

Assuring Quality & Effective Change Management in International Higher Education

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

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Aim of this session

To outline the approach being taken by one Australian University – the University of Technology, Sydney – and the network of five universities in which it is a partner³ to:

- manage quality for learning and teaching in the new, challenging environment faced by higher education, world wide;
- ensure that the Quality Management System it has developed is successfully and consistently implemented to the benefit of all students both international and local.

Context

There has been rapid growth in a wide mix of international higher education opportunities and approaches across the world over the last decade.

In Australia there was already strong interest in assuring the quality of higher education with, for example, national audits of every Australian University in the early 1990s by the national Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and production of a national Quality Benchmarking Manual in the late 1990s⁴, and, more recently, with the introduction of audits by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (<http://www.auqa.edu.au/>), the application of an Australian Qualifications Framework (<http://www.aqf.edu.au/>), the introduction of the Education for Overseas Students Act (<http://www.dest.gov.au/esos/default.htm>) and the use of a set of QA protocols by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training & Youth Affairs (<http://www.mceetya.edu.au/>).

However, the rapid growth in the two-way internationalisation of higher education and the importance of ensuring that international students get value for the money expended has accelerated the importance of QA for Teaching & Learning in all Australian Universities, including UTS.

This, in turn, has led Australian Universities, like their counterparts in many countries around the world, to look at how best to ensure that new approaches to Quality Management (i.e. improvements in how we do things) are not just soundly designed but effectively and *consistently* implemented. Thus the Fullan quote above.

What follows consolidates what we have learnt about the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of effective Quality Management in Higher Education, especially as it applies to international students.

¹ The NAFSA Conference is attended by 6200 senior staff and directors of International HE Program Offices from around the world.

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³ The Australian Technology Network of Universities (ATN) is made up of Curtin University of Technology, Perth; The University of South Australia, Adelaide; RMIT University, Melbourne; UTS, Sydney and Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. See www.atn.edu.au.

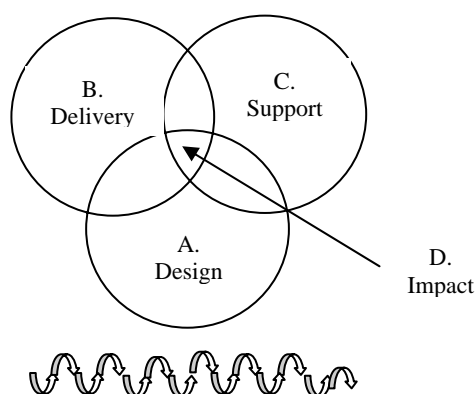
⁴ McKinnon, K et al: *Benchmarking* <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/otherpub/Execsumbench.htm>

Effective Quality Management in the Current HE Context Internationally

Key operating principles for quality management in H.E. learning and teaching:

- The quality of what is provided should be consistently at the approved standard irrespective of where students take the university's accredited awards.
- Quality standards that apply to local students and international ones, although the same, must be applied in a flexible and responsive way which takes account of the distinctive backgrounds, abilities, needs and experiences of students.
- Quality Management is about the total experience of the student not just what happens in the traditional classroom – we know from the UTS Student Satisfaction Survey (SSS)⁵ that how well enrolment processes, access to reliable IT, library resources, expectations about service provision, online sites, learning materials, assessment tasks and feedback, student services etc are managed are just as important in shaping students' judgements of quality as what happens in the classroom, as important as this remains.
- The quality management standards and processes used by the University must be evidence-based. That is, they must be derived from research on what best engages local and international students in all their diversity in productive, valuable learning. And it is here, as you will see, Australian universities have some very powerful tools and data at our disposal.
- Everyone must have shared overall picture of where quality must be managed. This overall framework is depicted in Diagram One:

Diagram One
Effective Quality Management in HE Learning Programs



Cycles of change over time

This framework suggests that productive learning occurs when there is a flexible and responsive learning design which demonstrably meets a set of evidence-based quality tests for productive learning (A); when this design is delivered by capable staff who know the area and are effective teachers (B); and when support and administrative processes, student services, IT, infrastructure and learning resources (C) are timely and appropriate. It emphasises that the key test of quality is evidence that the total university experience has had a positive impact (D) on student capabilities in the profession or discipline studied. Positive student feedback on A, B & C is important but positive, sustained student outcomes (D) are the critical test of quality.

I will now discuss how we assure quality for each of these elements in a little more detail.

A. Assuring quality for course design

⁵ Attachment One gives details of this and the other complementary elements that make up the UTS Tracking and Improvement System for Teaching & Learning.

