

UTS submission to:

Dept of Education, Employment
and Workplace Relations (Higher
Education Group) Review of three
programs:

- I. Workplace Productivity Program
- II. Learning & Teaching
Performance Fund
- III. And Collaboration and Structural
Reform Fund

August 2008

PART I

Workplace Productivity Program

UTS is involved in 3 successful WPP grants.

In Round 1 UTS is one of a large number of universities party to the successful Procurement benchmarking application. (University of Newcastle is the lead university.) This programme is not due for completion until late 2009.

In Round 2 UTS was successful in a WPP bid for our Performance Management Framework project (due for completion and report-back in December 2010) and are also a party to the successful bid for the Australian Technology Network (ATN) project on Development of Pay & Career Structures that support the Attraction & Retention of Academic and General Staff (due for completion and report-back at the end of 2010).

- *What improvements have been made to the efficiency, productivity and/or performance of your university as a result of WPP funding?*

It is very early to yet judge the full benefits of any of these projects however early indications are that real value is being derived from the Procurement project through the first round of product benchmarking which allows us to identify further savings potential for negotiation with our suppliers. Our Performance Framework (Business Intelligence) project is well underway with early benefits in our KPI measurement processes already evident and assisting with effective decision making. The ATN project is expected to fill a very real gap in knowledge to address the reward and retention of staff in the sector. The first report on this last project is not yet available.

- *Have any of these projects contributed to greater diversification of the sector?*

None of these programs are intended to drive greater diversification of the sector, they are all focused on productivity, efficiency and performance. There may be evidence of contribution in this area as the projects come to completion most likely in the Performance Framework (Business Intelligence) project.

- *Is there a need for more funding for the purpose of improved productivity and efficiency? Why should the government provide more funding for this purpose?*

The Procurement Benchmarking project is a good example of how such a fund brings broad benefit to the sector and individual universities that could not have been achieved otherwise. No individual university could have driven such a program without additional funds for this purpose. In addition the governance protocols required under the grant and those added by the Grant Governance Board ensured buy-in from the majority of the sector as a result of the independence of the handling of sensitive commercial data.

More generally, universities have limited funds at their disposal to invest in programs that are intended to generate future efficiencies and savings generally. As a result programs are spread over much longer time periods, generating lower and slower savings which are immediately required to fill gaps in rising operational costs.

PART II

Impact of the Learning and Teaching Performance fund

1. Has your university implemented any changes to its learning and teaching frameworks, strategies, policies and practices as a result of the LTPF?

A review of the national CEQ results over the past five years suggests that the LTPF has had an impact on the behaviour of many universities. In its current form the CEQ is made of 11 scales comprising 49 individual items. Of these, three of the scales, Overall Satisfaction (OSI); Good Teaching (GTS); and Generic Skills (GSS) are used as part of the determination of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) scores for each university. As indicated in the diagram below, all three of these scales (shown in red and with thicker lines) are reflected in the five scales which have shown an upward growth over the past several years, leading to questions about the degree to which the existence of the LTPF has influenced the focus of attention in universities.

