

A TEACHING QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR WSU: A SUMMARY PAPER

Friday 8th August 2025
Teaching Quality Framework (TQF) Working Group

In April 2025, the university released a [Discussion Paper](#) which laid out the case for a Teaching Quality Framework (TQF) at the university which now features in our *Western 2030 Strategic Plan (2025-2030)*:

“... the framework will characterise the dimensions of learning and teaching that we value, measure, reward, resource and support. It will also align with recruitment, probation, performance and promotion criteria. [...] For our academic staff, the framework will empower them to share their achievements and impact in a context where teaching quality is well-defined, understood and valued” (p.8, *Western 2030*).

The Discussion Paper – open for 5 weeks - invited all staff (via an All-Staff email) to make submissions in response to a set of questions. Subsequently, the [TQF Working Group](#) ran a series of 12 focus groups across July, inviting staff into a conversation about teaching quality, again, in response to issues and challenges received from the Discussion Paper feedback, and as a chance to provide general feedback about the TQF.

This Summary Paper is intended to give the university community an insight into the feedback we received from the Discussion Paper and Focus Groups, and it outlines the next steps in taking that feedback forward. It contains four sections:

1. Questions
2. Staff engagement
3. TQF Opportunities and Challenges
4. Next steps

We thank the university for engaging with us, and particularly, for the frankness in their feedback at a difficult and uncertain time.

1. QUESTIONS

The *TQF Discussion Paper* invited a response to 7 questions:

1. What are the dimensions of teaching quality that a TQF should aim to capture?
2. Is there anything particularly ‘Western Sydney’ about teaching quality we need to bear in mind?
3. How can the TQF better recognise inclusive teaching practices that support student success?
4. What do you consider to be the minimum standard for all teachers at Western Sydney?
5. How we do our current promotions criteria capture teaching quality at the range of academic appointments?

6. How might we build a more expansive evidence base for teaching quality, beyond student feedback surveys?
7. How can contemporary teaching practices adapt to incorporate the ethical use of artificial intelligence?

The *TQF Focus Groups* also posed 7 questions:

1. What allows you to be successful as a teacher and/or educator? What are you most proud of?
2. What might a TQF help you do as a teacher and/or educator? What concerns you about a TQF?
3. What knowledge and skills about learning and teaching are reasonable to expect of ALL teachers starting out in a WSU classroom?
4. What kind of professional learning and development would help you take the next step in your teaching?
5. You've been asked to develop two ways of measuring teaching quality. What would you suggest?
6. What's one thing that would make the biggest difference to valuing teaching quality in your School and/or across the university?
7. What would give you confidence that the TQF isn't just another compliance exercise and that it genuinely supports you as a teacher?

In the responses to the Discussion Paper, not all submissions address every question, and in the Focus Groups, not all questions were asked in every group either.

2. STAFF ENGAGEMENT

Responses to the Discussion Paper

- 19 submissions were received in total (which included 2 School-based submissions, 1 response from a research collective, 3 responses from Professional staff).
- The School with most responses was Science, followed by the Schools of Education, Humanities & Communication Arts, Health Sciences, and Medicine.
- Most responses were from Level C academics (39%) followed 28% from the Professoriate.

Participation in the Focus Groups

- 98 staff participated in 12 focus groups.
- The Schools of Health Sciences and Business had the most staff engagement (7 each), followed by HCA and Social Sciences (6 each).
- Of the academic staff, most participants were Level C; of the professional staff participants, most were HEW Level 6 and 8.
- Two School Deans also participated in the focus groups.
- Of the staff who identified their gender, there was more female participation than male (more than 3 times as many).
- Of the total participants, 30% had been employed at the university for 10+ years; 10% at 6-10 years; 17% at up to 5 years.
- Of the participants, 13 claimed Fellowship of Advance HE (Associate: 1; Fellow: 3 and Senior Fellow: 9).

3. TQF OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The data from both the Discussion Paper and the Focus Groups has been grouped under two main themes: Opportunities and Challenges. The goal is not to provide an insight that leans

toward consensus, but rather, to showcase the variation in views and perspectives across our university community.