This is done by making sure that the program meets a set of quality tests identified from research on what engages our students in productive learning. This research is based on a consolidated analysis of quantitative and qualitative results from the UTS Tracking and Improvement System for Teaching & Learning (Attachment One) and broader research on adult learning.

A particularly important source has been the *CEQuery*⁶ analysis of 40000 comments written by our students on the GCCA's⁷ Course Experience Questionnaire and a comparison with 27,000 CEQ comments written by graduates from 9 other Australian Universities in 2002⁸. The key QM checkpoints which have emerged align well with earlier U.S. research cited by the American Association for Higher Education⁹ and are indicated in Table One.

The results of this research provide a series of program quality tests that can be used to judge whether (A) a proposed design for a higher education course, (B) the delivery of the program or (C) its support are relevant, feasible and desirable.

Table One
Research on what engages students in productive learning

Those higher education programs which engage students in productive learning¹⁰:

- R** Are immediately **RELEVANT** to the Background, Abilities, Needs and Experiences of the students concerned and are delivered by staff who are accessible, responsive, up-to-date & effective teachers;
- A** Provide more opportunities for **ACTIVE** learning than they do for passive learning. In particular they include frequent opportunities for students to work with each other & with people who are further down the same learning path and to actively search a range of relevant data bases;
- T** Constantly link **THEORY WITH PRACTICE**, especially through provision of guided practice-based learning opportunities, real-life learning, case studies, simulations, problem-based learning and work-placements;
- E** Effectively manage students' **EXPECTATIONS** right from the outset about what level of service, support and contact they will be entitled to;
- D** Ensure that learning proceeds in **DIGESTIBLE** 'chunks' and has a clear, integrated direction.
- C** Use a valid graduate **CAPABILITY** profile to generate professionally and academically relevant assessment tasks. Learning designs specifically aimed at assisting students to successfully address these assessment tasks are then developed. It is in this way that relevant assessment, more than anything, drives learning;
- L** Provide students with opportunities to pursue flexible **LEARNING PATHWAYS**. Although students are allowed greater flexibility and choice in the subjects undertaken, careful attention is given to ensuring that they still end up with the same spread and quality of capabilities at graduation;
- A** Ensure that feedback on **ASSESSMENT** tasks is both timely and focused. Particular attention is given to identifying where students are performing well, where improvement is needed and how such areas for enhancement might best be addressed;
- S** Not only include opportunities for **SELF-MANAGED LEARNING** but actively coach students in how to undertake it;

⁶ See footnote 7 and: <http://australianit.news.com.au/articles/0,7204,9054331%5e15321%5e%5enbv%5e15306,00.html>. The Course Experience Questionnaire is administered annually to all 140,000 graduates from Australia's Universities. For further details of GCCA activities and the national graduate tracking system see: <http://www.avcc.edu.au/students/gradlink/GCCA>

⁷ The Graduate Careers Council of Australia operates a graduate destinations survey with every Australian Graduate each year, of which the CEQ is part. For details see www.gcca.edu.au.

⁸ This research was undertaken by UTS and Queensland University of Technology with 9 other Australian Universities during 2003, supported by a grant from the Federal Government. The result was a software analysis tool which specifically mines student comments on the national course experience questionnaire. The analysis has identified what students consistently emphasise as being important for productive learning.

⁹ See: Joint Task Force on Student Learning (1998): *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (1998), at <http://www.aahe.org/assessment/joint.htm>

¹⁰ In this context students variously describe productive learning as resulting in their successful employment, improved career outcomes, progression onto further study, personally significant outcomes like an improved sense of efficacy or as having helped them contribute to key national, regional or local community development priorities.

It has been particularly important to ensure that the issues tracked are really the ones which are most important to students, that students are not over-surveyed, that the results from the various instruments are triangulated and consolidated into an overall diagnosis of what is and is not working well, that the key improvement messages which emerge are addressed promptly and wisely and finally that students are shown directly how the key messages in their feedback are being acted upon.

This final step in ‘closing the loop’ on quality tracking data is critical. However, it is typically not well managed in universities across the world. A particularly important strategy in this regard is ‘benchmarking for improvement’. In this process a network of universities like the ATN uses a common tracking system to help each other identify and share pockets of good practice in key quality improvement areas with partners where performance in the same area is not up to expectations.

Making sure that particular quality management issues associated with international students are addressed and monitored

These were identified as long ago as 1996 in our focus groups with international students at UTS. The results have been confirmed in a recent review of offshore programs at UTS, by studying the published AUQA reports on the many Australian Universities so far audited (www.auqa.edu.au) and tested via the University’s international participation in quality networks in Europe, Canada, South Africa and Scandinavia.

