Assuring Learning and Teaching Standards through Inter-Institutional Peer Review and Moderation: Final Report of the Project

A sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation 2014

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www.uws.edu.au/latstandards
Chapter 6
Project outcomes and impact

The project sought to develop, test and enhance ‘a sector-wide model for assuring final year subject and program achievement standards through inter-university moderation’. It has generated a number of important outcomes against its endorsed project objectives, as outlined below.

6.1 Outcomes
Outcome 1: Production of a validated proof-of-concept inter-institutional unit-level peer review and moderation model that is sustainable and scaleable for use across the sector and across disciplines.

The inter-institution peer review and moderation model first developed by UWS in 2010 has undergone a number of refinements over the course of the project. These refinements are based on lessons learned at various stages and the extensive user feedback obtained from academic colleagues involved in the project, focus group meetings on the outcomes, the feedback from the project evaluator as well as detailed feedback from the project team and steering group members. The User Guide (see Appendix C and the project website: www.uws.edu.au/latstandards) is intended to describe the model developed and to assist all universities interested in pursuing this approach to assuring achievement standards with its successful implementation. The User Guide is complemented by a number of resources, also available on the website in the section entitled ‘implementation materials’. These include a step-by-step guide to implementing the process and editable documents to facilitate peer provision and review of inputs and blind marking.

Outcome 2: Evaluation of the relative benefits of peer review and moderation and the Group of Eight (Go8) Quality Verification of Standards (QVS) approach for assuring standards.

A discussion paper prepared by Professors Liz Deane and Kerri-Lee Krause entitled Towards a Learning Standards Framework compares and evaluates the peer review and moderation model with the Go8 QVS. The paper also includes a comparison of these two approaches to assuring standards with that used by Winthrop Professor Phil Hancock (University of Western Australia) and Associate Professor Mark Freeman (University of Sydney) in the Achievement Matters project. The Learning Standards Framework paper is included as Appendix E and is available on the project website at www.uws.edu.au/latstandards http://www.uws.edu.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/398620/learning_stds_framework_final_dec_2012.pdf

Further evaluation of the peer moderation model tested in the project has come from the detailed feedback provided in ongoing face-to-face and electronic meetings over the course of the project with the Project Team, the National Steering Group and International Steering Group member (Dr Peter Ewell). Academic colleagues have given feedback at the extensive follow up discipline roundtables, focus groups, and interviews.

Outcome 3: Develop networks of institution and discipline-based academic staff to share good practice in assessment and peer review and moderation across disciplines.

Networks of academic staff have been successfully established and developed over the course of the project. Site visits have been held in each phase of the project (Phase 1 – Semester 1 and 2, 2011; Phase 2 – Semester 2, 2011 – 2012) and the disciplinary feedback forums have helped build the required networks. Email and telephone discussions between discipline groups in the early stages of peer review and the moderation activities themselves have offered an opportunity for academic colleagues to network with colleagues outside of their own institution who share expertise in the same discipline. Discipline-based feedback teleconferences held at the conclusion of each peer review and moderation activity gave colleagues a further opportunity to build linkages.
Outcomes 4: Capacity-building among peer-reviewers.

A total of 52 academics from 12 discipline areas participated in the peer review and moderation process. Participants’ feedback on the value of this experience (Section 4.2) indicates that the process has proven to be a feasible and productive way in which to foster practical, situated, learning-by-doing, with clear guidance and peer support. Participants have consistently reported that this prompted them to reflect on, and make improvements to, their own approaches and practices.

Outcome 5: Promotion of a common language around issues of peer review and moderation and standards.

While colleagues often reported engaging in several forms of internal quality assurance including benchmarking, remarking of student work, calibration activities, they reported that a common set of definitions of key terms that would ensure everyone was speaking the same language when discussing aspects of quality assurance, standards, assessment and evaluation was absent. Participants suggested that the sorts of inter-institutional benchmarking and moderation fostered by this project would be significantly facilitated if this were achieved. Appendix B provides a starting point for this process. Involvement in the process, including using project materials such as the User Guide and editable feedback forms, also enabled colleagues to become familiar with the language of peer review and moderation and standards and have an opportunity to use this language when connecting nationally with colleagues in their discipline.

Outcome 6: Production of user-friendly resources.

A number of resources have been developed during the project which can be used by institutions to evidence assurance of quality and standards and address TEQSA requirements for higher education providers. These are available on the project website www.uws.edu.au/latstandards.

The project has provided capacity-building opportunities on the core concepts explored in the project for both the academic staff involved in the project as well as the senior university leaders who comprise the project team.

6.2 Evidence of impact on the higher education sector

6.2.1 Impact within Australia

The positive impact of the project on the sector can be seen in the number of additional institutions which have asked if they can use and/or adapt the methodology within Australia and, more recently beyond it. It has played an important role in helping shape policy developments in the sector, continuing to align with the work of TEQSA and the Higher Education Standards Panel.

In particular, the project has raised significant implications in relation to the national policy agenda regarding the measurement and reporting of student learning outcomes. Notably, several of the institutions that form part of this project referred to the value of peer review and moderation of learning outcomes as an important part of any effort to monitor and report on student learning outcomes in their institutional submissions to national policy discussion papers for the area.

The Australian Higher Education Standards Panel March 2013 discussion paper refers to the fundamental importance of peer review methodology such as that used in this project for the purposes of validation of learning outcomes and achievement standards. The work of the project has been discussed directly by Professor Krause with Emeritus Professor Alan Robson, the Chair of the National HE Standards Panel, as well as with the TEQSA representatives. Emeritus Professor Robson has given public support for the peer review approach.
The project has been showcased at key sector events like the TEQSA Teaching and Learning Standards Summit held mid-2011. This was an important event for raising awareness in the sector regarding the practical ways in which peer review of standards might be implemented as an alternative to the use of generic, un-situated ‘value-add’ measuring instruments proposed at the time such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment.

