The Academic Support Systems Project: A case study

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What is ASSP?

A project to develop a database system:

•to streamline and integrate business processes

•with the objective to provide a smaller, well integrated application to support learning and teaching

•with benefits including the reduction of duplication and work effort, improved data integrity and improved user experience for students and staff.

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Terms

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- Courses: units of study or units

- Programs: courses and degrees

Sector-wide

- AQF: Australian Qualifications Framework

- AUQA: Australian Universities Quality Agency

- TEQSA: Tertiary Education Quality Standards Authority

- QTAC: Queensland Tertiary Admissions Centre

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- 2 Faculties

- 2 Academic Divisions

- 10 Schools

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Staff Profile 2011[1]	Total
CQU Staff	1121
CQU Staff (FTE Equivalent)	1043.51
Academic Staff	408.82
Professional Staff	634.69

[1] http://www.cqu.edu.au/about-us/directorates/corporate-strategy-and-planning-directorate/cquni-statistics/student-and-staff-statistics

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Student Profile 2011[1]	
Total Enrolments	**19425**
Full-Time	10941
Part-Time	8484
Internal	10510
External	8951
Undergraduate	12229
Postgraduate (Coursework)	5033
Research Higher Degrees	353
Enabling (Non-award)	1810
Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander	370
International	7115

1 http://www.cqu.edu.au/about-us/directorates/corporate-strategy-and-planning-directorate/cquni-statistics/student-and-staff-statistics

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- Office of Learning and Teaching

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching)

Executive Assistant

Quality Manager

Head, Educational Development

AGS Officer

Grants & Awards Officer

Educational Developers

Ed Dev Officers

Admin Officer

Evaluation Officer

Multimedia e-Learning Offcers

Projects & Reviews Officer

Communities of Practice Officer

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Audit Report

- AUQA audit Cycle 1
  - Conducted in 2006
  - Recommendation 2: "AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University Council develop strategies to ensure it is able to inform and balance it's fiduciary governance responsibilities with it's academic governance responsibilities".

Academic Governance Review

- Commissioned by Council in July 2007

- External consultants

- 16 recommendations in total with 2 relating to academic governance processes

Academic Governance Review

- Recommendation 5:
  That Academic Board and its Committees ensure that matters of an operational, administrative and/or managerial nature be considered expeditiously through the appropriate University structure and not included in Academic Board business.

Academic Governance Review

- Recommendation 7:
  That a three-step process for program and course proposals be implemented.

- That the terms of reference of Faculty Education Committees, Faculty Research Committees, the Education Committee of Academic Board, the Research Committee of Academic Board, and the Postgraduate Research Advisory Panel be aligned with those of Academic Board.

Actions

- 2008 – 2009 Program and Courses Policy and Procedures developed and implemented.

- Templates developed to support implementation.

- Extensive consultation during development phase.

- Principle: develop templates that enable staff to enhance quality of learning and teaching information.

Audit Report Cycle 2

- Conducted in 2010

- Noted the series of changes since Cycle 1 audit

- Emphasised the need to maintain and take steps to sustain the efforts.

Strengthening of Academic Governance
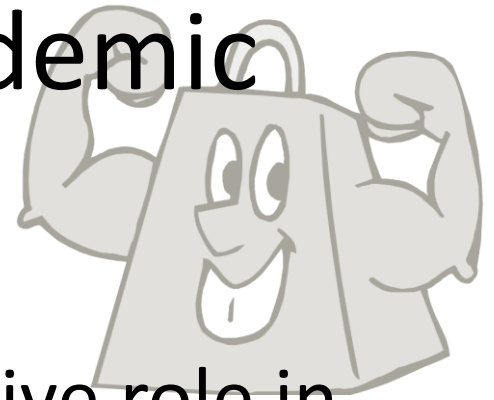
- Academic Board has the authorative role in academic governance

