions overviewed above, clarity around the ethics of assessment would appear to be undermined by the lack of agreement on the scope of its purpose. No disagreement is evident with respect to assessment’s provision of credible or reliable information on student achievement. But should it do more?

The varying nature of learning principles evident across assessment policies, as mentioned above, appears to depend on the extent to which the policy (the Higher Education provider) sets the purposes of assessment. This aligns with another gap which might be seen as relating to professional practice with respect to assessment within the curriculum.

A number of institutional assessment policies go beyond regulatory requirements of assessment with respect to evaluation. These institutions cover in their assessment policies aspects of assessment’s other roles such as to “promote, reinforce and reward student learning” (Charles Darwin University 2017), “to allow for quality assurance and the maintenance of high academic standards” (University of Melbourne 2017) or to “guide and
enhance student learning” (La Trobe University 2016). On a rare occasion, the policy directly addresses the role of assessment within the curriculum as an “interlinked, constructive, organised and coherent sequence to engage students in productive learning” (La Trobe University 2016). Such policy claims give rise to an ethical question, namely, is it professional or ethical if assessment does not fulfil these purposes?

The regulated requirement for “indicative student workload” specification is inconsistently addressed. Only some university policies attempt to address this and do so in varying ways and predominantly at unit rather than award level. Because of its complexity others appear to back away from this requirement or do it in a tokenistic way. Others tackle it through some type of hours of work per unit of study for average student to about an average or passing grade, see for example Flinders University (2018), section 3.7.2. Or, increasingly more common, it is tackled through some prescription of acceptable assessment component patterns but typically without dealing with the workload associate with each component, such as prescribing an assessment component with the first few weeks of assessment, see for instance, Curtin (2017) clause 2.2.1.

When there is no agreed position within academia with respect to assessment workload, there is no means to enable (or dis-enable) the professional judgement, ethical high-ground, of academics who consider over-working students wrong, or who think that students should be thoroughly assessed on everything in the course regardless of workload. What to other stakeholders seems professional? Does it diminish overall trust and respect?

As well as this ethical dilemma, the significant inconsistency around assessment workload across the sector and within disciplines, has other ramifications that are extensive. Of concern is the accompanying impact on students, both their well-being and, some argue, the integrity of their assessment practices. It also distorts the prioritisation of learning outcomes within and across units.

Another ethical gap potentially arises from a mismatch between regulations and policies, between the potential intent of regulation and the practices arising from policy. The mismatch considered here is that the requirement for grades to “reflect the level of student attainment” "of the specified learning outcomes" is not totally in alignment with policies that can be shaped by other considerations. It is also out of alignment because universities and the profession have no agreed set of grades and no shared understanding of what each grade represents; indeed, partial agreement in this context may be misleading when performing inter-university comparisons.

The ethical issue here arises from what in standardised (school) testing is referred to as “score pollution” (Haladyna, Bobbit-Nolen & Haas 1991). With respect to higher education standards, does a grade fulfil its credible assessment of learning attainment requirement if 10%, 15% or 30% of the underlying marks, enough for grade differences, come from attendance or engagement or effort? Or are lost for late submission? Or because the rest of the group produced a poor standard of work? More subtly, how much fitting of results to an expected distribution or how much explicit preparedness for assessment – as distinct from the curriculum - can pollute students' results. In all these different ways, how much “pollution” of marks and grades is professionally ethical?

Any paper on ethical excellence of assessment would be seen as lacking if it did not reference “academic integrity”. The current Higher Education Standards (Commonwealth of Australia 2015, Section 5.2) state, quote:
Preventative action is taken to mitigate foreseeable risks to academic and research integrity including misrepresentation, fabrication, cheating, plagiarism and misuse of intellectual property, and to prevent recurrences of breaches.

It would seem a reasonable bet that on reading this regulation, many within the sector and beyond, would relate it to the behaviour of students. This is good and bad. It is good because this might show that academics are still afforded much trust with respect to acting with academic integrity themselves. It is bad because publicity has arguably distorted the issue (and its impact) with respect to student behaviour (and even worse when it is used to stereotype particular student groups). It is also bad because it falsely suggests that there are not serious ethical discussions to be had with respect to the integrity of academics when it comes to these matters. It is this point that is relevant to this paper’s discussion and this is for two reasons.

The first reason is that without the framework of professional code of ethics, a range of interpretations (and moral judgements) have arisen that lead to significant divergence in professional practice in dealing with academic integrity. A good example of this deviation concerns “plagiarism”. Again, to put it simply, does the lack of integrity arise from not acknowledging sources or from using a lack of acknowledgement to gain an unfair advantage for fraudulently claimed ideas?

This is a crucial point of clarification. When it comes to self-plagiarism and plagiarism within teaching materials including assessment specifications, the answer could condemn much common academic practice to the unethical label. Certainly, these are areas where there currently appears to be little discussion in the formal literature, especially in the last decade; before that, see for instance, (Clarke 2006) and (Bretag & Carapiet 2007). There is arguably silent or quite acceptance in the re-use and re-cycling of teaching notes. This is an area where there is quite a divide in opinions.

Even in the research area, self-plagiarism “generates confusion” and the ethical status of textual re-cycling is “particularly controversial” (Bruton S 2014). Amongst research journal editors, there is acknowledgement that in certain contexts, “an element of text recycling is likely to be unavoidable” (COPE 2013); but is this the case amongst coursework assessment markers? Indeed, despite the previously mentioned prominence of “fair” as a university policy method of approach to assessment, it has been observed that such policy “approaches to plagiarism management do not appear consistent with outward appearances of justice and fairness” (Sutherland-Smith 2011).

There are potentially serious consequences of the lack of shared consistent standards. The seeming inconsistencies and differing opinions outlined cannot fail but lead to a reduction in respect for academics especially if they are firm (or worse) in pursuing students for forms of the very behaviour that they demonstrate on a regular basis. Furthermore, lack of referencing is common in public and social media these days. Also, there is a clear lack of referencing in external regulations and institutional policies. Such inconsistencies create a weakened ethical climate which studies suggest enables individuals to more easily behave in unacceptable ways (Gorsira et al. 2018).

**Conclusion**

Establishing a “professional code of ethics” would not of itself guarantee improved assessment practice across academia. However, it would create the platform for informed
professional debate and shared articulation of professional opinion and expected professional standards; all of which are currently patchy at best. Based on experience in other “professionalised” occupations, this could be reasonably expected to achieve more transparency, consistency and baseline quality in the academic practices covered including assessment.

It is not the intention of this paper to argue particular ethical positions, but to outline why the sector would benefit from facilitated discussion of these matters to derive a shared position of the academic profession on such matters. It would seem far better for it not to be a position imposed from external regulation nor institutional policy (which should nonetheless align) nor individual morality but one owned by those committed to the practice of the profession.

In the literature around standardised testing in particular, two professional guiding principles have been proposed that might serve as a starting point for responses to the many ethical questions that this paper has raised about assessment. These are “Do no harm” and “Avoid score pollution” (Green et al. 2007). Another one that appears in the literature is the theme “Assess as you would like you or your child to be assessed”. To these, particularly in reference to the last consideration, perhaps might be added “Practice what you teach”.

While these are all worthy and pressing considerations, it seems necessary to conclude that there appears to be an urgent collective need to determine whether academic should be, is, a modern profession. And, indeed or, what characteristics of a modern profession, academic should seek to have. As mentioned previously, the AAUP’s statement (AAUP 2009) might serve as a starting point for such a discussion.

Given all the threats and disruptions to academic practice, establishing it as a profession may further engender professional ethical excellence such as in assessment. This may enable the academic voice to be louder in shaping its future.
References


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Emeritus Professor Verbyla is a strategy consultant and coach focussing on tertiary education and the academic profession. Professor Verbyla has extensive experience as a senior academic leader and executive particularly with respect to academic programs, policies and procedures, and practice. For a number of years, the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Southern Queensland (USQ), with specific responsibility for the academic area of the university, Professor Verbyla served USQ as interim VC for much of 2017.
Diversity
Beneath the Surface of Initial Teacher Preparation: what contributes to pre-service teacher confidence to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in curriculum

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Abstract

The development of the capacity for graduate teachers to confidently include authentic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in curriculum is arguably influenced by the teacher preparation they receive. There have been more than 40 inquiries into different aspects of Teacher Education (Mills & Goos, 2017). This paper draws from a Desk Top Audit Report, commissioned by Australians Together, to investigate the inclusion of Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Standards 1.4 and 2.4 in Pre-service Teacher Education. While the research into over 7,000 units across the 46 providers of Initial Teacher Education in Australia, highlights best practice, it reveals significant weaknesses.

This research indicates pre-service teachers are graduating year after year with little opportunity to grasp the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to confidently and competently meet the required AITSL standards. In all but a handful (8) of ITE providers, there was only marginal, and at times tokenistic, attention to the education and equipping of Pre-service teachers in this regard (Bickmore-Brand, 2018, in Press). A general attitude was that Indigenous students in the classroom are a problem that needs to be solved. Examples of best practice built courses on a coherent epistemological framework; validated Indigenous Australians past and present; engaged in teacher critical reflection and worldview self-reflection; and engaged Pre-service teachers in authentic learning experiences coupled with assessment that engendered confidence and competence in the teacher and the student.
Should teacher preparation courses successfully increase teacher awareness of the authentic stories of Australia’s history and cultures, it may enable them to better inform students to become more empathic as adult voices.

**Key words:** Indigenous Education, Pre-service education, diversity, cross cultural competence, Australian history, AITSL 1.4 & 2.4
Introduction

Pre-amble

Preparing Pre-service teachers for knowledge of Australian Indigenous languages, cultures and histories.

That all Australian children understand and acknowledge the value of Indigenous cultures, and contribute to reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians was proposed in The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008). The Goals continue to impact Australian Curriculum. The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has embedded these goals in the new National Curriculum; and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education is one of three Cross-Curriculum Priorities that every teacher in Australia is required to acknowledge and respect the history and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, many primary teachers openly admit that they know nothing about Aboriginal people (McCrindle 2016).

The Australian government requires of its graduating teachers the following two (2) of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership’s (AITSL) 37 standards (2011):

1. Know Students and how they learn:
   1.4 Strategies for Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students: Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.

2. Know the Content and how to teach it:
   2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians: Demonstrate broad knowledge of, and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

Research conducted by Australians Together (McCrindle 2016, Starling, 2018) revealed that teachers admitted to low levels of confidence in their knowledge of Australia’s history and relationship with Indigenous people and in their students’ capacity to articulate it. Too often teachers and leaders (Starling 2018) dismiss the need to give attention to this area under the assumption it is irrelevant to them- not having any Indigenous students in their class or school. Some plead ignorance, claiming such content was never included in their own primary, secondary or tertiary education. This paper synthesizes an investigation at the Pre-service Teacher preparation level that may cast light on this dilemma (Bickmore-Brand, 2018, in Press).

Desk Top Audit Research Overview

The goal of this research was to gain some insight into the nature of the training to equip the Pre-Service Teacher’s capacity to (a) address the needs of Indigenous Australian students in their respective classes (AITSL 1.4) and (b) develop their own confidence in the nature of
Indigenous Australia’s language, culture and history as educators of Australian citizens (AITSL 2.4). To this end during July - October 2017 the website of each of the 46 Higher Education Initial Teacher Education (ITE) providers was explored, with over 7,000 units analysed for content relating to the AITSL standards 1.4 and 2.4.