Opportunities

- The TQF needs to carry our values as a university, particularly our commitment to student learning, retention, and success, and our unique role and responsibility in, and for, the Western Sydney region.
- The TQF is a welcome initiative; it rightly elevates the visibility and value of our teachers.
- It can help set expectations about what quality teaching is; it can provide broad principles, facilitate consistency, offer guidance, especially in contexts where there are large cohorts of students. Yet a TQF also requires nuance, flexibility and the capacity to exercise judgement due to the differences across disciplines, professions, and program requirements.
- It will be important to align the TQF with existing frameworks (e.g., Advance HE) so that it is clear to staff how multiple frameworks relate.
- The TQF needs to recognise our university's diverse student cohort; that many students experience a range of transition challenges (with important lived experiences and consequences) that require and inform an inclusive and justice-based response, and that this context matters in any commitment to quality teaching and excellence.
- The TQF is a chance to embed the principles of existing frameworks including Universal Design for Learning (UDL), cultural competence, and trauma-informed pedagogy.
- A TQF that acknowledges teachers' and educators' well-being would be very welcome, particularly, the time and 'care' labour that is involved in teaching our students.
- A TQF might help to expand what's counted in the workload for teaching to enable more time to read, prepare, get to know our students, share with colleagues, and devote to improvement.
- The important front-line work of our sessional teachers needs to be appropriately recognised and supported in a TQF.
- There is an opportunity for the TQF to recognise the contexts and ambitions of the education work carried out by professional staff as part of a 'third space' workforce.
- In developing the TQF, there is a role for a parallel conversation with students about how they see their responsibilities and capabilities as learners.
- There is a chance to acknowledge and elevate the expertise in teaching already present in our university, and to provide more routine opportunities for good practice to be shared, borrowed, discussed and critiqued, alongside others.
- A framework should encourage reflection, growth and experimentation with new teaching practices, particularly in innovating with digital tools and Generative AI. It should reward effort and initiative as well as outcomes.
- There is chance to give genuine weight and language to evidence about teaching scholarship, educational leadership and impact.
- The TQF offers an opportunity to review and improve the evidence base for teaching and its impact on student learning, especially a perceived over-reliance on a (currently) flawed student feedback system. There is a need for a genuinely triangulated system of teaching evaluation informed by multiples sources of data that could include for example, peer review and observation, student focus groups, conversations with local and First Nations communities, the production of high-quality learning resources and curriculum artefacts, that can all be fed into a Teaching ePortfolio.

Challenges

- A good challenge for the TQF is to reflect and recognise the full range of 'teaching' and 'education-related' activities – from preparation and classroom teaching, to leading and managing teams of tutors, participation in School, university-wide, and sector teaching, curriculum and assessment improvement activities. Context and variation are important.

- There is a concern that the elements of the TQF may be ignored, will not be adequately embedded, resourced, or will be implemented in ways that are bureaucratic and focus on ticking boxes and one size fits-all.
- If the TQF is intended to provide measures of teaching quality, a significant challenge will be to include a focus on measures of relational accountability and the collective stewardship of teaching, rather than individualised and competitive rankings.
- If teaching quality is to be taken seriously, it will require similar kinds of measures that drive research quality.
- There is already considerable research on teaching quality in other sectors of Education, and in other national contexts – learn from those examples.
- The TQF should include a suite of resources that translate high-level principles into examples, case studies, and evidence, particularly in supporting teachers' applications for promotion.
- A challenge for the TQF is to counter the perception that excellent 'teaching' does not matter in promotion to levels D and E, and that research achievements and impact are the main criteria.
- Research excellence, achievements and outcomes are visible and lauded; teaching excellence is not-it is virtually invisible. The reward for being an excellent teacher is more teaching which often feels like a punishment in this system.
- A focus on teaching quality should also aim to develop the environment and cultures that teachers work in. Most teachers will struggle to be and maintain 'excellent' or 'high quality' on their own; there is a need for a scholarly and intellectual environment to support their practices in sustainable ways.
- The success of the TQF relies on giving teachers adequate time, resources, infrastructure and support to focus on student retention and success.

5. NEXT STEPS

These responses from the university community are being fed into the deliberations of the TQF Working Group and will feature in the 8 x TQF MakerSpaces currently taking place across August and September. Because teaching quality has been a lively discussion in Australian universities for the last 30 years at least, these MakerSpaces are not intended as entirely blank slates. As a university, we are learning lessons from the work done elsewhere. The Working Group will aim to bring the best of those ideas, insights, and challenges into a conversation with the university community.

Following these MakerSpaces, in early October, we are planning a round of School visits.

If you have any questions or concerns about the TQF, [visit the website](#) or reach out to the co-chairs of the TQF Working Group, Professor Brian Stout, PVC Learning & Teaching or Associate Professor Tai Peseta, Learning & Teaching, or email tqf@westernsydney.edu.au