

# **Towards a Quality Management & Development Framework for Community Engagement in the Australian Higher Education Sector**

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## **The Initiative**

This discussion paper is based on the frameworks for community engagement laid by a range of Australian universities, and the growing body of literature analysing the impact of enhanced relationships with communities, on academic organisations and cultural values. A group of Pro Vice-Chancellors and managers with responsibility for, and experience in, community engagement portfolios wanted to look at patterns of practice and management across diverse universities; to bring this into the work of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA); to be able to contribute to policy development; and to advocate for a national quality approach that supports the diversity of ways in which Australian universities engage with their communities. The basic premise is to share concepts and frameworks to invite response and input.<sup>2</sup>

## **The Imperative**

There are a number of institutional, community, political, policy and quality assurance imperatives which demand that university engagement be addressed in a more clearly articulated and holistic way:

- The Acts of many universities explicitly require them to engage with their regions and specified communities.
- The strategic plans of numerous universities identify engaged research and engaged learning as key mechanisms for building a distinctive academic mission in an increasingly competitive financial and policy environment where diversity in institutional strengths and cultures is encouraged.
- Globally there is an emerging political and intellectual agenda around engagement, citizenship, and the social and economic benefits of tertiary education and research that suggests a movement toward a more balanced but highly accountable view of higher education as both a private benefit and a

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<sup>2</sup> A related paper was prepared by colleagues from the Northern AUCEA group and delivered at the 2007 AUCEA Conference in Alice Springs. A workshop was also held at the 2007 Australian Universities Quality Forum in Hobart.

public good. Given international commitment and attention to engagement as a mode of connecting academic work to public benefit, Australian higher education must increase its uptake of engagement practices and ensure quality in implementation and performance.

- For some universities engagement is inextricably tied to, and is a vehicle for, refining and extending aspects of their mission regarding equity and/or social justice.
- An analysis of all AUQA round one audit reports indicates that the area is less well articulated and often lacks clear strategic objectives, sufficient and dedicated resources, and tracking/monitoring systems to measure performance and inform improvement, as compared with Learning & Teaching and Research. The next round of AUQA audits will invite universities to identify key areas for improvement – community engagement is one area many universities may wish/need to pursue and thus need to describe and measure.

For Cycle 2 audits AUQA has indicated that it will use the ADRI framework (Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement). This approach will explicitly encompass standards, performance and outcomes with attention to benchmarking, greater use of external reference points and identification of two thematic areas for detailed attention. If Engagement is chosen as one of the themes it is anticipated that the University would be able to articulate its:

**Approach** – Intended outcomes; reference points employed in establishing objectives; benchmarks; communication strategies.

**Deployment** – Effectiveness of the approach being deployed; standards and benchmarks used to assess this; evidence of training and resourcing to achieve effective deployment.

**Results** – Evidence of objectives being met; deployment of effective strategies linked to results; reporting and incorporation of results in the University's operations.

**Improvement** – Evaluation, review and strategies for improvement; development of sustained quality improvement through feeding results back into university planning.

In the light of these imperatives, and in order to take a more purposeful approach to evaluating, giving focus to and developing university-community engagement activities, a shared map of the potential areas for activity, and a robust quality management framework for engagement is necessary. Such a framework should not be directed towards compliance but is necessary to enable universities to self-diagnose their level of interest, to identify where their strengths and areas for engagement lie, to surface and link existing sets of activities and to take a more strategic and efficient approach to the management and improvement of engagement.

In addition, university engagement must fit with a range of parallel developments in quality management in other aspects of higher education - including impact measures in the Research Quality Framework (RQF) and the strong focus on quality management for learning and teaching via initiatives like the Learning & Teaching Performance Fund. International attention to research and analysis of engagement practices has expanded dramatically over recent years and informs the framework proposed in this paper.