Methodology

The data collection conducted from July-October 2017, was a Desk Top Audit, based on university website searches and, where possible, research into the initial teacher preparation courses/programs. Their rules of progression offered in most cases, a list of the units and the unit outline, which may or may not have more than the unit descriptor, learning outcomes and content. Learning experiences, assessments, texts and references, were evident in less than a third of the providers. Of the Higher Education providers registered with Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA), three providers have not been included in this study as they do not offer Education, or Initial Teacher Education courses. This forms a total of 46 Initial Teacher Education providers in the study.

The Report (Bickmore-Brand, 2018, in Press) is the basis for this paper which has drawn together key themes and extracts from the Unit Outlines which together with the tables of collated data in the Appendices, forms the evidence to support the commentary throughout. The term “best” practice has been used where the example resonated with current research. This research has been summarised in the Recommendations listed at the end of the paper.

AITSL ITE Accreditation Requirements

In 2018, NSW adapted a proposed AITSL document Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education in Australia Criteria: Focus Areas 1.4 and 2.4 (2017). Suggestions from this adaptation (NSW Supplementary Documentation: Elaborations in Priority Areas - Aboriginal Education, 2018) were integrated into existing ITE programs to ensure inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in areas such as Program Design, Content, Professional Experience and Assessment. The findings of the Australian’s Together Desk Top Audit research into the 46 providers of ITE reflects these elements and signals some of the examples of Best Practice and inherent challenges.

Program Design

Indigenous Prioritising

Several items signalled the degree to which providers elevated Indigenous perspectives. The Desk Top Audit revealed that ‘Acknowledgement of Country’ (Welcome to Country) was not evident in about one third of the Higher Education ITE providers (see Appendix Table 1. Indigenous Prioritizing). This may appear a trite observation of no consequence but can serve to signal organizational culture and may impact Initial Teacher Education programs.

Victoria University was one of the more proactive providers in this study and requires all students to pass a compulsory Indigenous cultural education unit that is also available to staff. Another “best” practice approach came from La Trobe University, demonstrating the nexus between Indigenous expertise and, of interest to this study, their Education
Department. This positions the Pre-service teacher to commit to “closing the gap” in their own contexts:

La Trobe University Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Dewar said the university has a long history of supporting Indigenous students and welcomed the new strategy. “La Trobe is committed to increasing Indigenous student enrolments which will only help to grow the already strong Indigenous culture and research we have across all our campuses... Together with our Indigenous Strategy and Education Department we are continually looking at ways to close the gap for Indigenous people,” Professor Dewar said. The strategy was developed in consultation with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium (NATSIHEC).

Many providers were laudable in their engagement with Indigenous students: offering school leavers scholarships (although it was rare to see any relationship between these and any incentive for Indigenous students to take up teaching as a profession); providing student support and dedicated space; and giving their alumni reasonable profile and support at public events. Some university websites made much of their engagement with Indigenous personnel to guide their strategic directions as well as impact across disciplines and curriculum. Unfortunately, the nature of the Desk Top Audit did not reveal where Reference groups were consulted in program and unit design which may well have engaged Indigenous stakeholders as recommended by AITSL (2018).

Coherent Approach to Indigenous Education

There was great variance in the type of content which the Pre-service teachers were expected to engage with. At its most basic level it appeared to be a tacked on “mentioning” to satisfy government AITSL requirements. At another level there was a clearly sophisticated epistemological framework that the Pre-service teacher was expected to engage with in relation to the content. The following example shows when a holistic approach to the Pre-service teacher’s preparation to teach Indigenous Australian students is foregrounded.

The course as a whole is built around three important concepts in relation to the Indigenous Australian education landscape: respect, relationships and reconciliation. On top of this we ask you to know yourself, know your world; know your students; and know what you teach (University of Queensland).

The mode of delivery, where it was obvious, also varied, with some clearly allowing for digestion and reflection on some quite possibly new and confronting ideas, whilst others were left to self-discover, with few references.

A tone of “inclusion” was quite distinctive in some, for example, recognizing an equity issue and genuinely wanting to offer quality learning for all school students. Macquarie University appeared to be trialling a different approach since 2014.

Indigenous issues have been taken out of the Social Inclusion portfolio and given an autonomous identity. This is important for two reasons. Firstly, it disables the model by which Indigenous Australia becomes a problem to solve. Secondly, it promotes... the proposition that Indigenous questions require Indigenous answers.
Coupled with the striking differences across providers and even states, in how Indigenous Australians are constructed, is the nature in which universities overlay their particular ‘distinctives.’ Often their research expertise influences course focus, for example, towards social justice, environmental sustainability, or Aboriginal health and wellbeing. Christian Heritage College, with its theological and bible faculty was one of the few to examine spirituality in any depth despite this being of significant value to Indigenous Australians - introduce some of the ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people view the world around them as well as insights into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander spirituality. University of Sunshine Coast includes Spirituality and Art, and Edith Cowan University’s ACS2122 Aboriginal Perspectives on the Environment, makes a strong connection - the ecological and spiritual interrelationship integral to Indigenous cultures.

Superficial Engagement with Indigenous History- Past and Present

Despite “Intercultural understanding” being a General Capability, it was rare (less than a third) to see examples where the Pre-service teachers were educated in the history of the First Nations and their contribution to Australia. More often than not, in the Primary courses, it was left up to the History (HSIE/HASS) unit to include what it was teaching in the Australian Curriculum, for example, Years 3-5, Australian National Curriculum:

ACLFWC155- Gather, record and classify information from a range of sources from Country/Place. Historical documents and contemporary resources [Key concepts: community life, leisure, environment, Indigenous knowledge, health, wellbeing… (ACARA https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/)]

This results in exclusion of the Secondary Pre-service teachers, not specializing in History. One third of the B.Ed Secondary providers included an Indigenous specialism stream (See Appendix Table 2. Indigenous References by Initial Teacher Preparation Program).

Reconciliation

The main intent for attending to the content and how it is taught in AITSL 4.2 is to foster respect and promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. In only one quarter of the providers was there any content on the website referencing the university’s mandated Reconciliation Action Plan (see Appendix Table 1. Indigenous Prioritizing). Where providers offered an Indigenous perspectives specialism, or suite of electives, (see Appendix Table 2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander References by Initial Teacher Preparation Program) there was usually a strong emphasis on reconciliation and in-depth analysis of social justice issues, such as University of Canberra Faculty of Arts who offer both a major and a minor in Indigenous Studies:

This Indigenous major explores contemporary issues affecting relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in alignment with the University of Canberra’s commitment to reconciliation. It is of value to all Australians not only
as a study of intrinsic worth, but also as a means of facilitating positive inter-group relations.

Overall, there was a paucity in examples of strategies for Pre-service teachers to engage with reconciliation, and a handful across the courses where it was required in any Assessment (see Appendix Table 6. Pieces of Assessments/Learning Outcomes within units). This table also shows scant evidence of any high-level personal engagement and relationship building with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or sites. University of Western Australia had a “best” practice example in their The Humanities and Social Sciences unit, which uses Nadia Wheatley’s “My Place” in the Assessment to plan a unit of work, and visits the Nyoongar site at Kings Park.

Course design

Compliance rather than embracing the Indigenous contribution.

All ITE providers are required to offer a designated unit, or a recognizable degree of content on Indigenous Australian history, language, and culture in line with AITSL 2.4. Surprisingly, this research showed that as many as one third of the providers did not attend to this in any obvious way (See Appendix Table 2. Indigenous references by Education Program). It was rare (less than 25%) to see explicit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and acknowledgements of their contribution to the building of a nation.

Key Learning Areas (KLA’s)

In the main, any Indigenous Australian content was relegated to Human Society and Its Environment/ History - Geography, as part of the Australian Curriculum. See Appendix Table 3. Evidence of Indigenous Content within KLA’s, for a breakdown in the spread of KLA’s that address Indigenous content. The KLA units give Pre-service teachers the opportunity to learn how to program, plan, teach and assess for the students in their classroom. Even in the Arts where integration may have been more readily accessible, it remains superficial. There were few examples of full integration of Indigenous contributions in the Arts when, one suspects, it would have been quite self-evident.

An exception was Australian Catholic University’s Arts as Meaning Making in Early Childhood (EDAR460) unit - unique contributions of Australian Indigenous arts and its place in early years education. In the main this KLA was devoid of much more than dot paintings with no mention of significant Aboriginal Australian artists or musicians and theatre content. Federation University of Australia appears to be strong in its Arts in the Teacher Education programs, for example, the unit ERBED2004 Approaches for Teaching in the Arts (set unit in BEd Primary 4yrs). There is also a strong emphasis on connections between art and culture, including contemporary and traditional arts practices of Indigenous Australian artists and artists of the Asia/Pacific region.

There were few examples of Aboriginal ways of knowing in Science and Geography. The following examples of “best” practice in the Mathematics KLA were encouraging in the way they tap into the home and family use of mathematics and its impact on children’s learning:
Learning and Teaching Mathematics: Part A (EDU514)- Learning Outcome: *Explain in detail the impact of knowledge and belief systems about Mathematics in different cultural contexts including, Australian indigenous communities; Subject Content-Mathematics and culture, Australian Indigenous and cultural ways of knowing (Alphacrucis College).

EMC101 Let's Count: This Charles Sturt University unit is based on the Let's Count early mathematics program designed by The Smith Family and academics from Charles Sturt University and Australian Catholic University to assist parents and other family members to help their children aged 3-5 years play with, investigate and learn powerful mathematical ideas in ways that develop positive dispositions to learning as well as mathematical knowledge and skills. It relies on parents and other family members to provide opportunities for children to engage with the mathematics in their everyday lives.

It was encouraging to see the occasional children's literature written by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, or a book or article by Indigenous Australian researchers, quite possibly local e.g. *The little red yellow black book: an introduction to Indigenous Australia* (used by La Trobe University and University of Wollongong). University of Sunshine Coast was able to embed a solid Indigenous perspective in their secondary English units:

EGL205 Imagined Homelands: An Exploration of Australian Literature, has direct relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions e.g. module- *Finding Country: Synthesising self and country: divergent perspectives*; EGL206 Reading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Writing. *This course introduces you to examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writing in novels, essays, songs, blogs, and more. You will learn to contextualise this writing within broader social and cultural concerns, and to identify themes and devices in the writing.*

Overall, this weakness in the KLA areas is likely to greatly diminish the Pre-service teacher's confidence in their ability to communicate content concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (AITSL 2.4).

**Bundled with Diversity**

Recent requirements have mandated that ITE providers embed Cross Curricula priorities - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures; and increase the focus on inclusivity. Unfortunately, too often Indigenous Australian issues were rarely foregrounded and tended to be merely, “mentioned.” Predominantly, they were “bundled” with “diversity” and “inclusion,” in phrases which neutered any real possibility of communicating “respect” (AITSL 2.4) for anyone bundled into the group, let alone Indigenous Australians.

This lack of a genuine desire to engage with different cultures, including our own Indigenous Australians may be a contributor to the gap between teachers and students in many classrooms. Locating Indigenous perspectives with Behaviour Management (See Appendix Table 4. *Non KLA integration of Indigenous Australian content*) may also widen the gap between the Indigenous Australian student in the classroom and the non-Indigenous teacher, where a lack of authenticity and commitment could be perceived.
Marginal building on home language and knowledge

There were rare examples of the Pre-service teacher being encouraged to engage in local communities where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are going to school, or to investigate the land/Country the school was built upon. Community engagement was more likely to be evident in the Early Childhood courses where they took seriously intercultural communication skill development among their Pre-service teachers across a range of stakeholders (See Appendix “Consult with local communities. Roles of family, children, health” in Table 6. Pieces of Assessment/Learning Outcomes within Units). Across the board, the Early Childhood courses tended to contain more units concerning parents, family and community partnerships of relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts.