- Program and Course Policy and Procedures

- Development and implementation has ensured consistent standards for all programs and courses
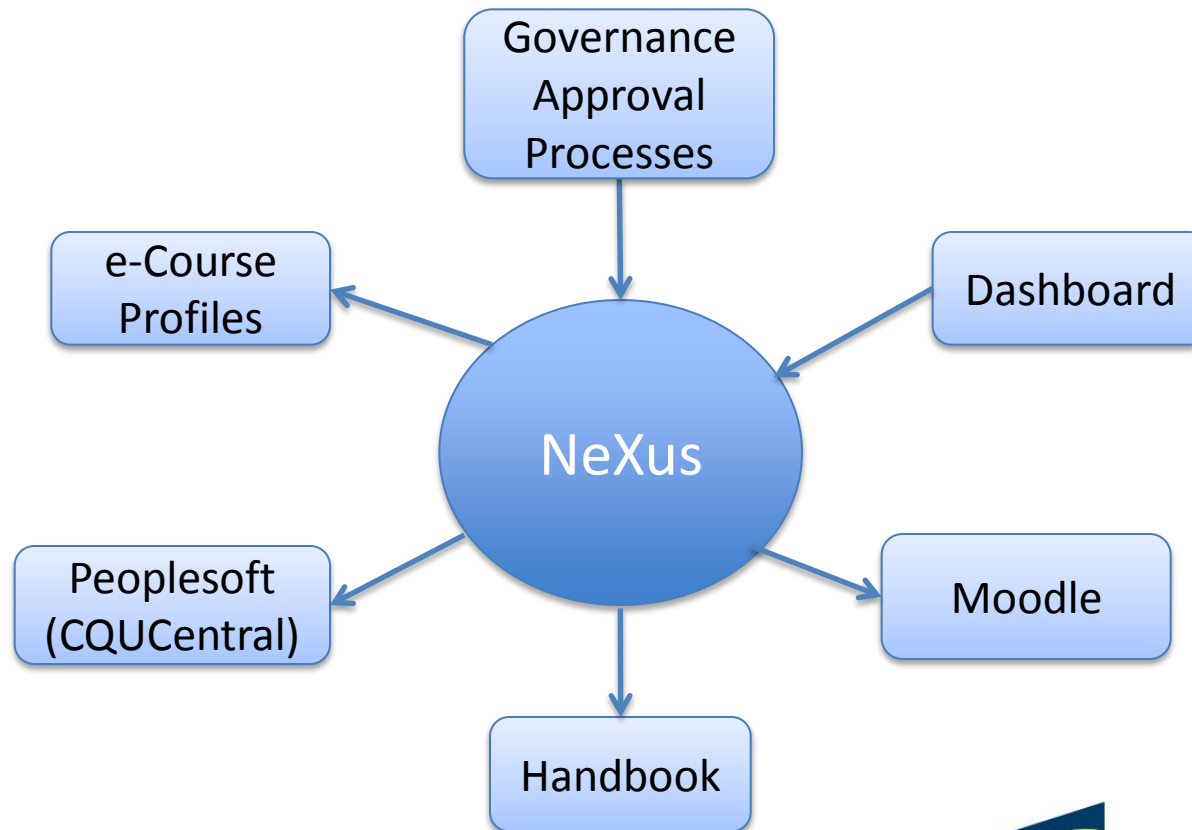
Accreditation Process

Faculty Education Committee/Non-Faculty Education Committee

↓

Education Committee of Academic Board (ECAB)

↓

Academic Board

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Committees

Program Committee — — → Program Reference Committee

Program Committee → Faculty Education Committee/Non-Faculty Education Committee

Faculty Education Committee/Non-Faculty Education Committee → Education Committee of Academic Board (ECAB)

Education Committee of Academic Board (ECAB) → Academic Board

NeXus

Governance Approval Processes

e-Course Profiles

Dashboard

NeXus

Peoplesoft (CQUCentral)