## Defining Terms

### *What is 'Community Engagement'?*

That universities should serve the public good has been at the core of the social contract with society since their inception, though it has been reformulated many times to reflect changing circumstances – most recently in Australia under the rubric of 'third stream activity'. Universities in Western democracies, the United States in particular, have traditionally been recognised as having an obligation to produce graduates who have not just acquired technical knowledge and skills but who have the capacity to add positively to the social fabric. Some argue that in the public mind universities remain essentially public and philanthropic even though their reliance on public funding has been significantly eroded. (Arthur & Bohlin 2005, 20).

Dramatic changes in the nature of tertiary education are taking place but this civil imperative, although taking different forms in different contexts, remains a significant part of universities' articulated or implied missions and is part of the 'legacy' inherited by Australian universities through their emulation of the British system. In the 19th century the emphasis, at least in the United Kingdom, was on producing graduates/future leaders of good 'character' – the character of its students is what British universities have traditionally claimed to help shape. In recent times the Crick Reports (1998 and 2000) laid the foundations for the introduction of a broader concept of 'citizenship education' into primary and secondary schools in the United Kingdom and even the Dearing Report (National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education, 1997) explicitly recognised the ethical dimension of higher education to equip students for work in ways that would help shape a democratic, civilized and inclusive society. The report also championed the pedagogy of work-related or community-based experiential learning. Dearing saw higher education as part of the 'conscience of a democratic society, founded on respect for the rights of the individual and the responsibilities of the individual to society as a whole'.

Similarly, in the United States there is an established tradition of civic engagement in higher education attributed to Jefferson (University of Virginia) and Dewey and dating from the Land Grant universities in the nineteenth century. Renewed concern around this civic mission is fuelled by the impact of globalisation and the widespread lack of interest or involvement in public affairs, especially noticeable amongst the young, together with 'a general lack of trust and respect for American democratic processes.' (Ehrlich 2000, xxii)

Despite these historic links between education and a strong democratic society, recent policy trends across higher education in the developed world have led to a proportional decrease in public funding for higher education, an increase in the costs of education borne directly by students, and an expectation that universities work efficiently and innovatively to create diverse streams of revenue support. These policy changes have had the cumulative effect, perhaps unintentionally, of creating a public view of higher education as primarily a privilege and a private benefit for the student who will lead a better life through education. The 'public

good' of higher education, meaning the direct and indirect benefits to economic, social, cultural, and civic fabric and well-being has largely been forgotten. As nations face the need to build strong economies and adaptive workforces in the context of a shifting global economy, higher education may be seen more as a specific tool for enhancing educational attainment levels and economic growth than as a specific source of intellectual expertise to build successful communities and social capacity through external actions and partnerships. (Kezar, Chambers and Burkhardt, 2005).

The emergence of this shift was clearly identified by Ernest Boyer (1987) in his study of 29 American colleges and universities:

Throughout our study we were impressed that what today's college is teaching most successfully is competence – competence in meeting schedules, in gathering information, in responding well on tests, in mastering the details of a special field...But technical skill, of whatever kind, leaves open essential questions: Education for what purpose? Competence to what end? At a time in life when values should be shaped and personal priorities sharply probed, what a tragedy it would be if the most deeply felt issues, the most haunting questions, the most creative moments were pushed to the fringes of our institutional life. (283)

Many contemporary commentators reiterate the sentiment that higher education is foregoing its role as a social institution and is functioning increasingly as an industry with fluctuating, predominantly economic goals and market-oriented values characterized by privatisation, commercialisation and corporatisation. (Kezar 2004, 430-435 and Kirp, 2003). Engagement was articulated by Boyer (1990) as a way to demonstrate the broader role of higher education by integrating public purposes and benefits into teaching and research (Boyer calls these learning and discovery) functions of higher education. Across the international literature, there is now strong consensus that university-community engagement describes “the collaboration between higher education institutions and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the **mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge** and resources in a context of **partnership and reciprocity**”. (Carnegie Foundation, 2006). This definition has been widely adopted and emphasises the core elements that distinguish community engagement from non-scholarly forms of service or the notion of ‘outreach’, which have sometimes been confused with engagement.

