Measuring learning outcomes at the course & unit level:

Development & implementation of electronic course and unit reports at UTAS

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Overview

❑ National drivers:

  ❑ TEQSA

  ❑ AQF

❑ Internal Drivers:

  ❑ UTAS' AQUA Audit Report (2012)

  ❑ Strategic Plan for Learning and Teaching (2012-2014) and associated policies

❑ Development and trial of electronic Course and Unit Report templates at UTAS

National Drivers

❏ Bradley Review (2008)

❏ Resultant discussion signified that universities need to work with Government to develop a robust set of performance indicators

    ❏ Transforming Australia's higher education system (DEEWR, 2009a)

    ❏ An indicator framework for higher education performance funding (DEEWR, 2009b):

        → Student participation and inclusion;

        → Student experience;

        → Student attainment;

        → Quality learning outcomes;

❏ Universities need to be more explicit in their use of performance indicators for funding, regulatory and quality assurance purposes.

❏ Aligns to 2006 OECD meeting – systems needed to measure outcomes

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National Drivers

❑ 'Quality revolution' emphasised that:

    ❑ Universities must demonstrate they are providing a quality learning and teaching experience

❑ Uncapping of undergraduate student places has led to marketisation of the sector:

    ❑ ↑ competitive pressures

    ❑ ↑ concern for what contributes to institutional reputation

    ❑ *MyUniversity* website

❑ Significant changes in quality assurance and standards nationally:

    ❑ TEQSA

TEQSA

❑ Emphasis on threshold standards and measures

❑ Aims to:

    ❑ accredit providers

    ❑ evaluate the performance of institutions and programs

    ❑ encourage best practice

    ❑ de-clutter current regulatory requirements

    ❑ provide greater national consistency (TEQSA Act, 2011)

❑ Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP)

    ❑ expert Advisory Body

    ❑ development and monitoring of HE Standards Framework (HESF)

TEQSA's HE Standards Framework

❑ The HESF outlines the roles and responsibilities for HE providers:
- ❑ Course design is appropriate and meets the Qualification Standards;
- ❑ Teaching and learning are of high quality;
- ❑ Assessment is effective and expected student learning outcomes are achieved;
- ❑ Course monitoring, review, updating and termination are appropriately managed

❑ Recent revisions to the HESF include:
- ❑ Standards for Course Design (Coursework)
- ❑ Standards for Learning Outcomes (Coursework)

Standards for Course Design (Coursework)

❑ State that:
  - ❑ '*the provider utilises defined processes for designing and assuring the quality of the design of each course of study and the qualifications to which it leads*'

❑ Course design includes:
  - ❑ rationale
  - ❑ structure
  - ❑ mode of delivery
  - ❑ learning outcomes
  - ❑ methods of assessment
  - ❑ student workload

❑ Student learning outcomes must be equivalent regardless of a student's place or mode of study

❑ State that:

- ❑ '*learning outcomes to be achieved on completion of a course of study are specified for each course of study*'

- ❑ the '*relationship between the overall learning outcomes for each course of study and the learning outcomes for the units that contribute to the course of study are demonstrable*'

- ❑ '*the assessment of student learning…encompasses all specified learning outcomes for each course of study*

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

❏ HESF Qualification Standards require that:

  ❏ all HE awards at levels 5-10 must meet AQF specifications by 1st January, 2015

❏ TEQSA will assess whether course learning outcomes (LOs) meet AQF requirements by:

  ❏ comparing the stated LOs for a given course with the specified LOs for the relevant AQF level and qualification type descriptor;

  ❏ assessing whether the design of all components of the course will support achievement of the LOs

❏ Deficient institutions may risk losing accreditation

❑ AUQA Audit Report (March, 2012) reported that:

    ❑ '*differing interpretations of learning outcomes have resulted in some uncertainty about the application and implementation of the concepts across programs and campuses. Achievement of greater consistency in approach will be an important part of future work*'

❑ Addressed in UTAS Strategic Plan for Learning and Teaching (2012-2014):

    ❑ Objective 1.4: Processes for assuring and enhancing quality in student learning

    ❑ '*student learning is assured by a rigorous application of a L&T approach that maps for each of its programs and courses the LOs to be achieved [and] how those outcomes are to be assessed …*'

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Introduction of Course and Unit Reports at UTAS

❑ Recommended that:

    ❑ Reporting and data collection at the course and unit level be enhanced across the university

    ❑ Development and introduction of mandatory, standardised electronic Course and Unit Reports

❑ Alignment to UTAS policies:

    ❑ draft Course Review Guidelines

    ❑ draft Learning and Teaching Policy

    ❑ Quality Management Policy

        → OADRI approach

        → course and unit review procedures

❑ Course and unit reporting was not implemented widely across UTAS

Aims

❑ Aims of the Course and Unit Reports:

1) Improve course and unit quality by enhancing UTAS' use of course and unit performance data;

2) Promote quality, consistency and transparency across the university;

3) Ensure the university's compliance to national regulatory initiatives

❑ Course Reports:
- ❑ 9 universities
- ❑ annually
- ❑ all incorporate pre-populated data
- ❑ qualitative data from teaching staff is less common
- ❑ balance between length or reports and provision of meaningful information is essential
- ❑ QUT is a good example

❑ Unit Reports:
- ❑ less common (n=4 universities)
- ❑ UTS' model of Course and Subject reporting is a good example
  - → linked to KPIs
  - → courses classified according to performance