Despite being a requirement, the evidence indicated that English as an Additional Language or Dialect was poorly addressed across the ITE providers. Granted there was a lack of full unit outlines in this research, however, it was rare (< 15%) for an English or Language and Literacy unit to explicitly provide strategies to support teachers to build on the language and literacy experiences that the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student brings from the home (AITSL 1.4) when programming and assessing. (See Appendix Table 4. Non KLA integration of Indigenous Australian content and Table 5. Indigenous Languages/literacy within Language and Literacy units). James Cook University offers a comprehensive designated unit ED3443 Teaching ESL to Indigenous Students. In the main, Queensland providers were more explicit about the rural and community context that the novice teacher is likely to encounter.

Consultation with human and information resources and expertise

In their recent document to support the implementation of 1.4 and 2.4, the NSW Education Department encourages ITE providers to seek out staff members and external personnel to ensure that the delivery of content has appropriate qualifications and knowledge in this area (New South Wales Education Department 2018, p. 4).

Three quarters of the Higher Education ITE providers had some kind of Centre for Indigenous Studies, for example, Student Support for Indigenous students, research scholarships or a cultural Centre (See Appendix Table 1. Indigenous Prioritizing). Unfortunately, despite these initiatives being documented in University Visions and Strategic Plans, they do not appear to have been routinely translated into any obvious curriculum content or interrelationship with Education departments.

Where Indigenous Australian Centres were on campus it was rare to see examples of them used as consultants at the teacher preparation course level or unit level. Nor was it obvious that they were invited as guest speakers or as lecturers (this may be due to the Desk Top Audit limitations where not all teaching staff were named, and not all named staff could be identified as Indigenous Australians). One of the “best” examples, however, was at Charles Sturt University which draws on staff from the School for Indigenous Australian Studies (located within the Faculty of Arts and Education) to teach a number of hybrid subjects in Education, Nursing, Justice Studies, Psychology, Management and Sport. These subjects
have Indigenous Australian Studies (taught and assessed by the Centre) and discipline-specific Indigenous Australian Studies (taught and assessed by the convening school).

La Trobe proved to have a proactive “best” practice approach across the organization. La Trobe University Elder Aunty Joy Murphy assisted in creating the module and features in the online video component – Wominjeka La Trobe Indigenous Cultural Literacy for Higher Education (ABSOWOM).

La Trobe Executive Director of Indigenous Strategy and Education, Professor Mark Rose, said the initiative was an exciting opportunity to encourage students to critically reflect on their own attitudes and beliefs. "Wominjeka La Trobe has been designed to increase Indigenous cultural literacy for all students," Professor Rose said. "The module will not only increase understanding, it will be an initial connection for all students to the very rich cultural heritage of this land."

This module not only offers an opportunity to learn about First Nations in Australia, and student’s own attitudes and perspectives but there is an expectation that they will be able to “recall,” the information they have been exposed to.

Content

AITSL recommends the ITE Program content deepen the Pre-service teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, societies, cultures, histories and contemporary experiences (2018, p. 5). A possibility for Pre-service teachers to expand their knowledge included taking electives or a minor stream. Of all the providers, the Federation University of Australia has the greatest choice of electives in Indigenous studies. Their Indigenous Issues in Education (EDFGC6310) unit not only seeks to expand the Pre-service teacher’s own understandings but appears to provide pedagogical protocols that enable their teaching to be culturally sensitive:

The focus of this course is to engage pre-service teachers in discussion with academics, Australian Indigenous community members and teachers, to advance pre-service teachers’ knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous histories and cultures. The course draws heavily on the concept of protocols for framing the planning and development of sensitive and ethical lesson plans that cater for diverse education settings.

Professional Experience

**Limited local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Contexts.**

It was rare to see a Professional Experience program require Pre-service teachers to visit/observe and/or teach in an Aboriginal community (See Appendix Table 6. Pieces of Assessment/ Learning Outcomes within units). Whilst many boasted of overseas placements, or voluntary service (Service Learning), even in the more obvious locations where access to Indigenous contexts would be less problematic, this seemed to be omitted.
Charles Darwin University, however, has a community service placement and University of New England includes a valuable rural partnership:

EDCX502 Aboriginal Education: PrEx 20days is presented in conjunction with Indigenous Education Consultants from the Tamworth office of the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities.

Charles Sturt University’s Residential program is offered as a routine option for placement. Queensland University of Technology ensures their specified Indigenous Studies unit - Culture Studies 1 EDB171: Indigenous Education, is embedded within the Pre-service teacher’s skills development:

During your professional experience you will be assigned to the supervision of a teacher in a school, and supported in the practice of embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ perspectives. This provides a ‘real world learning experience’ merging theory with practice.

Whilst it was less common to find much detail on the location of Professional Experience days, there was the occasional requirement within a unit to visit an Indigenous community, for example, University of Western Sydney where there were many good examples, two of which were their Professional Experience 4: Teaching in Country, as well as a highly commendable HSIE-type unit- 102133 Indigenous Landscapes and Sustainability.

The unit builds awareness and understanding about Aboriginal ‘ways of knowing’ and ‘caring’ for Country. The unit provides community engagement opportunities for the exploration of oral traditions, language, writings about nurturing, visiting, talking, singing and feeling ‘sorry’ for Country. It will design a framework whereby as future educators they will be able to use an ecological approach to their teaching… requires students to undertake visits to Environmental Field Studies Centres, the UWS Sustainability Unit and local cultural learning centres to work with Elders.

Assessment

Minor evidence of alignment to assessment tasks.

Assessment is a clear indicator to the student of what is valued, hence it was useful to see where assessment tasks engaged the Pre-service teacher with Indigenous Australian issues and whether they aligned to the Learning Outcomes (note the latest AITSL advice to ITE’s is detailed about assessment possibilities and much more in line with Table 6. Pieces of Assessment/Learning Outcomes within units), from this research. In only about one third of the ITE providers was there clear alignment between the Unit Description, Learning Outcomes, and Assessment. University of Western Australia was one such provider, who also made the AITSL requirements explicit, with rubrics within the assessments.

Table 6. Pieces of Assessment/Learning Outcomes within units gives some insights into the proportion of units which expected some continuous growth in understanding throughout the teacher’s professional life. Granted, it is also a function of the provider’s website as to what level of details could be accessed by “the public,” for this research.
What is missing from this audit is the considerable engagement lecturers may have with the Pre-service teacher during class, tutorials and in reading/assessment responses. Queensland University of Technology (see Appendix Sample Unit) had one of the few engaging assessment pieces -

Critique two (2) current mainstream newspaper articles on contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ issues, comparing their perspectives to articles on the same topics published by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ press.

Charles Darwin University was one of the rare providers to consider differentiating assessment tasks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students’ learning styles - EST203 Teaching Indigenous Learners - Examine effective pedagogical and assessment strategies for Indigenous learners.

Bias

Reflecting on one’s own bias and worldview is a critical skill for equipping teachers, made more potent when cast in an assessment requirement (see “Understand their own cultural location as an educator/ intercultural competence” Table 6. Pieces of Assessment /Learning Outcomes within units). Note: there were three providers who used the term “Cultural Competence” and Charles Sturt engaged Pre-service teachers in self-evaluation of their cultural competence.

The example from Queensland University of Technology (see Appendix Sample Unit) exhibits a coherent and holistic framework in their aspirations and approach for Indigenous education. Note, it begins with the Pre-service teacher’s own position in Australian society: increase your awareness of your own cultural positioning in Australia, and understand how it will affect your future as an educator. The conceptual, ethical and critical frameworks developed in this unit will carry over into the learning you do throughout your program of study and throughout your teaching career.

The University of Western Australia’s Early Years courses offered the enlightened unit - EYEK402 Engaging Koori Kids and their Families, covering some challenging content, and anticipates the Pre-service teacher will be able to - Recognise, develop and understand their own cultural location and identity as an educator and how it influences educational and child care practice(s). Suffice to say any proactive effort to redress cultural mis/perceptions concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people groups was far from evident across the board.

Reflexive Practice

University of Queensland in their Indigenous Knowledge and Education EDUC2090 unit regards reflecting on one’s own bias a continual process in the teaching profession -
We will ask you throughout the course to continually reflect upon your positioning in relation to Indigenous Australian peoples and encourage you to critique, question, and discuss the kind of teacher you would like to be in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

University of Sunshine Coast has some outstanding approaches to foster the Pre-service teacher’s understanding and attitudes towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and asks in one piece of assessment: Document in a reflective plan how, by the end of your program, you will continuously grow the following goals in relation to professional standards 1.4 and 2.4.

Conclusions

Key ideas have emerged in this research which cast potent light on the possible causes for the gap that remains in the Indigenous Australian student’s success in Australian classrooms. The research revealed a sporadic commitment to building Pre-service teachers’ confidence when planning, teaching and assessing curriculum that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum perspectives through an understanding of issues around language, history and culture. Best practice examples of Teacher Education courses in this research, worked towards developing confidence about Australia’s history and cultures. Better prepared teachers are essential to the formation of Australian citizens and identity and have the opportunity to sponsor positive changes that can be embraced, celebrated and maximized.

Recommendations

The following list of recommendations recognises the body of work undertaken over many years by committed scholars and practitioners in research and best practice. Drawing from their research, criteria was used to draw conclusions about the Unit Outlines and practices in each ITE provider’s website.

1. Engage pre-service teachers in examining their own biases, (Gower & Byrne, 2012; Darwin, 2011);
2. Engage pre-service teachers, and their lecturers, in learning about Australian histories and cultures past and present, particularly the ongoing impact of colonisation (Gower & Byrne, 2012; Morgan & Golding, 2010; White, Kline, Hastings & Locke, (2012);
3. Provide assessment and learning experiences that equip pre-service teachers to genuinely engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students rather than under the cluster of ‘diversity’ (O’Dowd, 2010; Morgan & Golding, 2010; Santoro, Reid, Crawford & Simpson, 2011; Gale, Mills, & Cross, 2017);
4. Make explicit the AITSL Standards 1.4 and 2.4 and ACARA cross-curriculum requirements when planning, implementing and assessing, and expected and supported demonstrated use of them in assignments (Shore, Chisholm, Bat, Harris, Kell & Reaburn 2014);
5. Demonstrate an overall framework or coherent approach to Indigenous education (McArdle, 2010; Beresford, Partington & Gower, 2012; Santoro, Reid, Crawford & Simpson 2011);
6. Avoid “tacked on” units and weave Indigenous perspectives throughout units (McArde, 2010);

7. Maximise the contribution from Indigenous people groups across the provider’s human resources and within all Key Learning Areas, for example, the Arts - Film and Television, Dance, Music, Art; Science; Geography; Physical Education - Sport (Santoro, Reid, Crawford & Simpson, 2011; Gale, Mills, & Cross, 2017);

8. Examine what the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children/learners might bring with them to school from home, for example, language and ways of knowing, (Gale, Mills & Cross, 2017; Gollan & Malin, 2012; Grote & Roche, 2012; Haig, Konigsberg & Collard, 2005; Partington & Beresford, 2012; Sharifian, 2017)

9. Assist pre-service teachers to develop strategies to engage with families and local communities (Partington & Beresford; 2012; Morgan & Golding, 2010; Shore, Chisholm, Bat, Harris, Kell, & Reaburn, 2014); and

10. Include education and awareness raising professional learning for course designers and accreditors (Mayer, Allard, Dixon, Doecke, Kostogriz, Rowan, Walker-Gibbs, White, Kline, Hoddet, Moss, 2014; Starling, 2018; Trinidad, Sharplin, Ledger, & Broadley, 2014).