The Australian government's most recent overview policy paper *Our Universities: Backing Australia's Future* (DEST, 2003), is underpinned by four narrowly defined foundation principles: sustainability (freedom to maximise market opportunities); quality (teaching and learning outcomes); equality (enabling individuals to fulfil their potential); and diversity (institutional difference). The policy paper is silent on the concept of tertiary education for public good. This is consistent with the policy emphasis in recent years on economic imperatives and graduate employability.

The idea that higher education can contribute more broadly to public good is not incompatible with current national policy directions in Australia. The idea of community engagement as an essential role for higher education emerged in the Crossroads discussion papers (DEST, 2002) – ‘engagement of universities with

their communities' was one of the main areas for consultation in the Ministerial Paper *Higher Education at the Crossroads*. The government recognised that institutions need to be responsive to the social, economic and cultural needs of the communities in which they are located and foster a more active engagement with these communities. The obligation for community engagement is one that rests with all higher education institutions, but regional institutions and campuses were seen to have a special responsibility to their communities (109:23). The government saw the 'best' regional universities as having a strong relationship with their communities, beyond employing people and purchasing goods and services. It was argued that mutual recognition of community service obligations contributes to the economic and social viability of both the institution and the community (110:23).

Despite the fact that much of the government-led debate in Australia has revolved around rural and regional development<sup>3</sup>, universities' relationship with territory is much more complex. Engagement in this context is not the exclusive preserve/responsibility of rural and regional institutions. All universities have allegiances to multiple territories – local, regional, national and international. In fact this is one of the strengths universities bring to community engagement – the local-global interface of networked institutions. The challenge is to ensure that engagement with different learning communities reinforce one another and to establish mechanisms through which the national and international connections of universities benefit their local regions.

Community engagement has also become caught up in the debate around 'knowledge transfer', more specifically research and research-related knowledge transfer in the context of the development of a Research Quality Framework (RQF):

Knowledge transfer is the process of engaging, for mutual benefit, with business, government or the community to generate, acquire, apply and make accessible the knowledge needed to enhance material, human, social and environmental wellbeing – this may also enhance the success of commercial enterprises. (Phillips KPA 2006:5)

Notably this recent report to DEST explicitly acknowledges the need to recognise the diversity of institutional responses to their communities and the need to include learning and teaching in the definition of knowledge transfer:

If institutions are genuinely responsive to the needs of non-academic users of knowledge and their respective communities, then knowledge transfer initiatives will be uniquely shaped according to those needs, the academic strengths of the institution and the nature of the participating academic disciplines. (2006:36)

It also recommends the use of the term 'community engagement' rather than 'knowledge transfer'.

Nonetheless, there is no question that universities are resource rich institutions, both in terms of expertise (intellectual capital), experience (social capital) and

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<sup>3</sup> Acknowledgement of the role of the university as a contributor to regional economic development is not new, and has been used as a 'tool for expenditure injection in peripheral regions' in Australia for some time. (Garlick 2000:3)

infrastructure/operations (economic capital). Engagement recognises that these resources can be available to our communities, in partnership. As Holland (1997:1) notes, 'Each institution must develop its own understanding of its academic priorities ...' Institutions that choose to identify engagement as an academic priority must look to 'match' community requirements to the University mission and strengths (Holland, 2001), and also to establish reward structures for staff that acknowledge and support the implementation of university community engagement initiatives that meet this match (Silka, 2005). In practice, this engagement might be realised at the student, staff, centre, academic/administrative unit or institutional level, and focus on diverse engagement initiatives relating to, for example, social justice issues, regional economic development or environmental management and sustainability.

The current policy agenda in Australia is clearly being informed by such shared understanding. Phillips KPA articulate three principles to underpin the definition and scoping of knowledge transfer/engagement (the latter being the 'preferred term'):

Principle 1: Knowledge transfer [engagement] is significantly integrated with the academic domains of research, scholarship and learning and teaching, which are themselves overlapping and integrated.

