Teaching and Learning Standards: Issues, challenges and opportunities

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Summary Notes

Part 1: Defining terms


- **Teaching standards**: ‘process’ or ‘delivery’ standards.
  - e.g., curriculum design, quality of teaching, student learning support, infrastructure supporting teaching and learning (p.3)

- **Learning standards**: ‘outcome standards’ (p.3)
  - Nature and levels of student attainment
  - What graduates know and can do
  - Learning outcomes
  - Competencies
  - ‘Learning standards apply to desired areas of knowledge and skills and the levels of attainment required for graduation and for the award of grades at pass level or above.’

Part 2: Teaching and Learning Standards: Issues and challenges

1. Defining standards
2. Operationalizing standards
3. Acknowledging the elephant in the room
4. Managing perceptions and realities
5. Traversing the policy landscape
6. Standards or standardisation?
7. Transparency in action - rendering the private public?

Part 3: Opportunities and implications

1. Pilot test, validate approaches and reporting mechanisms
2. Review and align institutional policy and practice
3. Prioritise staff engagement and institutional capacity building
4. Factor in student engagement with the standards agenda
5. Engage with government and decision-makers through informed, evidence-based input

Concluding thoughts

- Identify and manage the tensions in the standards debate productively and proactively. These tensions are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but need to be articulated and managed.
- Build staff and institutional capacity as we navigate our way through the standards environment.

References and further reading


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Assuring Teaching and Learning Standards in Australian Universities: Selected approaches

Following is a brief list of selected projects designed to pilot test and validate approaches for assuring and monitoring teaching and learning standards in Australian higher education.

1. Project Title: A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation (funded by ALTC)
   - Project Team: Prof Kerri-Lee Krause and Prof Geoff Scott (co-leaders).
   - Project universities: Griffith, Australian National University, Macquarie, University of Western Sydney, The University of Melbourne, Queensland University of Technology, Charles Darwin University, La Trobe.
   - 10 disciplines: Law, Marketing, Physics, Environmental Science, Economics, Chinese, Civil Engineering, Nursing, Philosophy, Music.
   - About the project:
     - Universities identify ‘comparable’ final year subjects in each discipline (note: not identical in content and approach, but comparable for the purposes of enabling peer review)
     - Convenors share subject outlines and assessment samples for blind peer review review by two other partner universities.
     - Blind peer review and moderation of deidentified student assessment items
     - Peer review of inputs (e.g., subject outlines, assessment tasks, marking criteria)
     - Moderation of outcomes (i.e., 4 assessment samples in 4 grade bands – Fail/Pass/Credit/Distinction-High Distinction – blind marking using home university’s marking guide/criteria).
     - Subject-level standards and how these compare with comparable final year subjects in partner universities.
   - Program learning outcomes also considered by examining subject outcomes in the context of program level learning outcomes.
   - Project extensions: Professor Sally Kift (ALTC Discipline Scholar, Law) will work with us in 2012 to examine connections between program-level discipline standards and subject level standards in Law. Additional universities are trialing the peer review feedback methodology.
   - Summary of outcomes: This project will yield a validated, robust approach for assuring subject achievement standards through inter-university moderation in common final year subjects across disciplines. It will also trial approaches for moderating and assuring program achievement standards, building on ALTC discipline standards. Project resources will assist universities to implement sustainable, self-regulatory moderation processes for monitoring subject and program standards.
   - For more information contact: Kerri-Lee Krause (k.krause@griffith.edu.au/k.krause@uws.edu.au) from 17.10.11) or Kate Aubin (Project Officer: k.aubin@griffith.edu.au)

2. The Group of Eight (Go8) Quality Verification System (QVS)
   - a process of external, discipline-led, academic peer review of final year undergraduate student outcomes, in each program or majors of large programs, at all levels of achievement across Go8 institutions.
   - Key features of the Go8 QVS are:
     - the timing and scope of the review is designed by individual university’s faculties or departments;
     - the QVS focuses upon assessment in a sample of final year subjects in undergraduate programs (the review must cover a minimum of 25 percent of final year requirements);
     - the QVS concentrates on benchmarking for comparing grades awarded in similar programs across Go8 universities;
     - the QVS is conducted by senior discipline-specific academics (Level D and above) who will have an understating of academic standards in similar universities around the world; and
     - the QVS is sufficiently flexible to complement other quality assurance mechanisms within Go8 universities to minimise duplication of efforts.
   - For more information contact: Mike Teece (Director Policy, Go8) mike.teece@go8.edu.au

3. Selected other projects on learning outcomes and T&L standards
   - Teaching standards framework project - includes six standards that provide institutions with a way of benchmarking the quality of their teaching, learning environment and curriculum (contact Prof Judyth Sachs, provost@mq.edu.au)
   - Assuring graduate capabilities project - focuses on evidencing levels of achievement for graduate employability, includes defining course-wide levels of achievement in key capabilities, articulated through standards rubrics; and implementing strategies to evidence student achievement of those standards. (contact: Prof Beverley Oliver: b.oliver@curtin.edu.au)
   - Assessing and assuring Australian graduate learning outcomes: principles and practices within and across the disciplines - principles for the assessment and assurance of graduate learning outcomes will be the major project outcome (contact: A/Prof Simon Barrie: simon.barrie@sydney.edu.au)
   - Achievement Matters: External Peer Review of Learning and Teaching Academic Standards for Accounting: (contact: A/Prof Mark Freeman: mark.freeman@sydney.edu.au)
   - For more information on ALTC-funded projects on learning outcomes and standards in the disciplines see: <http://www.altc.edu.au/grants-and-projects>.