Accountability

The issue is always of course accountability. What motivates a university, but more specifically a Faculty of Education, to improve practice in this area? Do the regulators have any teeth to compliance? Currently, the locus of control has been placed on the graduating teacher - a novice with a great deal on their mind, to include 1.4 and 2.4 as two of the 37 AITSL Graduate Teacher Standards they must demonstrate in order to gain registration.

In 2012, the then University of Western Sydney added an Indigenous Graduate Attribute to their suite which raised the ante in terms of accountability across the whole campus and a “natural” consonance, one would hope, between course content, learning outcomes and assessment, regardless of the field of discipline:- University of Western Sydney] believes that knowledge of Indigenous Australia should not only be an attribute shared by its graduates, but a fundamental part of Australian identity.

This research indicates that, despite inconsistent efforts across the sector, there is opportunity to harness the goodwill and benefit derived from sharing “best practice.” This paper suggests conducting an audit, that is not limited to Education Faculties, but includes all faculties down to the unit level for consistency and accountability against the Strategic Plans and Reconciliation Action Plans of their institution.

The last word in this paper is from Andrew Peters who runs the Indigenous Tourism course at Swinburne University “At the moment, most people see Indigenous culture as a separate thing to them; but it should be a part of them,” he says. “When that happens, I can retire.”
References


## Appendix

### Table 1

**Indigenous Prioritizing**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indigenous cultural program/unit (for all students &amp;/or staff)</th>
<th>Included in University Strategic Plans/ National best Practice Framework</th>
<th>Reconciliation Action Plan</th>
<th>Signed up with Aust Council of Deans of Ed MATSITI</th>
<th>Indigenous Studies Centre/ School</th>
<th>Indigenous Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 2

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander References by Initial Teacher Preparation Program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Specific reference to ATSSL 1.4, 2.4 or phrasing:</th>
<th>Designated Indigenous Unit(s):</th>
<th>Specialist Stream (major or minor) in Indigenous Studies</th>
<th>Elective(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MTeach* EC</td>
<td>19/46</td>
<td>29/46</td>
<td>16/46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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1. Only major programs listed, hence any minor examples e.g. BEd Sec/BArts has been collapsed into BEd Sec only and counted as ‘one’ program rather than multiple iterations / specialisms unless Indigenous Studies where it is listed appears on the table.

About one third of websites had the unit title only and / or a sentence / paragraph unit description as opposed to any details on learning outcomes etc.

Details for every program on offer was frequently missing, particularly for Masters of Teaching.

* Occasionally referred to as Masters of Education EC, Primary, Secondary
### Table 3

**Evidence of Indigenous Content within KLA’s**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Arts within or specialism</th>
<th>HSIE-Geography</th>
<th>Science</th>
<th>Maths</th>
<th>HPE/PDHPE</th>
<th>English, Indigenous literary contribution</th>
<th>Inter-disciplinary</th>
<th>Generic and neutered approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MTeach EC</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

3 Occasionally referred to as BTeach EC, Primary, Secondary

4 Some courses included more than one indigenous content subject
Table 4

Non KLA integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Bundled with diversity and low socioeconomic status</th>
<th>Cross-curriculum priorities</th>
<th>Clustered with Asian Studies or general capability, intercultural understanding</th>
<th>Mentioned in EAL/D,CALD</th>
<th>Mentioned in Education Support/Behaviour, Management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MTeach EC</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Indigenous Languages/literacy within Language and Literacy units

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Designated C-EAL/D Unit</th>
<th>Included within English units</th>
<th>Included within literacy units</th>
<th>Included within Indigenous unit(s)</th>
<th>Included within diversity units and Spec Ed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MTeach EC</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 Initial teacher preparation course providers may have EAL/D,CALD content but not have any reference to Indigenous content.
### Table 6

**Pieces of Assessment/ Learning Outcomes within units**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Some site visit, Indigenous, incursion or guest speaker</th>
<th>Teaching Practice Indigenous (School Teaching Model)</th>
<th>Explicit AITSL Rubric</th>
<th>Set of texts or readings</th>
<th>Understood own cultural location</th>
<th>Reflective plan for future growth</th>
<th>Analysis of mainstream media messages</th>
<th>Differentiated assessment tasks for Indigenous learning styles</th>
<th>Hotel approach conceptual, conceptual, conceptual, conceptual</th>
<th>Analytical frameworks</th>
<th>Engagement with reconciliation</th>
<th>Spirituality, Studies of Indigenous Religion, Aboriginal Belief systems</th>
<th>Consult with local community, roles of family, children, health</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MTeach EC</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>3</td>
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<td>-</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Sample Unit

*Queensland University of Technology’s EDN673 Culture Studies: Indigenous Education unit is a combination of two units from the Bachelor program and also situates the unit within 20 days professional experience.*

This unit begins with an analysis of the student’s own cultural place in the Australian context and moves toward understanding about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on history and contemporary issues. Students examine why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been continually disadvantaged by the Australian education system and are supported to develop theoretical understandings about cultural standpoint and principles for embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in an educational context.

The Rationale includes - Government reporting, discussions and debates continue around Australia’s most educationally disadvantaged group, with Indigenous students’ educational performance continuing to lag behind non-Indigenous students… teach curricula which embeds Indigenous perspectives on social, cultural and historical matters, in genuine ways.

The aims of the unit support this:

- To increase your awareness about your own cultural positioning in Australia in order to understand how your own cultural background influences your experiences as a student and your future as an educator;

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6 Of interest would be the number of professional experience days each course / program offered, although not all websites advertised this information.

7 Due to the minimal unit outline detail found on the website there were few examples of set texts related to Indigenous education – any examples have been included in The Report.
• To better prepare you to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students, and to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in teaching practice;
• To prepare you to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers in the educative process.

Both assessment pieces (how media report Indigenous issues, and portfolio reflection of their own practice) support constructive proactive strategies for redressing the current state for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and is quite explicit about the required outcomes, for example, approaches to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in curricula.
About the Authors

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Jennie and Sue have been involved in Teacher Education in higher education institutions across Australia since the 80’s. Both have been engaged on departmental reference committees, been contracted as curriculum writers, and continue to offer Professional Development to schools and professional associations, nationally and internationally.
Valuing Viewpoint Diversity: Four Examples for Higher Education

Professor James Dalziel

Morling College & University of Divinity

Abstract

There has been rising intolerance on some university campuses for non-progressive ideological viewpoints. In response, a growing number of academics and university leaders are acknowledging the value of viewpoint diversity – that is, the benefits of students being exposed to a range of competing ideologies and viewpoints during university education, particularly in humanities, social sciences and professional faculties.

This paper considers four recent examples of valuing viewpoint diversity:
1. Heterodox Academy, “a politically diverse group of more than 1,800 professors and graduate students who have come together to improve the quality of research and education in universities by increasing viewpoint diversity, mutual understanding, and constructive disagreement.”
2. The “Chicago Principles” for freedom of expression at universities – adopted by over 45 universities.
3. How theological colleges can balance support for academic freedom with a statement of faith.
4. The author’s use of Moral Foundations Theory to help people better understand others with differing moral priorities.

The paper concludes with reflections on the importance of viewpoint diversity for Australian higher education applied to the recent Guidance Note from TEQSA on Diversity and Equity.

Key Words: viewpoint diversity, academic freedom, ideology
The Purpose of Higher Education

There are many perspectives on the purpose of higher education. For students, they often have a focus on gaining knowledge and achieving accreditation in order to further their careers, while some seek personal growth. For academics, it is important to discover, synthesise and critique new knowledge. For society, university education can play a role in civic education and fostering democracy. From a regulatory perspective, higher education needs to provide a quality teaching and research environment in order to contribute to society. In the case of for-profit commercial higher education providers, they have an additional obligation to grow their business and return profits to their shareholders. And for various individuals and groups in higher education, there is a focus on promoting equity and overcoming injustice in society.

But what is most important purpose of higher education? In the view of this author, and many others the essential characteristic of higher education is a commitment to seeking and sharing true knowledge. Research is driven by the quest to discover and refine true knowledge, while teaching is about sharing true knowledge and helping students to think critically in order to sift truth from untruth (Newman, 1852; Leys, 2013). Many injustices in society are built on a foundation of untruths. This focus on true knowledge is not to suggest that all truth is simple and uncontested – in many disciplines there is significant debate, even on foundational issues (Snow, 1959; Kagan, 2009). This is particularly true in the disciplines of most relevance to this paper – the humanities, social sciences and the professions. Academic debate is usually driven by a quest for an ever more rich, varied and accurate view of the world – otherwise why debate in the first place? Even where definitive statements about true knowledge are elusive, the quest for better approximations remains a driving force for research.

Valuing and promoting debate is a way of encouraging academic freedom and free speech in higher education institutions. Debate recognises that competing ideologies and theories may have different contributions to make to the overall quest for true knowledge. At the same time, not all ideologies and theories make equivalent contributions – some approaches are less profitable to seeking true knowledge than others. But constructive debate provides a foundation for sifting truth from falsehood.

Ideological Problems in Higher Education

Intolerance of debate poses a fundamental challenge for higher education. While intolerance can arise from different ideologies, recent problems have mostly arisen from the increasingly progressive ideological views of academics (e.g., see Jaschik, 2012 and Figure 1). There has been rising intolerance on some university campuses for non-progressive ideological viewpoints – be they conservative, libertarian, traditional religious or insufficiently progressive (e.g., McVeigh, 2016). The rise of "no-platforming" (e.g., Richter, 2016), shaming and violent protests (e.g., Beinart, 2017) threatens academic freedom, and undermines the most important purpose of higher education, the search for truth.

In past papers (Dalziel, 2015, 2017) the author has provided examples of these problems. Other examples can be found in popular sources (e.g., Haidt, 2012a; 2014; Hayward, 2015; Schlosser, 2015; Smith, 2012) and academic publications (e.g., Kimball, 2015; Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015; Redding, 2013; Smith, 2014; Yancey, 2011; Yancey & Williamson, 2012;
The growing popularity of individuals identified with the “Intellectual Dark Web” (such as Jordan Peterson and Australia’s Claire Lehman, editor of Quilett) seems related to these problems (Weiss, 2018).

![Figure 1. Survey of US academics by Higher Education Research Initiative, data plotted by Sam Abrams. See https://heterodoxacademy.org/the-problem/](image)

A concern about progressive bias at universities and among intellectuals is not a new phenomenon. Major American critiques of universities include Bloom (1987), Buckley (1951), Kimball (1990), and Levin, (2001); while critiques of intellectuals more general include Hunter (1991), Lasch (1995), Rauch (1993) and the distinguished African American economist Thomas Sowell (1987, 2011). A number of these books have seen recent publications of expanded/reprinted editions indicating enduring concerns (Bloom, 2012, Buckley, 2002; Kimball, 2008; Rauch, 2013; and Sowell, 2007). European critiques include Benda (1928) and Scruton (2015). Recent Australian critiques include Donnelly (2018), Melleuish (2013) and Kurti (2017).

