

A TEACHING QUALITY FRAMEWORK FOR WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

A DISCUSSION PAPER

The university's new strategy *Unlimited 2030* due for release mid-year is sharply focused on student success and retention. It recognises the crucial role that quality teachers and teaching plays in achieving that goal. We have committed to the development of a Teaching Quality Framework (TQF) to align recruitment, probation, performance, and promotions criteria. Importantly, the TQF is intended to make visible a common purpose, a set of values, and expectations that underpin quality teaching at Western. A robust TQF will need to be capacious enough to recognise the disciplinary and professional variation in teaching approaches and contexts but also focused enough to ensure that quality teaching (and the resources to develop and sustain it) is directed towards student retention and success. A TQF will also enable the university to evidence its regulatory requirements, particularly in relation to the [Higher Education Standards Framework](#).

This Discussion Paper is intended to support our university community's deliberations about what a TQF might look like, and how we might go about developing one that draws on research, practice, and that strengthens our mission and commitment to providing students with quality learning experiences. While much of our teaching takes place in a variety of classrooms, we also know that our students' learning is supported by staff across the university, for example, in our library and labs, who are equally keen to support our teaching quality efforts. We need a TQF that recognises our Western Sydney context, and that is aligned with agreed Higher Education sector-wide efforts at defining quality teaching that also accounts for, and supports, workforce mobility. There are six sections in the Discussion Paper:

1. What is a Teaching Quality Framework (TQF)?
2. Examples of TQF in Australian universities
3. The case for a TQF at Western Sydney
4. Questions for Consideration
5. Your feedback and next steps
6. References

1. What is a Teaching Quality Framework (TQF)?

According to the [Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards \(AUTCS\) Project](#), a TQF typically comprises a statement of values and indicative criteria that aim to identify quality teaching across a set of standards. A TQF is often accompanied by suggestions about the forms and varieties of evidence that can support the demonstration of those standards.

In some universities, a TQF is organised in the following ways:

- academic levels (for example, from Level A to E)
- categories of teaching capability (for example, from 'competent' to 'excellent')

- teaching roles (for example, from ‘tutor’ to ‘Associate Dean L&T’)
- teaching practices (for example, subject design, assessment, or applying for an award).

There is often a suite of resources that enable a TQF to be used well: explanations, templates, exemplars, and in some cases, a Portfolio intended to make it easy to collect and curate evidence that is joined up to university systems.

Importantly, a TQF is not only intended to support and address teaching performance, but it can also be used to inform decisions about recruitment, induction, probation, and promotion. For our university, a TQF will drive a refresh of our professional learning so that university teachers and educators have access to opportunities that allow them to develop and evidence their teaching practice.

2. Examples of TQFs in Australian universities

Many Australian universities already have a TQF or something akin to it. A selection (not exhaustive) of those universities include:

- UNSW: [My Education Portfolio](#)
- Deakin University: [Teaching Capability Framework](#)
- Griffith University: [Learning and Teaching Capabilities Framework](#)
- Monash University: [Education Performance Standards Framework](#)
- University of South Australia: [Quality Teaching Framework for Teaching Excellence at UniSA](#)
- The University of Melbourne: [Framework for Educational Excellence](#)
- Federation University: [Teaching Expectations for Academic Staff](#)

Collectively, these frameworks represent:

- an effort at articulating the distinctiveness of a university’s learning and teaching approach;
- an attempt to characterise the dimensions of learning and teaching that are valued, measured, rewarded, resourced, and supported;
- an opportunity to outline expected levels of performance (for Levels A to E), a set of outcomes for each level, and a suite of evidence that supports the case for teaching achievement claims; and
- a focus not just on what a teacher or educator knows and does, but an opportunity to make a case for the impact of their teaching on others (for example, students, community, industry, the discipline, and profession).

While in most cases, these TQFs focus on teaching performance and promotion; it is less obvious how they support recruitment, induction and probation. Moreover, these universities have tended to adopt (and have adapted) the teaching criteria and standards from the national AUTCS project and/or the [Advance HE’s Professional Standards Framework](#), likely because many universities are keen to align with professional learning opportunities for Fellowship, their own institutional Excellence Awards, as well as the suite of national [Australian Awards for University Teaching](#) (AAUT). In many ways, it makes sense for academic mobility that there is enough of a shared language in the Australian HE sector regarding quality teaching.

3. The case for a TQF at Western Sydney

There has long been concern about capturing, measuring and evaluating quality teaching in Australian universities – described in an array of studies and reports since the 1990s (Ramsden & Martin, 1996, Crebbin, 1997, Martens & Prosser, 1998, Chalmers, 2010, Arkoudis et al., 2023). And although the demand to measure teaching quality is not without its critics

(Cooper, 2018, Blackmore, 2009, Patfield et al., 2022) a move towards a TQF acknowledges that there is a specialist body of knowledge, skills, and capabilities – what Schulman (1986) called ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ associated with learning and teaching both within, and across disciplines, that ought to feature more prominently in institutional approaches and teachers’ and educators’ practices. There is a compelling argument that the research basis for quality university teaching has been mature enough for some time to be clearly articulated. Moreover, a TQF is not intended to flatten disciplinary pedagogical approaches, rather, it can provide university teachers and educators with a language and guidance to support their teaching claims and achievements. Its intention is to be pedagogically inclusive enough for disciplinary specificity to be recognised. Designed, scaffolded, implemented, monitored, evaluated and resourced well, a TQF at WSU has the potential to act as an institutional anchor that can also integrate disparate improvement efforts and activities and re-orient them towards multiple forms of impact:

- **For students**, a TQF is a statement that their learning experience is overseen by teachers and a university that prioritises their success. It enables students to see that institutional effort and resource is being put towards their educational futures, and where possible, it invites them to join in that endeavour as partners with their teachers, peers, and the university.
- **For individual teachers**, a TQF can reveal how the university sees the purpose, aims, expectations and impact of teaching. Via a TQF, individual teachers have access to criteria, standards, expectations, and exemplars of evidence that clarify what teaching quality is, and looks like, across the range of academic appointments from levels A to E, especially, teaching and educational leadership. It allows teachers to narrate their achievements and impact in a context where teaching quality is well understood by the university community so that judgements about it are transparent and defensible. Teaching quality needs to be robust and clear with how individual teachers can gather multiple sources of evidence to demonstrate their achievements in a compelling way.
- **For Schools**, a TQF is an occasion to interpret, translate, and demonstrate that quality teaching matters, and that it can be developed and strengthened through local decisions, activities and mechanisms. It is a chance for Schools to support and elevate their quality teachers, to diagnose where quality teaching is happening and to celebrate it, to amplify the outcomes of quality teaching, to facilitate and act on improvement, and to develop tactics that orient their teaching and programs towards student retention and success. Importantly, it also gives Schools the capacity to identify where quality teaching is not happening and to address it. A TQF can work to focus effort and energy in a communal direction, and it provides a language for Schools to communicate the distinctiveness of their teaching quality to multiple audiences: to themselves, current and future students, to future staff, and to their community and industry partners.
- **For groups of teachers keen on collaboration in, and across Schools**, a TQF can provide signposts for the kinds of learning and teaching activities that will be resourced to generate impact.
- **For Divisions (e.g., Education)**, a TQF can sharpen the purpose and scope of the university’s suite of professional learning activity for teachers, teaching and educational leaders, learning and teaching support staff, and Schools so it builds in sophistication and is aligned with university strategy, policy and procedures. It recognises quality teaching (and its development) as an expansive endeavour – with knowledge, capability, and impact that moves from influencing student success in the classroom, to participation in external networks that foster international impact as a teaching scholar and educational leader. It also recognises that professional learning contains a mix of knowledge and know-how: disciplinary expertise, learning and teaching scholarship, technical and digital skill,

institutional nous and policy compliance, and that there is an array of approaches and locations – formal and informal; in learning and teaching programs and School-based events; f2f, online and hybrid; facilitated and self-study; and in communities of practice where learning about teaching quality happens. In acknowledging that diversity, a TQF gives teachers the capacity (and tools) to curate their professional learning through collecting, documenting and reflecting on the impact of their teaching in ways that might be both private (and developmental) and public (for reward and recognition).

- **For the university**, a TQF declares and resources what teaching quality looks like, and how it is to be developed, assured, recognised, celebrated, and improved - from recruitment, induction, performance, probation and promotion. Among other things, it can provide a structure for a revised suite of student feedback surveys; it can give supervisors a language to discuss expectations, standards, and improvement for teaching in annual performance reviews; and it can give staff an opportunity to make a case for resourcing their career development, for example, an Academic Development Program (ADP) application that legitimately focuses on teaching, assessment or aspects of curriculum development and renewal.
- **For our regulators and various accreditation bodies:** a TQF can provide evidence and confidence that the quality of teaching in our programs is rigorous, scholarly, assured, and focused on improvement.

While a TQF often seems pitched at the level of the individual teacher, it is also clear that sustaining individuals' good practice relies on teaching cultures and conditions that support them to maintain that focus. In other words, it is much more difficult for an individual teacher to continue to pursue a commitment to teaching quality when the local environment they work in is unclear, ambivalent, or actively works against it through workload and resourcing decisions. Not only that, a TQF is only one mechanism for sustaining the emphasis on student retention and success. It works best when it is accompanied by appropriate settings for policies, procedures and governance; when senior leaders and their teams advocate for its utility; when it is appropriately resourced; when there is an active and critical discourse around it (for example, when teachers and educators aim to give it meaning alongside others, rather than see the TQF as something to be implemented); when professional learning is aligned to it; when there are systems, tools and resources that make the TQF easy to find and use; when communities of practice around it are relevant and scholarly; when there are mechanisms and resources for educational experimentation, innovation and collaboration, and when reward and recognition is consistent with it.

Above all, a TQF reminds us that if “the purpose of teaching is to make student learning possible” (Ramsden, 2003:6), that this is a task best done when the university community works together to develop a commitment to it, and the corresponding conditions for it.

4. Questions for your Consideration

We are particularly keen for your comments and feedback on the following questions below, but we welcome any general comments about the development of the TQF:

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 well does 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?

5. Your Feedback and Next Steps

This Discussion Paper is open for comment until Friday 30 May 2025.

Across the remainder of 2025, we will be shaping the TQF with the university community. In May and June, we will commence conversations with Schools and the broader university community. Please look out for opportunities to participate.

This work is being led by a TQF Working Group comprised of colleagues from Schools, Learning & Teaching, Quality and Integrity, and is co-chaired by Professor Brian Stout, PVC Learning & Teaching and Associate Professor Tai Peseta. The development of the TQF sits under the responsibility of the PVC Learning & Teaching in the Division of Education.

Send your comments and questions to TQF@westernsydney.edu.au until Friday 30 May 2025.

We will undertake to develop a response to your feedback.

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