Principle 2: Knowledge transfer [engagement] requires capabilities, infrastructure and relationships that extend beyond the traditional academic domains of research, scholarship and learning and teaching.

Principle 3: Knowledge transfer [engagement] is distinguished from the traditional academic domains by its requirement for mutually beneficial engagement with a wide range of non-academic users of knowledge. (2006: 18-21)

In Australia these widely accepted principles are reflected in the definitions of engagement emerging in universities which begin to illustrate a more consistent understanding of engagement as a form of scholarly action through knowledge-driven partnerships with external partners:

Engagement is the collaboration between the University and a targeted community (regional, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in the context of partnership and reciprocity

UWS AUQA Performance Portfolio 2006: 48

Knowledge creation in the context of community engagement is characterised by: mutual dependence; commonality of (negotiated) goals; sharing of (different forms of) expertise; and communication based on trust and credibility.

Griffith University, Developing Community Partnerships, 2004

## **Institutional Attributes of Engagement**

A number of 'institutional attributes' are widely recognised as indicative of the 'engaged university'. The Kellogg Commission (1999:12) identified:

- Responsiveness
- Respect for partners
- Academic Neutrality
- Accessibility
- Integration
- Coordination
- Resourcing of Partnerships

as defining features of the 'engaged university'.

Recently a more specific set of institutional actions, strategies and attributes has been implemented by the Carnegie Foundation as Foundational Indicators for their new elective scheme to classify US higher education institutions according to their diverse levels of commitment to engagement (2006):<sup>4</sup>

- Priority in mission statement/vision
- Formal recognition through campus-wide awards and celebrations
- Systematic assessment of community needs and perceptions of engagement
- Emphasis in marketing materials
- Explicit promotion by Executive leadership
- Campus wide co-ordination infrastructure
- Internal budgetary allocations and external funding/fundraising
- Systematic campus-wide documentation mechanisms/tracking
- Integration into curricula and student experience
- Integration into research agendas
- Explicit framework for rewarding and recognising academic staff performance
- Intentional strategic plan for engagement
- Professional development support for academic staff
- Inclusion of community in planning
- Explicit approach to partnership development and management

The formation of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA)<sup>5</sup>, a formal alliance involving 32 of the 39 Australian universities, has begun to articulate the activities that may (or may not) be included in universities' concept of engagement, with AUCEA describing university engagement as:

... a two way-relationship in which the University forms partnerships with the community that yield mutually beneficial outcomes such as:

- Productive research outcomes that are, among other things, socially robust;
- Regional economic growth;

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/index.asp>

<http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classificatins/index.asp?key=1213>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.aucea.net.au/>

- Linking the community and the world (boosting local/global connectivity);
- Social capital development;
- Progress towards a region's sustainable development;
- Human capital development;
- Development of corporate and private citizenship attributes;
- Driving social change including helping to solve some social issues especially in areas of disadvantage; and
- Development of the professional, cultural and intellectual fabric of the community.

Community Engagement is, therefore, a method of teaching and of research that requires knowledge-driven, mutually-beneficial partnerships with external entities such that the university benefits from improved student learning and research quality and productivity and the external community benefits from increased knowledge and capacity to address community issues.

***Examples of community engagement activities include:***

- Community-based learning: students learn academic content in community settings through partnership-designed activities that provide specific knowledge benefits to a particular community. This type of learning is credit-bearing and curriculum-based; it is fully integrated into a student's course of study.
- Community-based research: collaborative research in which university staff and community (and students also) work together to design, conduct and report on research studies of both intellectual and community importance. Products of engaged research are of demonstrable benefit to both the academy and the community.
- Partnerships between university and external organisations (business, industry, government, community-based/non-profit, educational), focused on a mutually-designed agenda to address specific community needs or opportunities through collaborative work to which each partner contributes essential expertise.