Countering the stronger critiques, Shields and Dunn (2016) offer a nuanced perspective by identifying the genuine challenges experienced by many conservative academics – but they also note that most conservative academics say that universities are more tolerant than right-wing critics suggest. And in a wide-ranging study by Gross (2013), he acknowledges the predominance of progressive ideology within universities, but suggests that much of this is a function of self-selection by prospective academics rather than a deliberate culture of enforced groupthink (as feared by some right-wing critics).
Lest it seem that conservative concerns are overblown, one example from psychology is instructive. Research has shown a sizeable minority (14-37%) of progressive social psychology academics are willing to actively discriminate against conservative academics in grant reviews, paper reviews, symposium invitations and hiring decisions (Inbar & Lammers, 2012). It is striking that progressive academics seem quite willing to report discriminating against conservative and libertarian colleagues.

Problems are not confined to academics – some conservative and libertarian students have described a lack of ideological diversity in teaching and assessment. Some students have experienced poor quality assessment of their work when they have argued from a conservative or libertarian perspective, and some report a toxic culture where public discussion of non-progressive ideology can lead to personal attacks, shunning and shaming (e.g., Haidt, 2012a). These issues have been reported at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, as well as in the experiences of early career academics.

Recent examples of problems in Australia include:

- The University of Western Australia cancelling the contract for the Australian Consensus Centre involving Bjorn Lomborg following a “passionate emotional reaction” (ABC, 2015)
- The sacking of Professor Peter Ridd from James Cook University over issues surrounding his critique of some research on the Australian Barrier Reef and his reactions to the University’s actions against him (Alcorn, 2018)
- The need for a police riot squad due to violence by protestors at a talk by sex therapist Bettina Arntt at the University of Sydney (Fernando, 2018)
- Ongoing debate about the proposed Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation, including its rejection by the Australian National University (e.g., Groch, 2018)
- Student complaints at a number of Australian universities about talks by feminist Germaine Greer (e.g., Hiatt, 2018)

In the past two years, there have been a range of books raising specific concerns about restrictions on free speech in universities, including: Ben-Porath (2017), Cabranes, Stith & Zelinski (2016), Chemerinsky & Gillman (2017), Fukuyama (2018) and Furedi, (2017). But the most significant recent book to address free speech, academic bias and student disquiet is “The Coddling of the American Mind: How Good Intentions and Bad Ideas are Setting Up a Generation for Failure” by Lukianoff and Haidt (2018). The authors begin by identifying three “Great Untruths” that have become widespread in universities in recent years, and the research demonstrating that these are untruths:

1. The Untruth of Fragility: What doesn’t kill you makes you weaker
2. The Untruth of Emotional Reasoning: Always trust your feelings
3. The Untruth of Us versus Them: Life is a battle between good and evil people (p4)

Lukianoff and Haidt draw parallels between the cognitive distortions observed in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and the sensitivity to taking offence in student culture. They also raise concerns about the idea that “words are violence” to justify physical violence, and the
rise of witch-hunts against academics. They propose “viewpoint diversity” (see below) as a solution to flawed thinking and limited perspectives arising from “groupthink”.

In comparison to their earlier article (Lukianoff & Haidt, 2015), they no longer see universities as the primary cause for the apparent fragility of students, but they rather see universities as responding to a pre-existing problem of adolescent anxiety and “safetyism” in society that has arisen for a range of reasons (see Part 3 of the book). They also draw on the informative study of “victimhood culture” on campus by Campbell & Manning (2018) to explain how today’s campus culture differs from a previous generation.

They conclude their book with six recommendations to parents and educators to help students become wiser and more resilient:

1. Prepare the child for the road, not the road for the child
2. Your own worst enemy cannot harm you as much as your own thoughts unguarded
3. The line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being
4. Help schools to oppose the Great Untruths
5. Limit and refine device time
6. Support a new national norm of service or work before college (p237-51)

They also offer four recommendations to university administrators to support free expressions and viewpoint diversity:

1. Entwine your identity with freedom of inquiry
2. Pick the best mix of people for the mission
3. Orient and educate for productive disagreement
4. Draw a larger circle around the community (p255-62)

Most importantly, Lukianoff and Haidt stress the need to reverse current trends not just for the sake of universities, but for democracy as a whole.

Viewpoint Diversity

Diversity in higher education can take many forms, and serve different purposes. One reason for supporting diversity can be as part of a focus on promoting equity and overcoming injustice. In some cases, the concept of diversity itself has been used to justify limiting academic freedom for non-progressive ideologies. The rise of the modern interpretation of diversity has itself been a subject of critique (Wood, 2003).

A key reason to support diversity is to foster a range of viewpoints from different perspectives in order to seek true knowledge. Diversity can mitigate bias arising from limited worldviews associated with particular groups. This is particularly important where those in power exhibit groupthink that stifles critique by those who have less power. The ultimate concern in this case is not the redress of power imbalances (though this may be a major
problem that needs to be addressed), but the goal of overcoming limiting worldviews that blind participants to errors, undue simplification and discounting of evidence that challenges prevailing theories (Kuhn, 1962).

In Australia, the Higher Education Standards Framework identifies diversity and equity under 2.2. In particular, 2.2.1 notes that higher education providers should “create equivalent opportunities for academic success regardless of students' backgrounds.” The standard notes a required focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and allows providers to identify other groups as appropriate to their mission.

“Viewpoint diversity” is a term recently popularised by Heterodox Academy (2018):

Viewpoint diversity refers to the state of a community or group in which members approach questions or problems from multiple perspectives. When a community is marked by intellectual humility, empathy, trust, and curiosity, viewpoint diversity gives rise to engaged and civil debate, constructive disagreement, and shared progress towards truth. Viewpoint diversity enables colleges and universities to realize their twin goals of producing the best research and providing the best education.

This concept has also been referred to as ideological diversity. Viewpoint diversity does not mean that all ideas are equally true or deserving of consideration, but rather that seeking truth requires “civil debate” and “constructive disagreement” among major ideas within the academy – particularly in disciplines where one particularly political ideology is dominant in its interpretative frameworks.

Example 1: Heterodox Academy

Heterodox Academy is an international network of academics and postgraduate students seeking to foster viewpoint diversity in higher education. The Heterodox Academy websites explains the problem as follows:

“When campuses don’t include ideologically diverse voices and don’t engage seriously with dissenting ideas, students and scholars miss the opportunity for their thinking to be challenged. They don’t get the chance to figure out which ideas hold up within the crucible of open inquiry. Biases go unchecked. Critical thinking is abandoned.

A lack of viewpoint diversity on campus undermines the academy’s ability to realize the goals of scholarly inquiry and education. Instead, research and learning spaces become self-affirming echo chambers in which ideological validation displaces critical inquiry.

(Heterodox Academy, 2018)

As at October 2018, there were over 1800 members of Heterodox Academy (the author was one of the initial members). Members affirm the following statement:

I believe that university life requires that people with diverse viewpoints and perspectives encounter each other in an environment where they feel free to speak up and challenge each other. I am concerned that many academic fields and universities currently lack sufficient viewpoint diversity. I support viewpoint diversity, mutual understanding, and constructive disagreement in my academic field, my institution, my department, and my classroom.
Heterodox Academy grew out of the work of Jonathan Haidt on the problems of political bias in the field of social psychology (Haidt, 2012a, 2014; Duarte et al., 2015). The research philosophy and methods of social psychology have provided valuable tools for analysing data used to debate contentious ideas (e.g., the “Google memo” on diversity, see Stevens & Haidt, 2017).

Given that Heterodox Academy draws attention to the overrepresentation of academic staff with progressive ideologies, and strongly endorses free speech, it might be assumed to be a conservative political organisation. However, the Heterodox Academy FAQ notes:

Our mission – to improve the quality of research and education in universities – is apolitical. As far as we know, we are the most politically diverse and politically balanced large group or society of professors to be found anywhere in the academy: according to the latest data, 16% of our members self-identify as conservative, 17% as progressive, 25% as centrist, and 26% as libertarian.

In addition to a website, newsletter, blog and podcast, Heterodox Academy provides resources to support students with critical thinking (e.g., the “OpenMind” platform) as well as ratings on viewpoint diversity at the top 200 American universities. Heterodox Academy is a significant new initiative in support of academic freedom in universities, and it acts as a focal point for research and discussion of this issue.

Example 2: Chicago Principles of Freedom of Expression

In 2014 the University of Chicago formed a committee to examine issues of freedom of speech and expression as a result of recent events in the USA. The committee produced a report (University of Chicago, 2014) that was adopted by the University.

The report notes that “It is not the proper role of the University to attempt to shield individuals from ideas and opinions they find unwelcome, disagreeable, or even deeply offensive.” In practical terms, the University must seek to uphold free expression even when some people would seek to restrict it:

Although members of the University community are free to criticize and contest the views expressed on campus, and to criticize and contest speakers who are invited to express their views on campus, they may not obstruct or otherwise interfere with the freedom of others to express views they reject or even loathe. (University of Chicago, 2014)

As an example of how the Chicago Principles relate to students, and the need to balance free expression with civility, the University of Chicago wrote to all incoming students for 2020 noting:

Members of our community are encouraged to speak, write, listen, challenge and learn, without fear of censorship. Civility and mutual respect are vital to all of us, and freedom of expression does not mean the freedom to harass or threaten others. You will find that we expect members of our community to be engaged in rigorous debate, discussion, and even disagreement. At times this may challenge you and even cause discomfort.
Our commitment to academic freedom means that we do not support so-called “trigger warnings,” we do not cancel invited speakers because their topics might prove controversial, and we do not condone the creation of intellectual “safe spaces” where individuals can retreat from ideas and perspectives at odds with their own. (Ellison, 2016).

As at September 2018, 47 US higher education institutions have adopted/affirmed the Chicago Principles or a substantially similar statement including Princeton, Purdue and Johns Hopkins University (FIRE, 2018).

In the Australian context, the problem of limiting free expression in universities was recently addressed by the Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Santow, and the Federal Minister of Education, Mr Tehan:

"Of course we care deeply about freedom of speech on campus," [Mr Santow] told Fairfax Media. "We also want to be supportive where there's a desire to combat hateful speech."...Asked about codes of conduct similar to the Chicago declaration, Mr Santow said: "In principle I think it's definitely worth considering ... we need to properly understand what the nature of the problem is and go from there." Mr Tehan told Fairfax Media he would support any vice-chancellor who adopted a position similar to the Chicago missive. (Koziol, 2018)

Former Chief Justice of the High Court Robert French has recently noted that the actions of university leaders “were probably subject to the implied constitutional freedom of political communication”. He also raised concerns about undue restrictions:

If the threshold [for restricting speech] is set too low in the interests of the feelings of the university community and applies an extended concept of “safety” in support of restrictions, the reputation of universities in the wider community which they serve might be at risk. The better approach is to encourage and maintain a robust culture of open speech and discussion even though it may involve people hearing views that they find offensive or hurtful. That is one of the prices we pay for a core freedom in this liberal democracy. (Merritt, 2018)

Similar concerns are raised in the Free Speech on Campus Audit (Lesh, 2017), where it was found, based on a review of policies and incidents, that 34 out of Australia's 42 universities are hostile to free speech, while seven threaten free speech and only one (University of New England) support free speech on campus. The institution identified as the most hostile towards free speech was the University of Sydney.