The quality management ‘hot spots’ include:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations management – truth in advertising • Pre-departure contact and communication • Induction and on-arrival support • Accommodation assistance • Computer support • Enrolment, fees and other administrative requirements • Study skills support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counseling, student health/ welfare and recruitment support • Staff training and provision of cultural briefings • Assessment Quality including LOTE • Social support: e.g mentoring by a senior UTS student to assist transition, links to clubs, programs to meet Australian families
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Of course many of these apply just as well to local students. Others, however, are distinctively important for those who are studying abroad.

How to ensure that a quality management system like this actually works efficiently, effectively & consistently in daily practice

Having talked about the ‘what’ of change – in this case what constitutes a sound, evidence-based approach to quality management for learning and teaching, it is now time to address the other half of Fullan’s observation: - that ‘good ideas’ with no ideas on how to implement them in ways that demonstrably improve student outcomes are wasted ideas. This maxim is as true for process innovations like setting up a quality management system as it is for educational, research, community service innovations or the myriad of support and administrative developments currently being attempted by universities.

Quite simply, failed change costs - not just economically but strategically, socially and psychologically. When enthusiastic university staff commit to a change project like implementing a new QM system and that project fails they take the scars of that experience with them. Students and the country receive no benefit from failed change. Institutions which take on a change project that fails to deliver suffer a loss of reputation and, in the current climate, this can cost jobs. Change implementation in higher education

is not generally managed well, despite the fact that there is extensive research on how it can best be undertaken¹⁴.

This research has identified four key, recurring change management principles:

- Change is a complex learning and unlearning process for all concerned. It is not an event;
- Organisational and individual capabilities to manage change are directly linked;
- There is a profound difference between change and progress;
- Strategic change (i.e. setting out in quite new directions) and continuous quality improvement of current provision are two sides of the same change coin. Both need to be evidence-based and to focus only on key improvement priorities, not every change option that comes along.

In seeking to apply these principles we have had to successfully address six core change lessons to ensure that the UTS quality management system for Learning & Teaching is being consistently and effectively put into practice. These lessons are listed below and some examples how we have addressed them in relation to the QM development are given.

Change is learning & motivation is its engine

- A range of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are being used to engage staff in systematically implementing the quality management system. They include:
 - . The prospect of a forthcoming audit of UTS by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) which will focus on how well the system is being put into practice;
 - . The fact that negotiated funding under the new Australian Higher Education Support Bill 2003 reinforces the importance of not just gaining students but retaining them and ensuring they graduate with the capabilities that count.
 - . Other motivators include: the intrinsic satisfaction that comes from seeing students learn and change; receiving praise from senior staff and colleagues; achieving promotion; being part of a peer network which takes the QM development seriously and a culture which values high quality learning; recognising the possibility of being made redundant, growing competition, evidence of increased litigation in some other countries by students unhappy with the quality of the learning and teaching service they have received.
- As implementation is fundamentally about staff learning the gaps in their expertise, it has been critical to apply the same flexible and responsive approaches known to promote productive learning amongst our students explicitly to the staff development processes being used to help teaching, support and administrative staff learn how to implement the quality management system.

Change priorities must be set using robust, consolidated evidence

- Detailed diagnostic reports on where each program is and isn't performing well are produced each semester or annually by the university's planning & quality unit using data from the tracking and improvement system outlined in Attachment One.

Collaborative cultures focused on action learning produce practical results

- Personal contact and reciprocal relationships encourage people to persevere with a change effort and also identify better ideas than working alone. For this reason:
 - . A network of A/Deans works with the University's Planning & Quality Unit to set up local or networked action teams to address agreed improvement priorities. This network advises the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching) of these initiatives who ensures that parallel change initiatives are linked.
 - . Action teams are cross-functional action. They first test potentially viable quality improvement options under controlled conditions and then act as a resource for scaling up the most effective solutions. The motto here is, as Francis Bacon said, *we rise to great heights by a winding staircase*.

¹⁴ See, for example Scott, G (1999): *Change matters; making a difference in education & training*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney and at <http://www.qdu.uts.edu.au/pdf%20documents/Key%20lessons%20Imp%20Changes%20in%20.pdf>

Look both outside & inside for change solutions

- A key source of improvement solutions is benchmarking for improvement – a process which uses shared tracking systems to identify successful ways of addressing identified improvement priorities from across a network of universities.

Alignment and mutual reinforcement

- The University's Teaching & Learning Committee concentrates on ensuring that policy and support are aligned with these key developments;
- The UTS Courses Accreditation and Approval Process Online (CAAPO) builds in specific attention to key quality management issues for international students as well as those which cover all students irrespective of their culture (Table One).