Thus, community engagement differs very specifically from more traditional conceptions of service, public service and outreach, with the latter referring to one-way interactions and services provided by a university for the public without partnership relationships. These are not normally motivated by public relations or promotional agendas.

***Examples of Public service and outreach activities include:***

A suggested list of activities which may (or may not) be included in different universities' concept of public service and outreach includes:

- Undertaking community service; voluntary or for credit (as in Academic Service Learning)
- Providing continuing education, professional development
- Consulting services
- Public lectures, expert testimony
- Cultural events for the public

- Library access
- Community education programs
- Community membership on university advisory panels
- Making public commentary, running lectures, or forums on key social and economic issues of importance to the university's targeted communities
- Making university resources (library, radio, TV, skills, rooms, resources, facilities) available to local community groups (free or for payment)

Activities described above as public service and outreach can become engaged learning or research activities if they are organised, designed and implemented through partnership relationships characterised by an exchange of knowledge and expertise between university and community.

### **Towards a University Community Engagement Quality Management & Development Framework**

At the 2005 AUQF conference Julie Jackson (La Trobe) and Geoff Scott (UWS) proposed a Quality Management framework for University Engagement in Australian higher education with links to Quality Management for Learning & Teaching and Research.

(See: [http://www.auqa.edu.au/auqf/2005/proceedings/full\\_proceedings.pdf](http://www.auqa.edu.au/auqf/2005/proceedings/full_proceedings.pdf) 162-8).

The 2005 AUQF conference focused on Quality and Community Engagement and the paper was reviewed and enhanced in the light of feedback from local and international participants who are expert in the area. Member universities of the Northern Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (NAUCEA) have since field-tested the framework and found it accommodated their various approaches. Universities such as UWS have completed university wide reviews based on the framework (the UWS Review was chaired by Barbara Holland). The framework has also been tested internationally: most recently in South Africa in a JET<sup>6</sup>-convened national review of the framework by 22 universities in December 2006. In 2005 members of the Canadian Quality Network of Universities also reviewed it.

In early February 2007 a group of university engagement Pro Vice-Chancellors and quality managers met for two days to review progress and look at how the participating institutions might work more closely to develop an enhanced version of framework for managing strategy and quality in the area.

It was agreed that “quality” for university-community engagement can be evaluated at four levels, running from the least to the most important:

Judgements can be made about:

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<sup>6</sup> JET Education Services operates across the public education sector in South Africa: from schools [general education and training] to colleges [further education and training] and universities [higher education]. The development and evaluation projects in which it is involved are focused in poor, marginalised and disadvantaged communities across the country. See: <http://www.jet.org.za/>.

1. The clarity, relevance, desirability and feasibility (i.e. achievability) of the university's approach and strategy for the area. This gives focus to the quality of **conceptualisation and planning** for university-community engagement.
2. The extent to which the relevant human, financial and non human resources identified in the university's strategy and plans for the area are in place. This gives focus to the alignment and quality of **resourcing** for the area.
3. The extent to which those who are to implement the engagement strategy report that they are satisfied that what was anticipated on paper is actually working in practice. This gives focus to and enables tracking of the quality of user feedback on the quality of **implementation**.
4. The extent to which those intended to benefit from this work are demonstrably gaining from its implementation. This gives focus to the quality of **impact**. This level of evaluation is the acid test of quality but, in the area of university engagement, is the least well understood or articulated<sup>7</sup>.

Clearly, levels one and two (inputs) are necessary but they are not sufficient to conclude that a university's approach to the area is a high quality one; quality resides at levels three and four (in the implementation and outcomes of plans). It is in this way that the 'fitness for purpose' approach to quality evaluation can be addressed. In terms of 'fitness of purpose' approaches to quality discussion of this notion occurs at level one.

At every level it is necessary to adopt an evidence-based approach to making judgements of quality; that is, it is necessary to work out what data and indicators are most important at each level and who will evaluate (i.e. make judgements about the worth of) the results that emerge.