The problem in many universities is that the balance between freedom of expression and concerns about causing offence has shifted too far away from freedom of expression. This shift is detrimental not only of the university mission of seeking truth, but also to the education of students, who risk uncritically rejecting ideas contrary to their own. There is a strong chance that this problem will get worse, not better, and hence significant action is needed by government to legislate for free speech at universities (Lesh, 2018a), and for university leaders to promote free speech and stop attempts to limit free speech.
Example 3: Theological Colleges – Balancing Academic Freedom with a Statement of Faith

An instructive case study of balancing academic freedom with a distinctive existential commitment is provided by the theological colleges operating in the Australian higher education sector. Many theological colleges have a "statement of faith" as a requirement for employment as an academic. These statements are based on an affirmation of traditional Christian beliefs dating back to the founding of Christianity, often in line with particular church traditions of interpretation.

Theological colleges frequently prepare students for the role of priest/minister/pastor in a church denomination that requires affirmation of a particular statement of faith. Similar requirements may exist for related Christian organisations. Given this context, it is reasonable to expect that the academics that teach these students would subscribe to the same beliefs as those expected of these students.

However, how is this requirement to be interpreted in the light of a commitment to academic freedom that is required of all higher education institutions in Australia? Treloar (2017) provides a nuanced discussion of many of the issues involved in this area from the perspective of Australia’s largest network of theological colleges (the Australian College of Theology).

Ormerod (2008) notes some similarities between academic freedom in theological colleges and constitutional law. A constitution sets the framework of beliefs for legal academics, and these academics are not free to simply ignore a constitution because they may not agree with it. At the same time, legal academic freedom encourages critique and debate about a constitution, but the constitution provides the framework for this debate.

Theological colleges typically have a public policy to provide guidance on the intersection of academic freedom and confessional beliefs (e.g., Moore College, 2017). Christian higher education institutions that teach in other disciplines from a Christian perspective (e.g., education, counselling, etc.) have similar policies (e.g., Avondale College of Higher Education, 2014).

It is worth noting that these policies usually address two quite different issues – academic freedom for students and academic freedom for staff. In the case of students, the policies typically note that students will not be penalised for making an argument that stands outside the confessional beliefs of the college, so long as the argument is well supported academically. In the case of Moore College (2017), this is phrased as:

“One of the published values of the College is ‘Freedom of Enquiry’ defined as ‘the freedom to subject all ideas to honest inquiry’. This means in practice that no student will be penalised because the opinions expressed in his or her work are outside the confessional convictions of Sydney Anglicanism or evangelical theology more generally. Where intellectual rigour and sound argument with a proper appeal to evidence are employed, the work will be rewarded appropriately.”

In the case of academic staff, a key issue is the academic freedom of the institution to specify a (public) confessional basis for the college, and hence the expectation that academic staff that choose to work at this institution accept any confessional basis to their employment. Moore College (2017) phrases this as:
Moore College is a faith-based institution in which genuine rigorous critical inquiry is not seen to be in conflict with confessional responsibility. Academic freedom does not require neutrality but rather allows room for commitment. Conversely, that commitment, and each component part of it, must be open to honest examination and evaluation against appropriate criteria… The teaching faculty of the College enjoy the fair exercise of academic freedom alongside their commitment to the confessional position of the College in all their research and teaching. As Moore College is an evangelical College, such a commitment involves, first and foremost, a recognition that the final authority in matters of faith and life is the teaching of Scripture, adduced from a plain reading of its words in context.

To take a different situation, academic staff could have reasonable concerns about a college that did not previously have a confessional requirement then seeking to implement one (i.e., “after” the employment choice of staff to join the institution). However, in other cases where the confessional requirement is public, and a known requirement for employment, this provides a fair basis on which academics can choose (or not) to seek employment at these institutions. In this case, it is important to protect the freedom of the institution in being true to its underlying mission/ethos.

Part of the theory of learning and teaching in theological education (often expressed as “spiritual formation”) is that education involves the whole person – mind, heart and habits – and that each of these aspects of personhood affect each other. It is for this reason that theological education may include not only acquisition of knowledge, but also the formation of the heart/character (such as through mentorship) and habits such as spiritual disciplines (e.g., fasting, prayer, confession, etc.). Some theological colleges include behavioural requirements for staff in addition to “cognitive” requirements in their statement of faith – and these requirements are based on the holistic view of personhood embodied in the learning and teaching theory of theological education. For an academic to reject these behavioural requirements is equivalent to rejecting the cognitive requirements of a statement of faith.

How does a statement of faith interact with viewpoint diversity? The Australian College of Theology addresses this issue in its “Affiliation Agreement” – the agreement required of all colleges that are part of the network. It states:

Fundamental commitments - The College:
(a) supports the view that, while adopting a point of view, students should have an understanding of other perspectives that Christians hold on topics that are taught. One prevailing presupposition is that the Christian world-view is not just a theoretical framework of beliefs but is something which is related to and guides all that we do; and (b) accepts that students should be able to work in accordance with standards of critical scrutiny and academic freedom which guide, including being able to look critically at their own presuppositions as well as those of others. (ACT, 2017)

Regarding the current Australian regulatory environment for theological colleges, it was helpful to see the issue of a statement of faith addressed in the final version of the TEQSA Guidance Note on Diversity and Equity released in 2017:

“The individual mission of each provider gives the context for the development of institutional approaches to valuing diversity and supporting equity in its many forms. Where students are expected to make a commitment to support that mission (for example through a Statement of Faith), this should also not contravene a provider’s obligation to support free intellectual inquiry...” (p2)
TEQSA’s acknowledgement of both issues, and their need to be addressed together, is a valuable contribution. Placing the issues within the overall context of the individual mission of the institution is particularly helpful for resolving potential concerns in this area, provided that the individual mission of the confessional institution is publicly available to allow prospective staff and students to make informed decisions.

Finally, similar issues could arise with other religious higher education institutions, and they should enjoy the same balance of rights and protections. It is also possible to imagine higher education institutions that have a foundational set of beliefs that guide their teaching and research which, although not “religious” in character, may nonetheless guide the appointment of academic staff, and hence appropriately fall under the considerations here (e.g., a Montessori or Steiner teacher training higher education provider).

Example 4: Using Moral Foundations Theory to better understand the views of others

A key to valuing viewpoint diversity is to have a framework that allows people with different viewpoints to understand underlying reasons for disagreement. One particularly useful framework is Moral Foundations Theory (“MFT”, Haidt, 2012b), which can help people understand underlying moral assumptions in debates over contentious social issues. There are six Moral Foundations, each viewed as a continuum:

1. Care/Harm
2. Liberty/Oppression
3. Fairness/Cheating
4. Loyalty/Betrayal
5. Authority/Subversion
6. Sanctity/Degradation

One of the key insights of MFT research is that for many people, the pattern of responses across these six foundations varies with their political views. A graphical representation of the general pattern is provided in Figure 2.
To use MFT to help people explore debates over social issues, they first need an introduction to the theory, followed by an explanation of the patterns across the six Moral Foundations in relation to political views. It is important that people are reminded that these are general patterns, but that any given individual may be quite different.

To analyse a contentious social issue (such as from a recent news article), a 6x6 “Grid” based on MFT is provided (see Figure 3). An acknowledgement of the complexity of political views is included, but people are asked to choose the category is closest to their personal views. After providing the issue (e.g., What should a teacher do about school students who break school rules?), people are asked to identify the most important Moral Foundation for those on the “Left” (in this case “Care”), and those on the “Right” ("Fairness") and to use this to find the square on the Grid that represents the point of intersection. This process is repeated with a range of different issues, corresponding to different points of intersection on the Grid.
Figure 3. Moral Foundations Theory Grid for identifying the most important moral priority for two different groups (e.g., “Left” political views and “Right” political views) on contentious issues.

The visual illustration of the location of each disagreement can help people to step out of their personal view, and try to see the issue from another perspective. This can help people with different political views to better understand why their views differ – due to underlying differences in the prioritisation of Moral Foundations. This approach has the potential to foster more constructive and civil debate on contentious issues, and to help take some of the “heat” out of debates by focussing attention on the underlying reasons for disagreements. The author has used this approach in a range of contexts with students, academics and other professionals, and has found it to be a valuable tool for fostering constructive debate and greater understanding of the view of others.

TEQSA Guidance Note on Diversity and Equity

While the issues addressed above have broad implications for modern universities and their regulatory bodies, their application to a recent policy example concerning diversity and equity may be illustrative. In October 2016, TEQSA (the Australian higher education regulator) released a consultation Draft Guidance Note on Diversity and Equity. Considerable feedback to TEQSA led to some significant revisions. This included an important addition regarding free speech: “Measures taken to accommodate diversity should also not contravene the pursuit of free intellectual inquiry, and more generally, freedom of expression” (p2, Final Version).
The revised version also included discussion of academic freedom and statements of faith in relation to the mission of the institution (see above). Another important addition clarified the nature of equality: “The Standards do not require providers to achieve equality of outcomes, however they do require them to ensure equivalent opportunities for all groups” (p6, Final Version).

These changes, together with other wording changes, helped to address a perceived progressive ideological bias in the consultation Draft that concerned some (e.g., Lesh, 2018b). Nonetheless, concerns remain about the way that the Guidance Note could be applied in practice. Given the quite brief section on diversity and equity in the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015, it is important that TEQSA’s actions in this area do not overstep the legislation. This is an example of broader concerns that the practical application of higher education regulation can lean towards progressive ideology.

Finally, given the issues raised in this paper, the following wording that was retained in the final version, despite being critiqued in feedback on the Draft, remains concerning: “The major risks of a failure by a provider to implement plans for diversity and equity among its student cohorts are: a poor experience for learners and potential damage to their self-esteem…” (p5, Final Version). Attempting to manage student self-esteem is fraught with difficulties, and where academic free inquiry causes offence to students who do not accept competing views, the state of their self-esteem must not overrule freedom of expression. As Lukianoff and Haidt (2018) and Robert French suggest, the future of democracy is at stake in this issue.

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Equity at and beyond the boundary of the Australian university: student equity within third party delivery and non-university higher education institutions

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Abstract
This paper reports on preliminary findings of recent research funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. The research examined social demography, learning outcomes and educational experiences at and beyond the boundary of Australian public universities, including programs delivered through third party delivery arrangements and in non-university higher education institutions. The research examined whether equity group participation and outcomes for university courses delivered by third party providers varies greatly from the institution more broadly and/or the sector. We also investigated whether student equity group participation rates and outcomes for courses delivered by non-university higher education institutions varied greatly from the sector. The research identifies good practice exemplars where students from equity groups successfully participate in non-university higher education institutions. Qualitative interviews with key stakeholders across exemplar institutions provided insights into the factors that contribute to high quality higher education beyond the boundary of the university.

Key Words: Equity, Third Party Arrangements, Non-University Higher Education Institutions
Introduction

This paper reports on preliminary findings of research into the social demography, learning outcomes and educational experiences of students enrolled in two distinct modes of higher education delivery in Australia – namely, university programs delivered through third party arrangements, and higher education courses delivered by non-university higher education institutions (NUHEIs). The full research report will be published by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education in 2019.

University programs delivered via third party arrangements and higher education courses delivered by NUHEIs represent two distinct modes of delivery that are brought together by their relationship to the dominant institutional form in Australian higher education – the public university. While public universities enrol the vast majority of domestic higher education students in Australia, university courses delivered through third party arrangements – particularly those that involve sub-contracting and franchising of program delivery – are not definitively situated within public universities. Instead, they can be considered to reside at the boundary of the public university. By contrast, programs delivered by non-university higher education institutions are positioned definitively beyond the boundary of the Australian public university. Our research examines the equity group participation, retention and success rates, as well as the educational experiences, of students within these two domains of delivery. While maintaining a particular focus on students from low socioeconomic areas (low SES), we analyse and present data on five of the six nationally recognised equity groups within higher education, including low SES students, students from regional areas, students from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB), students with disabilities, and Indigenous students. In short, the research examines equity at and beyond the boundary of Australian universities.