Change doesn't happen, it must be led, accountably

- The whole development & implementation process has been led by a respected professor recognised as a leading educational practitioner and researcher on the area;
- Each Faculty has a position of A/Dean (L&T), assisted by a quality committee, with local leadership accountabilities for making the system work and suggesting improvements.
- The Dean is held accountable each year in his/her performance review with the DVC.

Conclusion

Universities around the world are increasingly operating in an environment where higher education is seen as being both an investment in the future of our countries and as a user-pays service in which students are entitled to a level of service which matches the increasingly high levels of fees they must pay.

In such a context we need a carefully formulated, evidence-based, comprehensive approach to Quality Management for learning and teaching in higher education. That is, what is done to manage quality for our students must be wisely formulated and must focus on what really counts.

The approach must apply equally and responsively to all students, both international and local. For example, this year at UTS we have Australian resident students whose first language is not English and who speak over 100 languages from Amharic to Urdu and come from 159 countries.

So we are very used to tackling the challenges of providing high quality, responsive learning experiences to a diverse range of students. And, given the trend towards globalisation, we know the career benefits for students of working in such a multi-cultural environment. We are well aware also of the fact that productive learning starts with a process of 'reading and matching' and making sure we explicitly address what tens of thousands of our students from all over the world have told us most (and least) engages them in productive learning, learning that results in positive outcomes and demonstrably adds value to their capabilities.

Having good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them means they are wasted ideas. Time and again over 20 years' work in higher education developments across the world we have found that too much time and talk goes into formulating a great change idea and too little focused and informed effort goes into trying to make it operate in a way that consistently generates practical benefits for students.

Higher Education is at a watershed, world wide. The institutions that will thrive in the new more competitive, quality-focussed, scrutinised and continuously shifting operating environment will be those which can successfully combine the 'what' of change (a good idea like a well-conceived, relevant, desirable, feasible quality management system) and the 'how' (a capacity to effectively manage it into successful daily practice).

Attachment One
UTS Tracking System for Teaching & Learning

Instrument	Quantitative	Qualitative	Frequency, Sample & Mode
UTS Student Satisfaction Survey (since 1994)	87 items covering the student's total experience of the university. Items are ranked on both importance and performance	All comments are kept on digital files, stored by course, year, level, sorted into areas of good practice and areas requiring enhancement	Every two years to a representative sample of 3000 currently enrolled course work students. Paper and online. Response rate 33%
UTS Research Student Satisfaction Survey (since 1999)	87 items covering the research student's total experience of the university. Items are ranked on both importance and performance	All comments are kept on digital files, stored by course, year, level, sorted into areas of good practice and areas requiring enhancement	Every two years to all currently enrolled research students Paper and online. Response rate 30%
UTS Course Monitoring & Improvement System (since 1998)	Benchmarked results for the past 3 years on 24 CEQ items developed in the 1980s, ranked on performance only plus benchmarked trend data on <u>demand, retention, progression & graduation rates, employment and salary.</u>	All CEQ qualitative data are stored x course, sorted into areas of good practice & those requiring improvement. They are also coded and analysed by <i>CEQuery</i> for inclusion in the annual CMIS report to each faculty.	Annual, covering every course for which there is sufficient data. CEQ goes to all graduates and can be completed online or on paper. Response rate 60%
UTS Subject Feedback Survey (since 2001)	8 items identified as of high importance in CEQ qualitative data, in SSS quantitative & qualitative data and in research on adult learning	Comments are returned to the appropriate subject coordinator and are not stored centrally	Initially all subjects, every semester. Thereafter all subjects requiring monitoring every time offered. Others every fourth time offered. Scannable form. Response rate 60%
UTS Feedback on Teaching Survey (since 1990,)	Items involve a core set and a wide selection from an item bank developed in the 1980s. Individual chooses	All FTS comments are currently returned un-analysed to the individual academic.	Voluntary at the request of the individual lecturer. Scannable form.
UTS Employer Survey	Items cover employer perceptions of UTS graduates, the capabilities they most require, future trends in the profession concerned, the UTS image & the quality of UTS Careers Services	The survey is undertaken online and all data and comments are stored and analysed electronically	Undertaken every three years with 150 of the major employers of UTS graduates.
UTS Successful Graduates Tracking System (since 2001)	Items cover 5 components of professional capability. Respondents rate these on both importance in current professional practice and the extent to which their university course addressed these successfully.	All comments are stored in digital files by question area. Also captured are a set of case studies when the graduate's capability was most tested. Comments are analysed to identify recurring themes.	Each professional area is to be tracked approximately every five years