In applying the framework it is equally important to sort out not only **who** will actually make the judgements about performance at each level but also who will ensure that action is taken to address any emerging areas of poor performance promptly and wisely.

This quality assurance and evaluation framework applies not only to assuring and improving the quality of learning and teaching or research and research training in higher education. It can also apply to making judgements of quality about a university's engagement work more systematic and focused.

### ***What is a useful framework for managing quality in Community Engagement?***

The proposed framework supports the notion of engagement as a force for institutional diversification as each university seeks to ensure that its governance, strategy formation, resourcing, delivery, quality monitoring and improvement processes related to engagement activities are soundly formulated and explicitly

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<sup>7</sup> For some useful guides see: *The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education* (2005) at: [www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications](http://www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications); and *Benchmarking: A manual for Australian Universities* at: <http://www.dest.gov.au/archive/highered/otherpub/bench.pdf>

linked. The framework encourages a coherent, transparent, linked, systematic and institution-wide approach based on well-established quality indicators.

The elements of the proposed framework fall into a number of quality management clusters:

- The first cluster concerns good governance and the quality of strategy formation for university engagement;
- a second cluster concerns ensuring that resourcing and rewards are aligned;
- a third concerns ensuring that the institution has clear leadership for implementation; and
- a fourth cluster concerns putting in place a systematic approach quality tracking and improvement for the area.

It is vital that all four clusters of activity are working effectively and together if quality is to be managed effectively. There are clear links between these clusters and the four level quality evaluation framework outlined earlier.

### ***Draft national quality management framework for University Engagement***

#### ***Targeted Governance***

The university has explicit, well-constituted and influential governance bodies responsible for the area. For instance some universities have as part of their governance structure a Regional Council, Campus, Business Advisory Committee, or Indigenous Advisory Council.

#### ***Linked & accountable leadership***

For quality to be assured and sustained, for desired engagement projects to be successfully implemented there needs to be appropriate, influential leadership both at the highest levels of the university and locally. Quality management and change implementation do not just happen; they must be led and led well. In recognition of this, some universities now have in place a PVC (University Engagement) and a network of local leaders – such as Associate Deans (Engagement).

#### ***A widely understood, 'nested' and aligned strategy***

The commitment of the university to genuine engagement is enshrined in the university strategic plan which articulates the values/principles/processes which underpin such engagement. Hence the university has a shared picture of what university community engagement means, then sets up clear areas for development and performance targets – using a wide range of input on what is going to be most relevant, desirable and deliverable; it checks it has the capability to deliver on what is decided; it specifically allocates resources, support and accountabilities to ensure its agreed engagement priorities are actioned; then it tracks what is happening at levels 2-4 of the quality evaluation framework.

In some universities priorities for engagement are quite broad and defer to schools/programs to identify the engagement activities they believe are best suited to

their capabilities, interests, roles and resources. In a more effective approach there are intentional and explicit links between engagement plans and other key university plans – for example to the university’s plans for Research and Teaching and Learning. One way this is done is to focus on developing models for engaged research and engaged learning and providing professional development for academic staff to take up these models. In addition, advanced models of engaged universities often develop areas of thematic focus to create an agenda of engagement that facilitates a long-term investment in key projects and relationships. This greatly enhances the probability of mutual benefit and the ability to measure such impacts.

***Indicators, targets and KPIs directly linked to the key university engagement development priorities for each year***

These need to be operational, measurable, agreed and linked directly into performance management, the accountabilities of key staff and the university’s funding model if they are to be given consistent attention.

***Aligned resources and support***

Some universities not only have senior central and local leaders to assist the development, linking and support for the area; they also have university-wide support units like an Office of University Engagement, a Community/Regional Engagement Centre, a Cooperative Education Unit, or a Community Shopfront and make sure these engagement support units work in partnership with parallel support units for learning and teaching, and research and research training. Appropriate funding for managing university engagement is outlined in the university funding model. A number of universities make sure that their university’s funding model also includes rewards for performance and improvement in the area. Others have community engagement electives in place to make it easy for students to undertake service projects for academic credit. Universities ensure that promotion criteria include demonstrated evidence of successful performance in university community engagement and make sure the professional development programs give targeted support for people to develop their capabilities in the area.