6.2.2 International links and impact
A number of international contacts have been initiated and awareness of the project amongst these contacts has been strengthened during the course of this project. Selected examples are outlined below.

USA
The project leaders have discussed the project methodology with Dr Peter Ewell, Vice President at the National Centre for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS, USA). NCHEMS is a research and development centre founded to improve the management effectiveness of colleges and universities. Dr Ewell also has close ties with the US Tuning Project and has provided advice to the project team in his role as international member of the Project Steering Group.

UK
Contacts in the UK with whom the Project Leader has consulted on the project include: Mr Norman Sharp, former Head of the Scottish Quality Assurance Agency. Selected outcomes of the project were presented at the Scottish Quality Enhancement Themes conference (July 2013) in Glasgow.

Canada
Professors Krause and Scott have visited Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, on two occasions to share information about the project and to benchmark similar practices in Canadian higher education. Professor Scott discussed the project as part of his 2013 keynote address at the Canadian Association for Institutional Research & Planning Conference at the University of Regina.

South Africa
The project co-leaders held a Skype call with senior representatives of the University of Cape Town, including the DVC Academic and colleagues responsible for quality assurance at the University. We sent them a copy of the project outline and user guide. They invited us to speak to a forum of DVC Academics in South Africa. This took place in 2013. An academic in Nursing at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, South Africa, requested the user guide to use with nursing academics in South African universities.

China
Dr Xiaoguang Shi from Peking University requested a copy of the user guide and information about the methodology for application among a number of Chinese universities.

New Zealand
The project methodology and approach was discussed in a keynote address at the New Zealand HE Quality Conference in May 2013.
6.2.3 Links with parallel projects

Links with a range of parallel projects and initiatives have been made. For example, representatives of this project were involved in a meeting of ALTC/OLT standards-related projects convened in August, 2011. Links were established with Simon Barrie who is leading a project on standards entitled Assessing and Assuring Graduate Learning Outcomes (Available online: www.itl.usyd.edu.au/projects/aaglo). See Appendix F for a table of all the other projects with whom we have made connections. Consultation has also been undertaken with the Queensland Studies Authority to review moderation practices and to check on synergies with our project and with Professor Beverley Oliver to identify links to her OLT-funded project on Assuring Graduate Capabilities: Evidencing Levels of Achievement for Graduate Employability.

6.3 Outputs

The project has resulted in a number of outputs that have been, and will be of benefit to the sector. All are available on the project website at: www.uws.edu.au/latstandards.

6.3.1 The project website

The project website consists of three sections:

1. About the project: This includes two project summaries – one brief and one longer. The summaries give details of the project, including its aims, research questions, conceptual framework and methodology.

2. Project reports and publications – This includes two discussion papers arising from the project which have been distributed in the Australian higher education sector and to selected international colleagues.
   i. Mapping Learning and Teaching Standards in Australian Higher Education: An issues and options paper (Krause, Barrie, Scott, Sachs & Probert, 2011); and

The final project report will also be hosted on this site.

3. The Resources section of the site is comprised of three parts:
   i. Readings – links to relevant journal articles and research papers that have informed the project approach;
   ii. Presentations – downloadable copies of all project-related keynote presentations and workshops delivered by members of the project team;
   iii. A user guide and templates to assist in the implementation of peer review approaches among institutions. These include a User guide for implementing inter-institutional peer review of learning standards; an editable peer review feedback form; and coversheets and templates to assist in implementation.

6.3.2 Selected publications and presentations


Keynote presentations during the course of the project included:

i. September 7, 2011: Presentation to Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRUA) consortium meeting, Melbourne (Krause and Alexander);

ii. September 28-29, 2011: Keynote presentation at the National Learning and Teaching Forum, Informa Higher Education Series (Krause);

iii. September 28-29, 2011: Keynote presentation at the National Learning and Teaching Forum, Informa Higher Education Series (Scott);

iv. September, 2011: Australian National University (ANU) Quality and Standards Forum (Scott);

v. November 4, 2011: Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) presentation (Krause);

vi. November 29-30, 2011: Keynote at Measuring and Improving Student Engagement and Experience Conference: increasing the quality of teaching and learning to encourage retention in higher education (Krause);

vii. November, 2011: International keynote address to the South African Association for Institutional Research conference (Scott);

viii. February, 2012: Keynote presentation to Australian Council of Business Deans (Scott);

ix. July, 2012: Invitational address to the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency/ Higher Education Funding Council of England (QAA/HEFCE) national meeting on developing a quality assurance framework for education for sustainability in UK higher education (Scott);

x. May, 2012: Criterion Conference national workshop on operationalising standards (Scott with Margaret Mazzolini);

xi. August, 2012: National workshop for the directors/teams of the four commissioned OLT academic integrity projects (Scott);

xii. October, 2012: Keynote address at University of Adelaide’s learning and teaching week (Scott);

xiii. March 19-20, 2013: Keynote presentation and workshop on project outcomes, Criterion Conference: assessing and reporting learning and teaching outcomes (Krause and Alexander);

xiv. May, 2-3, 2013: Invitational presentation on project outcomes, Testing together? Invitation-only meeting to advance the agenda of collaborative assessment of graduate outcomes in the professions, University of Queensland (Alexander).