Our understanding of student equity group participation and performance in Australian higher education is not ideally served by current approaches to the collection and distribution of data. Statistics on the participation and performance of students in the six nationally-recognised equity groups are routinely reported at the level of the university, but the data is not disaggregated to facilitate understanding of equity group participation and performance within university–third party arrangements. Meanwhile, aside from participation rates at the state level, student equity group data for non-university higher education institutions is not routinely published, thereby limiting understanding of equity performance in this domain.

The absence of publicly available data on student equity group participation and performance at and beyond the boundary of the Australian university represents a significant gap in our understanding of the Australian higher education sector. The international literature suggests it is important to know whether these forms of delivery are of a differential level of quality, and whether equity group students are disproportionately accessing programs of inferior quality (Edwards, Crosling & Edwards 2010; Kirp 2002; Wekullo 2017). This is of broader concern if enabled by public subsidy. A better understanding of student equity group participation and performance at and beyond the boundary of the Australian university will support evidence-based policy-making in matters that include the Commonwealth Government Provider Category Standards.

This paper responds to the following central research questions applicable to domestic undergraduate students enrolled in public university programs delivered through third party arrangements; and domestic students enrolled in higher education programs within NUHEIs in Australia.
• **Third party transparency:**
  What information is publicly accessible about third party delivery?

• **Third party public interest:**
  What equity performance is associated with third party delivery?

• **Equity beyond the university:**
  What is the equity performance of non-university higher education institutions?

### Core Concepts and Relevant Literature

#### The Australian Public University

In terms of student enrolments, Australian higher education is dominated by a single institutional form – the public university. In 2018, there were 129 non-university higher education institutions registered with the national regulatory authority, the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) (Norton et al. 2018, p. 9). These, together with three private universities, one specialist university and one overseas university, enrol a growing proportion of domestic higher education students. Nonetheless, in 2017, more than 90% of all domestic higher education students studying in Australia were enrolled in one of the 38 Australian public universities (Department of Education and Training (DET) 2018a).

Universities operating within Australia are defined by their relationship to legislation. Each university is associated with an Act of Parliament. Universities are also defined by their alignment with criteria for higher education providers set out in the Higher Education Standards Framework (Australian Government 2015). Finally, universities are a function of their financing. Australian public universities have Table A status within the Higher Education Support Act 2003, making them eligible for funding for Commonwealth-supported places in most bachelor-level courses (excluding medicine) through the Commonwealth Grant Scheme.

Australian public universities reported operating revenues of over $30 billion in 2016, with more than half of this income generated from government grants and payments, e.g. HECS-HELP, FEE-HELP, etc. (DET 2018b). Given the significant level of public investment involved, Australian universities are required to meet certain standards of transparency and accountability. This includes transparency and accountability around student equity group participation and performance.

Information on student equity group participation and performance within the Australian public university is readily available for the six nationally-recognised groups of under-represented students, and is a topic of considerable research and analysis. Appendix 2 and Appendix 5 of the Higher Education Data Collection routinely sees information published about participation and outcomes for the nationally-defined equity groups. This data has been published in a similar format since the publication of Equity and General Performance Indicators in Higher Education (Martin 1994). Other routine publications on higher education such as Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances and Student Experience Survey include references to at least some of the six nationally-defined equity groups.

The Australian public university is large by global standards. Mean enrolments in 2016 were over 33,000 students (DET 2017a). At this scale, Australia’s public universities utilise complex structures for delivery and engagement that are not clearly situated within geographic or institutional boundaries. Programs are delivered in partnership with institutions that include schools and hospitals, and a variety of business enterprises. Programs are
delivered on-line and on-campus, or via combinations of both. For regulatory and financing purposes, all these activities are considered to fall within the confines of ‘the university’, and this forms the unit of analysis for higher education statistics, research and financing in Australia.

Australian public universities reported expenditures of over $28 billion in 2016 (DET 2018b). A proportion of the expenditure of some universities is allocated towards non-public entities for core teaching operations. This includes what is known as ‘third party arrangements’ where universities contract all or part of a course to another entity (TEQSA 2017). No information is collected through the Higher Education Information Management System (HEIMS) on third party arrangements. Consequently, no information is published that describes equity group participation and performance within third party arrangements in public universities. This research sought to clarify whether there is a case for greater transparency in third party related activities.

Sub-Contracting, Franchising and Third-Party Arrangements

The Higher Education Standards Framework refers to third party arrangements. Standard 5.4 Delivery with Other Parties specifies that higher education providers are accountable for verifying continuing compliance of a course of study with the Higher Education Standards Framework. This Standard utilises a broad definition of delivery with other parties, including the course in total, or components of such. It also references work integrated learning, placements and collaborative research training arrangements.

Additional information on third party arrangements can be found in the TEQSA Guidance Note: Third Party Delivery (TEQSA 2017). The Guidance Note does not have the same regulatory status as the Standards but provides cues as to where TEQSA foresees risks in third party arrangements. The Guidance Note places emphasis on transnational education and redirects readers to a specific Guidance Note on Work Integrated Learning. There is no guidance currently published for providers on third party arrangements within Australia.

Paralleling the data limitations of HEIMS, the TEQSA Provider Information Request (PIR) does not capture information on third party arrangements. There is very little published about Australian higher education providers engaging third parties to deliver all or part of their courses. Consequently, no information is published that describes equity group participation and performance within third party arrangements for the six nationally-recognised equity groups.

For the purposes of this study, only third party arrangements between public universities and other entities were examined. There is limited availability of data for non-university higher education institutions consistent with the methodologies utilised for public universities to generate insights into third party arrangements for these entities.

TEQSA commenced a quality assessment of third party arrangements in 2013; however, data collected through the quality assessment was not subject to public disclosure (TEQSA 2013). Subsequent changes to TEQSA’s legislation, focus and operations meant that these quality assessments were used to inform TEQSA’s regulatory work but were not published (TEQSA 2014).
Non-University Higher Education Institutions (NUHEIs)

The TEQSA National Register for Providers and Courses includes a count of the number of organisations approved to operate in accordance with the *Higher Education Standards Framework*. Out of the 170 registered providers, 127 are categorised as ‘higher education providers’ who are accredited to offer at least one course of study. There are four other categories of provider which all include the term ‘university’. Given this, the category of higher education provider is routinely augmented with a prefix non-university.

Whilst comprising 75 per cent of all registered providers, non-university higher education institutions enrol less than 10 per cent of Australian higher education students. Information published on NUHEIs is limited when compared to public universities. *Appendix 2 of the Higher Education Data Collection* publishes aggregates equity group participation data for NUHEIs at the state level, but not by individual provider. *Appendix 5 of the Higher Education Data Collection* does not include NUHEI performance data. *Appendix 6 of the data collection* is focused exclusively on private universities and NUHEIs but includes no data on student equity group participation or performance.

Transparency of Public University Third Party Delivery

To understand the extent to which public universities undertake third party delivery, the research examined university policy libraries, Commonwealth funding agreements, annual reports and financial statements, and institutional websites. This enabled us to identify which universities are engaging in third party arrangements, with which providers, and for which courses. It also allowed us to estimate university expenditure on third party arrangements, and the proportion of annual continuing operations expenses this represents.

More than half of Australia’s public universities have a policy on third party delivery

Amongst the 38 publicly funded universities, fourteen were found to have institutional policies, procedures and/or guidelines pertaining to on-shore third party delivery of university-level award courses. A further five Australian universities mentioned teaching partnerships or third party delivery in other documents relating to course/curriculum delivery and quality assurance. Two universities were found to have policies that appeared to cover various options, which may or may not include on-shore third party delivery of university-level award courses. Three Australian universities had policies pertaining only to partnerships for off-shore course delivery. In total 22 universities were identified as having policies relating to third party arrangements of varying specificity.

A quarter of public universities list approved educational facilities in Funding Agreements

Funding Agreements are legal agreements between the Commonwealth of Australia and individual institutions. The agreements describe the number of Commonwealth Supported Places allocated to the provider, the maximum grant amount an institution may receive under the Commonwealth Grant Scheme, and the conditions attached to this funding. Courses enrolling Commonwealth supported students to be delivered at a location other than a university campus require the Commonwealth’s written approval and have, since 2014, been listed in funding agreements as “approved educational facilities”.

2018 TEQSA Conference and HEQ Forum – Selection of Papers

220
The “approved educational facilities” section of university funding agreements spanning 2013 to 2020 were examined to identify whether a university was actively partnering with any other organisations, and who the partner organisations were. Partnering and the use of another organisation’s facilities does not necessarily mean that a university is engaging in third party arrangements. Nonetheless, the process allowed for an assessment of whether a relationship between a university and another organisation with which the university may be engaging in third party arrangements was present.

Nine universities were found to have “approved educational facilities” other than university campuses listed in their 2014-2016 funding agreements. A further two universities joined the ranks of those with “approved educational facilities” in the 2017 funding agreements, while two universities listed additional “approved educational facilities”.

Approved educational facilities listed in funding agreements do not include third party arrangements through on-line delivery partners. Several universities engage in third party arrangements with entities to support on-line delivery. These entities are not all approved to operate as higher education providers by TEQSA. More information on course delivery issues is outlined below.

A third of universities with third party policies describe relevant payments in their annual financial statements

The annual financial statements for the 22 Australian universities found to have a policy referring to third party delivery were examined between the years 2012 and 2016. For seven of the 22 institutions whose annual financial statements were reviewed, we were able to identify expenses likely to refer specifically to payments made to third party providers of onshore teaching services. Other universities may also be making payments for third party delivery, but these could not be identified in the annual financial statements.

Terminology utilised within annual financial statements to describe third party expenses varied considerably – from “contract tuition services”, to “private providers”, “academic partner payments”, “teaching partners – payments”, and so on – with no two institutions using the same classification. All identified classifications were also listed under the broader classification of “Other expenses”, with the exception of one university where payments were listed alongside “Employee related expenses”.

Payments likely to represent payments for third party delivery in the seven universities totalled $280 million in 2016. This represents approximately 10 per cent of total continuing operations expenses for the seven universities in question. There was significant variation in third party payments at the institutional level, however, with payments ranging from a minimum of $1.5m or 0.5% of operating expenses, to a maximum of $105m or 18 per cent of operating expenses.

Transparency Findings

Public transparency of third party delivery in public universities is limited by the absence of standard nomenclature. Universities use different language to describe their policies. Funding agreements specify some forms of delivery beyond the campus boundary, but not all. University expenditures on third party arrangements for those institutions that publish this information adopt different language. It is difficult to form judgements on equity within third party delivery given the low level of transparency.
Public Interest for Greater Transparency in Third Party Delivery

The transparency issues described above may be of heightened public interest if revenue for third party delivered programs is derived mainly from public subsidies. The payments identified in the annual financial statements do not make clear whether payments are associated with international students and other fee paying cohorts, or domestic undergraduate students enrolled in Commonwealth Supported Places.