Development of Course and Unit Report Templates

- ❑ Unit Report template:
  - ❑ Existing examples:
    - → School of Human Life Sciences
    - → School of Management

- ❑ Course Report template:
  - ❑ UWS' Course Review Form
  - ❑ Statement of Curriculum Philosophy
    - → reflective approach to curriculum management

- ❑ Aligned to:
  - ❑ UTAS Strategic Plan for Learning and Teaching (2012-2014)
  - ❑ UTAS University Standards Framework

- ❑ Composed of pre-populated and qualitative data

- ❑ Converted to electronic PDFs by Synateq

❑ Purpose of Statement of Curriculum Philosophy:

- ❑ Set out the ways in which subject coverage is managed through the constituent units of the course;

- ❑ Detail the core and elective unit structure and how this maps onto areas of specialisation and research;

- ❑ Demonstrate how course teams have responded to the requirements from professional bodies and/or external accreditation, where appropriate, in relation to course design and learning outcomes;

- ❑ Map the location, progression and assessment of learning outcomes and support for graduate attributes across the units that comprise a course of study;

- ❑ Outline how the course is responding to UTAS requirements with regard to participation and internationalisation.

Course Report Template

Consultation Process

- ❑ Opportunity for staff to:
    - ❑ discuss the rationale for standardised reporting
    - ❑ gather feedback on the process

- ❑ Consultation workshops (n=28)

'Quality assurance mechanisms are often met with scepticism by some who view such activities as regulatory (and burdensome) when institutions themselves are considered autonomous' (Bellingham, 2008)

Consultation Process

- ❑ Issues:
  - ❑ workload implications
  - ❑ who will have access to reports
  - ❑ how will reports be used
  - ❑ how are 'at-risk' courses and units identified and how will they be supported
  - ❑ timing
  - ❑ compliance
- ❑ Feedback used to:
  - ❑ revise and refine templates
  - ❑ inform development of Course and Unit Report Procedure

Trial of Electronic Course and Unit Reports

- ❑ Opportunity to test and review the:
    - ❑ design and functionality of the templates
    - ❑ accessibility and functionality of the software

- ❑ Not feasible to trial all courses and units:
    - ❑ Technological issues (Mac users)
    - ❑ Resistance from staff due to Faculty restructures

- ❑ Schools and staff with Mac computers exempt

❑ Remaining Schools were required to complete:

  ❑ 1 Unit Report at each level (n=37)

    → Unit Coordinator(s)

  ❑ 1 Course Report (n=12)

    → Course Coordinator(s)

❑ Highlighted the need for:

  ❑ software compatibility and accessibility

  ❑ alignment to other University systems/databases

  ❑ a central repository of all Course and Unit Coordinators

❑ Adobe Acrobat Pro:

    ❑   not routinely installed on University computers

    ❑   not supported by Macs

    ❑   links do not function effectively in Preview

    ❑   data cannot be saved in Adobe Reader

❑ Electronic PDFs cannot be shared:

    ❑   inadequate for units and courses with >1 Coordinator

    ❑   cannot include input from additional teaching staff e.g. tutors

Alignment to other University Systems/Databases

❑ Pre-populated data

❑ Alignment to other University systems/databases

- ❑ online Course and Unit Handbook
- ❑ Learning and Teaching Dashboard
- ❑ TechOne Student Management System
- ❑ *e*VALUate

Independent

❑ SLIMS released September, 2014

❑ New database is required in the interim

- Templates and software revised and refined to enhance:

  - accessibility

  - functionality

  - meaningfulness

- Templates are:

  - predictive

  - context-focused

- Transitioning to online Course and Unit Reports:

  - eForms

  - compatibility

  - greater flexibility

❑ New database currently in development, including:

  ❑ repository of all Coordinators

❑ Course and Unit Report Procedure:

  ❑ commitment to enhancement

  ❑ Course reports will be undertaken annually

    → Supportive, rather than punitive role

      ○ Commendable;

      ○ Acceptable;

      ○ Areas for development (e.g. student demand, student load, graduation rate, attrition and retention rates or CEQ results)

    → Policy and processes to support 'at-risk' courses will be developed

  ❑ Unit reports

    → Triggered e.g. student evaluation system or request by HoS

Summary

- ❑ ↑ Government intervention has led to increased requirements by universities to demonstrate commitment to quality assurance at the course and unit level

- ❑ Development and testing of electronic Course and Unit Reports has resulted in;
  1. A process by which courses and units are reported and evaluated on a structured and supportive basis
  2. Templates that align to national and institutional strategic priorities
  3. A mechanism to capture the dynamic nature of courses and units, and initiate ongoing improvement processes
  4. Online forms that collect and store evidence in a secure environment and allows reports to be filtered
  5. A comprehensive Procedure for evaluating courses and units

Conclusion

- The development of online Course and Unit Reports provides:

    - A formal, transparent system to map and evaluate the quality and performance of courses and units

    - A means by which data and self-reporting for internal and external purposes can be compiled and reported

    - A valid and standardised approach to recognise good practice and areas for improvement at the course and unit level

        → ↑ student experience

        → promote quality, consistency and transparency

- Ensures compliance to:

    - National regulatory initiatives, e.g. HESF and AQF

    - internal Strategic Plans and related policies

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