



Quality, standards and regulation: Are we there yet ?

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Existing system: extensive and rigorous

- ❖ Performance reporting
 - ❖ Required under Commonwealth Funding Agreements
- ❖ Performance funding
 - ❖ eg: Australian Teaching and Learning Performance Fund
- ❖ National Protocols
- ❖ DEEWR – DIISR Institutional Assessment Framework
 - ❖ Requires extensive analysis by Fed Govt Agencies and institutions

The existing system: extensive and rigorous

- ❖ Audits
 - ❖ AUQA Audits, to be replaced by TEQSA
- ❖ Accreditation
 - ❖ Independent Professional Bodies, both domestic and international
- ❖ State Government regulation and reporting
- ❖ Research Assessment Exercises
 - ❖ At UWA – Socrates; also The ERA Initiative
- ❖ Peer Review
 - ❖ Ensures research quality

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The existing system: extensive and rigorous

- ❖ Recognition of units by other universities –
International and domestic
- ❖ CRICOS international student requirements
- ❖ Student feedback
- ❖ Student Surveys
- ❖ Assessment of theses and capstone projects

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The existing system: extensive and rigorous

- ❖ Internal faculty, departmental and divisional reviews with external reviewers
- ❖ International ranking systems
 - ❖ Shanghai Jiao Tong World Universities;
 - ❖ Times Higher Ed Rankings
- ❖ Reputation
 - ❖ Individual reputations of institutions built up over long periods of time
 - ❖ Includes community engagement

Conclusion: There is already a vast amount of quality monitoring going on

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What the existing system has delivered

- ❖ A comprehensive high quality university system
- ❖ Universities aspiring to quality and excellence in:
 - ❖ Research
 - ❖ Innovation
 - ❖ Student learning
 - ❖ Teaching
 - ❖ Community and industry engagement
- ❖ Universities actively pursuing their different missions
- ❖ Demand for university places
- ❖ Demand from government and industry for university research

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What the existing system has delivered

- ❖ An international reputation of having a strong university system in research; teaching and learning; international education
- ❖ Reflected in Universities in International Rankings system
 - ❖ Shanghai Jiao Tong - 17 of 38 Australian Unis in Top 500; 7 in Top 200
 - ❖ THES – 12 Australian Unis in Top 200
- ❖ Despite small size of the nation – Australia performs highly on international rankings.

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Deficiencies

- ❖ Does not generate quantifiable results
- ❖ Needs to be more effective and efficient
- ❖ Not clear to people outside the Higher Education system (*nor to all within it...*)
- ❖ Low public awareness of the quality system
 - eg. Recent AUQA audit of UWA produced outstanding result for UWA – *but who would know?*

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Where we are

- ❖ An quality system exists in Australia
- ❖ The mechanisms of quality assurance and monitoring are extensive and comprehensive
- ❖ The mechanisms of the quality system need improvement

Do Australian universities need more quality related mechanisms ?

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Standards: the current debate

AUQA discussion paper:

*Setting and monitoring academic standards
for Australian Higher Education*

National standardisation is a common concern:

- ❖ Risks the diversity of the sector
- ❖ Stifles ability to have variations and innovations in student learning
- ❖ Inter-disciplinary standards will require system of calibration, comparability and monitoring
(**extremely expensive**)
- ❖ May require national testing to yield usable data
- ❖ High administrative burden

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Standards: the current debate

- ❖ Standards need constant reworking or risk being limiting or out of date
- ❖ Unless set at a minima – standards can be limiting:
 - “...standards cannot be designed to anticipate future excellence.” (Robin McTaggart; Campus Review, 04/08/09)
- ❖ Knowledge is international – standards based on national frame of reference diminish international linkages

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Standards: the current debate

- ❖ Exit testing can lead to informing content of courses
- ❖ Leads to standardisation of curriculum across universities and potentially reduces diversity
- ❖ Ignores the wider university experience of students
- ❖ Ignores the diversity in learning environments
 - eg. community focus of regional campuses vs global outlook of city campuses

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The experience of others

In the United Kingdom:

- ❖ Millions of pounds spent in government and unis
- ❖ 10 years developing subject benchmark standards that are highly variable and may have weakened quality
- ❖ NUS demanding external examiner reports published widely
- ❖ System of external examiners as a means of maintaining nationally comparable standards – *thought not to be working*

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The experience of others

In Denmark:

- ❖ External examiners system
- ❖ External examiners marking one third of all student assessment
- ❖ Estimated 3% of university budgets goes to external examination

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The way forward: ideal approach

- ❖ Individual institutions are responsible for developing and evaluating academic programs that reflect scholarly values, respond to student needs and serve community interests (*i.e. reflect their values, culture and mission*)
- ❖ A wide diversity of educational inputs, methods and levels of performance is both desirable and necessary
- ❖ Choosing not to pursue common national standards *does not mean* that academic standards are abandoned

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The way forward if standards are a must

Role of Government:

- ❖ To ensure educational qualifications reach a minimum threshold standard

Role of universities:

- ❖ To demonstrate how well their graduates perform and exceed the minimum standards

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Basic principles if adopting a standards approach

- ❖ Benefits must exceed the cost and administrative burden
- ❖ Approach must be conceptually sound
- ❖ System must be workable
- ❖ System must enable and reflect diversity
- ❖ Universities must remain autonomous

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We must avoid:

- ❖ Standardisation of the sector
- ❖ Standard external testing
- ❖ Quality assurance or standards regime informing funding decisions across all facets of university activity

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Questions and discussion



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