Of particular importance is to have in place a set of guidelines on what is necessary to ensure that agreed engagement projects and plans are actually delivered successfully at level 3 with positive impacts at level 4 of the quality evaluation framework. There is considerable research on effective project management and implementation for the area now available.

***Aligned rewards***

It is critical to realise that staff will only get involved in the area and persevere with engagement projects if the motivators to do so are both favourable and aligned, if, in their view, engagement is cost-beneficial. Motivators can be intrinsic – e.g. the staff member’s personal desire to contribute to a region; to give individuals who are first in their family to attend university the opportunity to open up their life chances by completing a degree. Motivators can also be extrinsic – e.g. receiving a funding reward for achieving a university engagement performance target; winning a team funding reward for the best university engagement project in their unit; gaining promotion; winning a prize or a Vice-Chancellor’s award for the area; achieving an Australian Research Council Linkage grant; receiving positive peer group feedback; or having their contribution acknowledged in their work plan. Motivators also apply

to getting staff to enter data on what they are doing on the university's engagement database. For example in some universities staff can only apply for promotion if the evidence they cite to support their claim in the engagement area is on the university's engagement data-base; they also, as noted above, give funding rewards for achieving university engagement performance targets only based on what is entered onto the university's university engagement database.

***Easy, one-stop access for community members***

For example, it is important for a university to provide a single authoritative, senior point of contact for community members to suggest projects, and access resources. While communities seek to develop specific relationships with academic staff to complete project activities, partners also want to be assured of institutional commitment over the long term.

***An efficient and effective quality tracking and improvement system***

It is critical that universities can answer the question 'how do you know your engagement activities are effective?' For this to happen there needs to be a single, online, tracking system which is consistently updated and includes tracking data at all four levels of the quality evaluation framework outlined earlier. It is equally important that there is a systematic approach to ensuring that areas for improvement that emerge from this tracking system are addressed promptly and wisely. 'Closing the loop' on tracking data is a key area for development across most areas of activity in universities, including university engagement: For example, in universities with an Associate Dean (Engagement) role it would be these people who would be held accountable for making sure that each initiative is not only tracked but enhanced in the light of the data that emerges.

The UWS has developed a comprehensive online system for tracking and reporting activity and for giving staff incentives for keeping it up-to-date. This tracking system has been widely reviewed and is subject to continued refinement.

**Potential uses of the University Engagement Quality Management and Development Framework**

The above framework does not constitute a prescriptive list of what needs to be done. Rather it is primarily intended to provide a 'big picture' of what quality management for the area entails. It is primarily presented, therefore, to enable institutions to self-assess, to reflect on what aspects of their approach to the area are well conceived, systematically leveraged, well implemented, and which are not. In this sense what is presented is simply a number of quality checkpoints for reflection; they are not a framework for compliance; nor is there one best way to address each of them.

For those universities (both local and international) that develop a shared framework and tracking system there are considerable opportunities for 'benchlearning', especially where they have a similar operating context and mission. Similarly, a shared framework and tracking system would enable the sector to better identify and share good practice via, for example, a national clearinghouse on university engagement.

The framework is intended also to enable AUCEA to see where its current benchmarking exercise fits into the bigger picture of quality management for the area.

## **Conclusion**

Joint consideration of what is presented can start the process of ensuring that, when university engagement is discussed, people are talking about the same concept and similar approaches. It will enable universities to better answer the 'how do you know' question of effective change implementation and better target strategy and identify improvement priorities for the area.

And, for those universities which select the area as an institutional theme for their Round 2 AUQA audit, it will help ensure that they take a comprehensive and considered approach to self-evaluation.

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