To assess the significance of third party financing the research examined university course handbooks and marketing materials in five universities where payments made likely in the procurement of third party arrangements were more significant in absolute and proportional terms. After identifying specific programs of study involving third party arrangements, data was purchased from the Australian Government Department of Education and Training to understand the equity characteristics of students enrolled in these courses. This process was time intensive and identified anomalies between institutional websites and student handbooks. There were cases of ambiguity around whether specific courses were delivered through a third party arrangement.

The process identified 158 undergraduate programs of study delivered on-shore by third party providers on behalf of the five universities. Around 15,000 domestic students were enrolled in the 158 third party delivered programs in 2016, as compared to 50,000 domestic undergraduate students enrolled in programs delivered in-house by the five universities. The equity characteristics of students in programs delivered by the five universities or through third party arrangements on behalf of the universities are described in Table One below.

Table One

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equity Group</th>
<th>Third Party</th>
<th>Not Third Party</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Rate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>3,127</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>3,039</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>487</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Any Equity Group Member</td>
<td>5,687</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table One data reveals that domestic students in programs identified as being delivered through third party arrangements in the five universities examined are less likely to be a member of an equity group. Students enrolled in third party delivered programs were however more likely to be from a low socioeconomic status background than those enrolled in courses delivered in-house by the universities.
Comparing the data in Table One to national data for 2016, students from low socio-economic status backgrounds enrolled in third party delivered programs at the five universities included in the study represented 2.5 per cent of all undergraduate students from low socio-economic status backgrounds enrolled in undergraduate programs at Australian universities in 2016. The proportion was lower for other equity groups, particularly students with disability. Less than 1.0 per cent of all domestic undergraduate students with disability were enrolled in third party delivered programs at these five universities in 2016.

Such low numbers and rates of equity student participation in third party delivered programs do not appear to make a compelling public interest case for transformation of reporting of third party arrangements. However, there is reason to pay closer attention to student equity within third party delivery and to introduce reforms that may improve transparency.

Firstly, the research highlighted that in the five universities examined, domestic undergraduate students enrolled in third party programs increased from 5 per cent of all domestic undergraduate enrolments in 2013 to 22 per cent in 2016. Third party delivery is growing in some institutions and warrants closer scrutiny.

Secondly, for students enrolled in third party programs within these five universities success and retention rates were lower for every equity group (Table Two). Quality, as measured by equity student success and retention is lower than that available for students enrolled in programs delivered in-house by the relevant institutions. This finding is made possible only through a customised data request made to DET following detailed analysis of institutional websites and handbooks.

Thirdly, 15,000 Commonwealth supported students enrolled in third party delivered programs at five public universities represents a significant amount of publicly financed higher education about which comparatively little is known. Public universities may be accountable for assuring compliance with the Higher Education Standards for third party delivery, but this remains visible only to the universities undertaking these arrangements, while being assessed cyclically through TEQSA re-registration processes.

At this point, it is worth noting that, to the best of the researchers’ knowledge, the only public university to have conditions imposed on its re-registration was for reasons relating to management of third party arrangements (TEQSA 2018). This specific university was not one of the five that was identified in the methods utilised (analysis of policies, funding agreements, annual financial statements, institutional website and handbook information and custom data provided by DET). The research has identified only the third party delivery that is publicly discoverable, but there is likely more third party activity occurring across the sector.

Table Two

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equity Group</th>
<th>Success (%)</th>
<th>Retention (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third Party</td>
<td>Not Third Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>67.6</td>
<td>75.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Equity Group                  | Success (%) | Retention (%) |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third Party</td>
<td>Not Third Party</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>78.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>71.2</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>58.3</td>
<td>64.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>78.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Equity Performance in Non-University Higher Education Institutions**

Non-university higher education institutions (NUHEIs) comprise a small but growing share of students in Australian higher education. However, they are not an homogenous category. Norton et al. (2018, p. 11) provide a description of the variety evident across NUHEIs, but there remains no clearly agreed taxonomy by which they can be categorised. Binary distinctions between public and private, university and non-university, for-profit and not-for-profit confront anomalies that are not readily accommodated. For example, some private non-university higher education institutions are part-owned by public universities (Ryan 2012).

At the aggregate level, we know that NUHEIs have a lower level of equity representation than public universities (Brett 2018), but there is little in the public arena that provides a level of transparency on NUHEI equity performance. Recent reports into student success and retention by TEQSA (2017) and the Higher Education Standards Panel (2017; 2018), as well as data on cohort completions published by DET (2017b) have included NUHEIs within their analyses. Many NUHEIs now participate in the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching (QILT) Student Experience Survey, and this data is publicly available, but access to NUHEI equity performance data nevertheless remains limited.

NUHEIs operate at a smaller scale than public universities, with the mean number of undergraduate domestic enrolments sitting at around 520 students, thus making it more difficult to assess their equity performance. Due to the smaller number of enrolments, custom data requests at the institutional level can be rendered irrelevant by data suppression protocols intended to address privacy concerns. This is particularly the case when looking at equity groups that make up a smaller proportion of enrolments, including students from remote areas, Indigenous students, and students with disabilities. For this reason, our analysis tended to focus on the largest equity group – namely, students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds. Table Three outlines comparative equity group participation and success data for all domestic students enrolled at Table A providers and NUHEIs.
**Table Three**

*Equity group participation and success rates by provider category, 2016.*
(Data source: custom data requested from the Department of Education and Training)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equity Group</th>
<th>Participation (%)</th>
<th>Success (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Table A</td>
<td>NUHEI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low SES</td>
<td>15.2</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional/Remote</td>
<td>20.8</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>4.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NESB</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NUHEIS have lower equity participation and success rates than Table A universities for all equity groups. The difference in participation is most evident for regional/remote and Indigenous students. NUHEIs are clustered in major capital cities, particularly Sydney and Melbourne, potentially reducing their access and/or appeal to people in regional communities. Aggregate data masks the variation evident in NUHEIs equity performance. Figure One highlights the distribution of low SES participation rates for NUHEIs and Table A universities in 2016. The median low SES participation rate is higher for NUHEIs than Table A universities, although the interquartile range is wider for Table A universities. Figure Two highlights the distribution of low SES success rates for NUHEIs and Table A universities. The median low SES success rate is higher for universities and the distribution range of low SES success rates is narrower for universities.
For NUHEIs participating in the QILT Student Experience Survey, there is again more variation than Table A universities, but the median overall satisfaction rate for NUHEIs is slightly higher than for universities (Figure Three). NUHEIs may have lower success rates for students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds, but in many cases, the average student is more satisfied with their educational experience.
The final phase of the research describes thematic analysis of interviews conducted with leaders from NUHEIs with strong equity performance. Eight NUHEIs were purposefully selected for interview on the basis of the following criteria:

- Above average domestic enrolments 2013-2016, as compared to all NUHEIs
- Above average low SES participation 2013-2016, as compared to all NUHEIs
- Above average low SES retention 2013-2015, as compared to all NUHEIs
- Above average low SES success rate 2013-2016, as compared to all NUHEIs
- Above average overall satisfaction rate 2015-2016, as compared to all NUHEIs

Of the eight NUHEIs selected for interview, no one type of institution was correlated with strong equity performance. The eight NUHEIs represent a mix of Christian institutions, private providers and TAFEs; for-profit and not-for-profit organisations; some with self-accrediting status under TEQSA, and others not; and half supported by CGS funding, the other half not. The only thing consistent across the eight high performing institutions is that they have operated as higher education providers for thirty years or more.

Staff in leadership roles from six of the eight NUHEIs agreed to participate in an interview.

Preliminary analysis of the interviews highlighted common themes across each of the six institutional leaders. It was evident from contact with staff within the organisations we interviewed, including our contact with the head administrators themselves, that they are education professionals – committed organisations and individuals, with a passion for higher education. This passion extends to a common focus on student-centred education. For interview participants who had moved across from the university sector to NUHEIs, they reported that comparison between the two types of providers in terms of the degree of focus on the student was stark.

All interviewees agreed that the degree of student-centeredness of their organisations was partly enabled by the organisation’s relatively small size. While some of the organisations we interviewed were outliers as NUHEIs in the sense of having larger numbers of domestic enrolments, they are still very small compared to the average public university. Fewer overall enrolments in turn leads to smaller class sizes.

Figure Three. Overall satisfaction rates by provider category, 2016.
(Data source: custom data requested from the Department of Education and Training.)
Smaller class sizes allow teaching staff to spend more time with individual students, and students are more likely to have direct contact with their lecturers, rather than through tutors. A number of interviewees noted that, because teaching staff develop closer relationships with their students then they might in a larger institution, they sometimes take on more of a pastoral care role in addition to providing additional academic support.

Another theme to emerge from the interviews was the strong sense of belonging and community felt by staff and students alike. Again, this is no doubt partly a result of each organisation’s comparatively small size – relative to public universities – with the increased intimacy making it is easier for a sense of belonging and community to emerge. However, most of the organisations we spoke with also actively work to foster this culture.

The organisations we spoke with were selected specifically for their relatively high equity performance for students from low SES backgrounds. Most organisations also had relatively high participation and performance of at least one other equity group, e.g. students with disabilities, regional students and/or Indigenous students. However, none of the organisations we spoke to felt that they specifically targeted any of these groups in their marketing and recruitment. Instead, they considered that the demographic profile of their students had come about more by accident, or circumstance, than by design.

A number of interviewees commented that the biggest factor impacting student equity within their organisation, from their perspective, is the inconsistent treatment of NUHEIs and public universities within the higher education regulatory landscape. The majority of students who access FEE-HELP to enrol in an undergraduate or postgraduate degree at a NUHEI will incur a 25% loan fee. This is perceived as a significant inequity confronted by NUHEIs.

Implications of Equity at and Beyond the Boundary of the University

The paper outlines preliminary findings of a research project funded by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. The final report based on this research will be published in 2019.

The paper was prepared for the 2018 TEQSA conference and specifically the ‘diversity’ theme of this year’s conference. Relevant to this theme of the conference, the research asked questions about whether we have sufficient knowledge of student equity in two important and growing aspects of Australian higher education – university–third party delivery, and non-university higher education institutions.

The research provides new insights into both domains of the sector. Third party delivery is growing and currently enrolls a significant number of Commonwealth-supported students. Programs delivered through third party arrangements do not appear to be directly targeting equity students, but the third party delivered courses within the institutions examined demonstrated a higher rate of low socioeconomic status participation than courses delivered directly by the universities. Student success and retention is lower for students across each equity group for those undertaking programs delivered through third party arrangements.

There is a case for improved transparency, but this is hampered by policies and practices for which there is no common language. Third party arrangements are defined broadly, and there may be a case to develop more precise definitions. This should include both
institutional policy, and reporting conventions around third party delivery. This may require changes to the data requested of higher education institutions through HEIMS and PIR.

NUHEI delivery is also growing and the research highlights that there are some institutions who perform strongly on equity grounds – spanning participation, success, retention and satisfaction. Qualitative interviews with leaders from institutions purposefully selected for strong equity performance highlight key factors in this outcome – notably a commitment to student-centred learning combined with learning environments that have smaller cohorts and a strong sense of community. NUHEIs report a sense of inequity in the design of the higher education loan program. Their calls for changes to policy may be progressed by evidence of the strength of equity performance. This too would be advanced by improved transparency and more routine publication of relevant equity statistics.

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La Trobe University:
Associate Professor Andrew Harvey, Centre for Higher Education Equity and Diversity Research; and Associate Professor Buly Cardak, Department of Economics and Finance

Victoria University:
Professor Peter Noonan, Mitchell Institute
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