Moodle

Handbook

The Project

- Governance and Management
  - Oversight sits with a Project Board
  - Reference Groups formed from interested stakeholders, both academic and professional staff
  - Action Group formed to make decisions on actions that could not be resolved at reference group level.
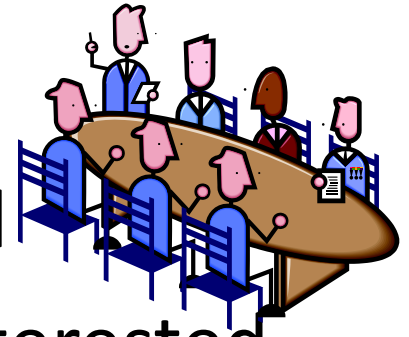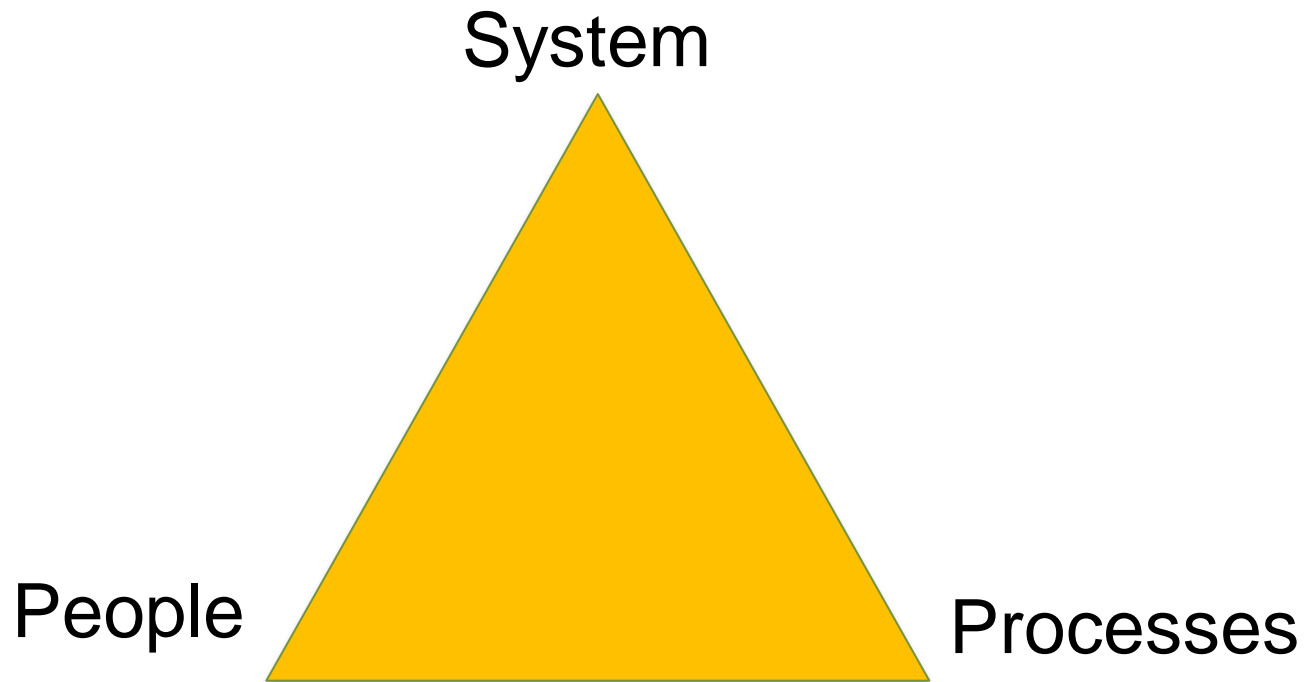
The Project

- Modules

  1. Scheduling and Allocation

  2. Program and Course Accreditation

  3. Course Development

  4. Grading and Assessment

  5. Student Interaction

The Project

System

People

Processes
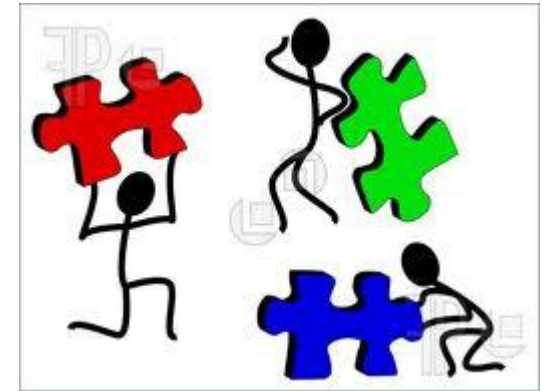
System

- NeXus database will be the central repository of all program and course information.

- It is replacing existing out-dated standalone systems, ie PCA, TDR and course profile.

- It is being built in-house.

- Is a task-based system.

- Uses Grail's groovy, platform and language.

- Grail's groovy is an advanced Java system, that's faster, more compact & gives more options in development and use.

- Limited commercially-available systems available.

Processes

- Strengthened academic governance processes required changes to business practices.

- Templates have been developed to assist in the process.

- Revisions made to the templates to meet changing internal & external requirements has lead to version control issues & sections being omitted from proposals.

- Lack of autopopulation incorporated into the template design has caused confusion & frustration for staff.

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People

- A myriad of changes in systems and processes happening at same time and in short time span.

- Having to learn a completely new system.

- Having to work across different systems to input data and information.

- Effects on staff of all these changes has been huge with varying degrees of success and acceptance of the system.

- The effective management of these changes has been varied.

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Complexities

- Multi-campus environment and the location of the various stakeholder groups

- Each Faculty has their own business practices

- Competing stakeholder needs/wants from the system and processes

- Competing agendas for system outcomes impacted on the project.

Complexities

- Standalone systems not 'talking' to each other and the difficulties in developing an interface between them

- Changes in internal vs external requirements for accreditation require revisions to existing processes and additional templates developed since the project commenced
  - Initially 12 templates to be developed
  - Additional 2 templates have been developed since project commenced

- The ability of the system to develop and implement some of the processes and linkages between the templates needed for effective use by staff
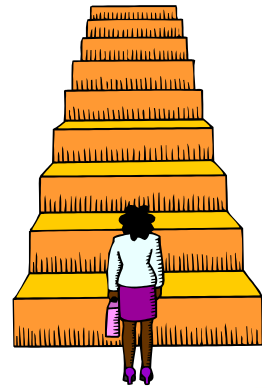
Challenges

- Communication has been the biggest challenge
- Tactics employed have had varying degrees of success
- Forms:
  - Regular email updates
  - Helpline has been implemented
  - User testing sessions
  - Newsletters
  - Surveys for user feedback
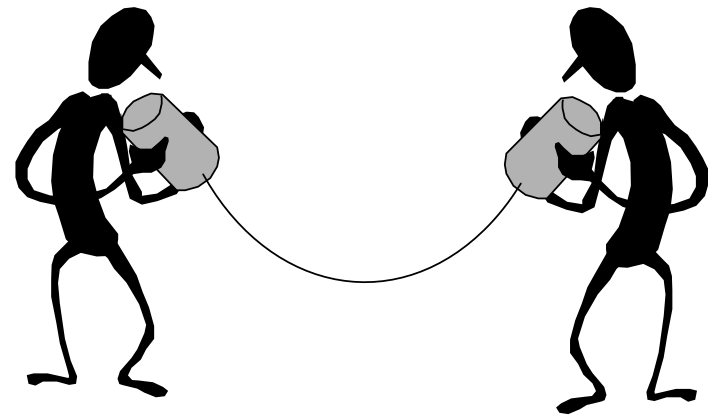
Challenges

- Introducing a new system and associated business processes is a completely new way of working from past processes
- Technical deliverables have not met the anticipated outcomes so expectations of the end users have not been fully realised, eg collaboration, graduate attributes mapping interface
- Differences between templates and online versions
- OLT assisting in gathering data, providing guidance and interpretation of policy and procedures

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Challenges

- Developing a completely online system is an adventurous plan

- Prior to Accreditation module development a review of program structures was undertaken

- Assortment of program structures across the university

- Developing 'one size fits all' initially a challenge

- Coursework Program Framework Policy and Procedures developed

- More consistency in program structures but ability to have some flexibility to cater for program professional requirements

Where we're at

- Not progressed as far as envisaged

- 3 of initial 12 templates have been implemented

  - Program related templates in development

  - Five-year Program Review and Re-accreditation templates not commenced

- 5 modules have been reduced to 2

  - Content of remaining 3 have been superseded by other systems

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Where we're at

- Vice-Chancellor intervention
  - Initial agreed project plan and objectives not met
- Change in project management structure and roles
  - Project Board remained and still has project oversight
  - Project management responsibility of Chair of Action Group, currently Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning & Teaching)
  - Action group consists of members of development team and key stakeholders representing pre-existing reference groups
  - Working party convened prior to template development

Where we're at

- Improved communication strategy employed
  - Change Management Coordinator/User Liaison Officer appointed
  - Former academic with technical capabilities providing more academic as opposed to system focus
  - More interaction with staff from schools and divisional staff
  - Face-to-face workshops and drop-in sessions held
  - How-to videos developed
  - Information text included in system for guidance on content requirements

Where we're at

- Improved processes that will be integrated into system
  - Ability to reduce the number of tasks from 6 to 1 for completion of e-course profiles
  - Roll-over of accredited information from term to term
  - Autopopulation of statistical and course evaluation data into Annual Course Enhancement Report then following approval into e-course profiles
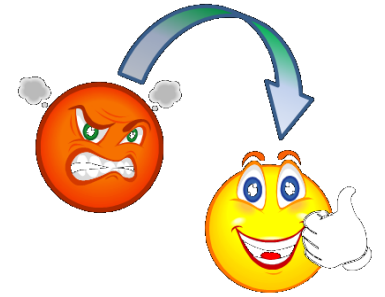
Outcomes

- Positive outcomes arisen outside the system but led to better outcomes for staff and students
  - Collaboration between Schools and Divisions
  - Shared understanding of business processes
  - Networks forming
 - Sharing business practices at school meetings so a wholistic view can be achieved

Outcomes cont…

- Enhanced academic outcomes from strengthened academic governance processes and streamlined system processes in NeXus
  - Mapping exercises undertaken in preparation of full implementation of Nexus
  - The ability to map Graduate Attributes, Learning Outcomes and Assessment
 - Ability to audit programs to ensure alignment with AQF requirements

Outcomes cont…
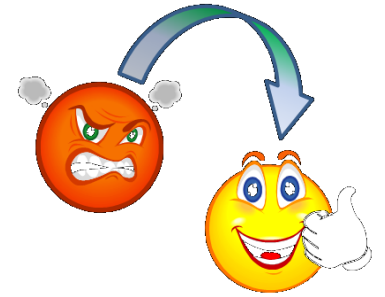
- Introduction of Coursework Program Framework
  - improves ability to give accurate advice to students about their programs
  - Information from program structure will autopopulate student handbook and e-course profiles
 - Autopopulation and interface between systems will minimise enrolment errors

Outcomes cont…
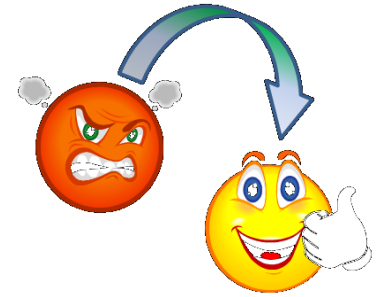
- e-Course Profiles
  - Developed by ASSP team with input from Action Group members and other relevant stakeholders
  - Consistent look and feel for all courses
  - Autopopulation of accredited information reduces risk of errors and need for double-entry
    - Textbook information, location and mode of delivery, assessment tasks and results of mapping exercises

Outcomes cont…
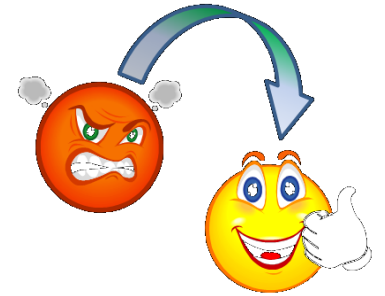
- Once fully implemented there will be a central, authorative source of data for all program and courses

- The ability to report on program and course data to regulatory bodies such as TEQSA will improve

- More transparency for students with the ability to integrate course evaluation feedback into reports and then back to them via e-course profiles

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Questions and Comments

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