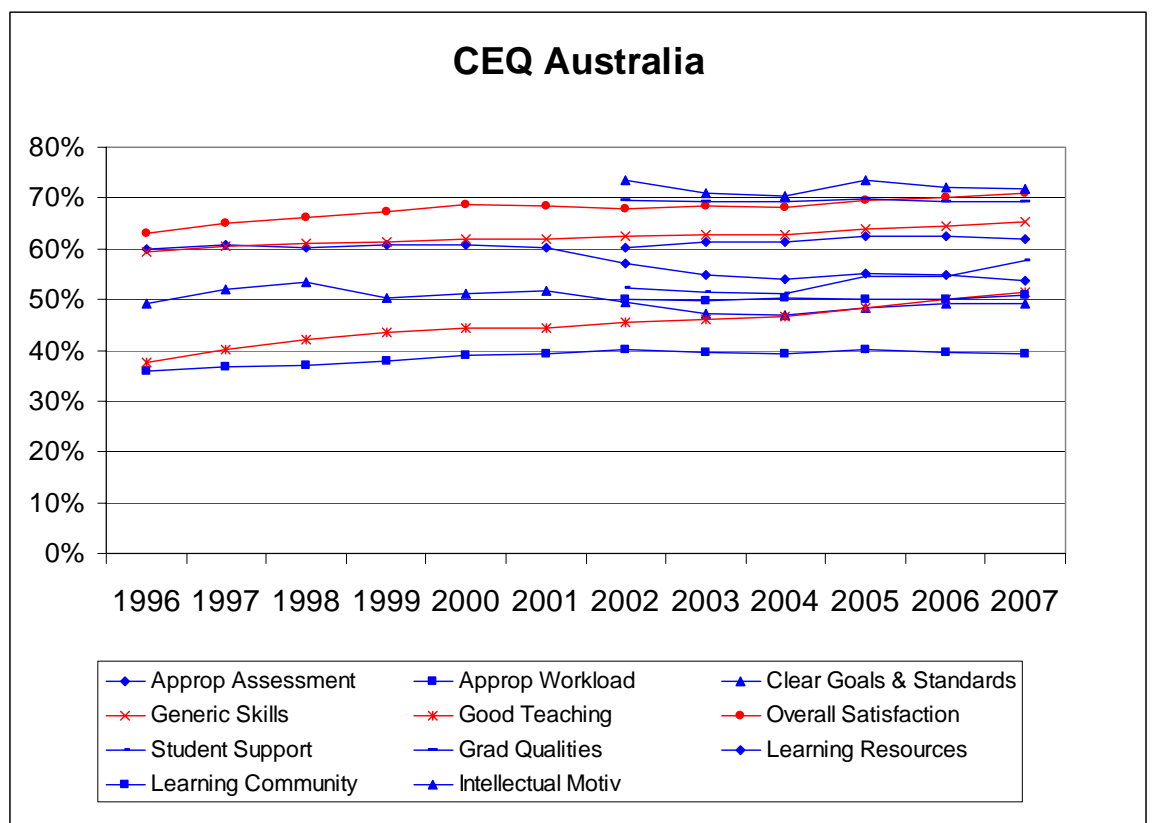


Figure 1: CEQ results for Australia (1996-2007)

The graph below shows the data for the CEQ scales used in the LTPF only, and a linear trend line has been added to demonstrate the growth in those scales over time.

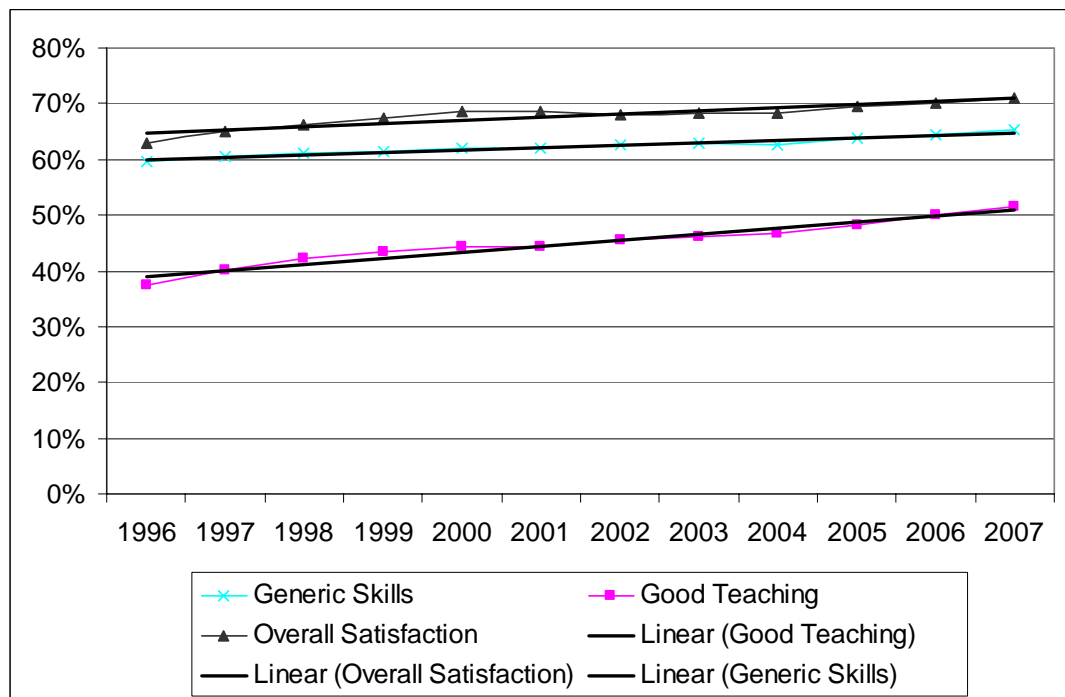


Figure 2: Trends in CEQ scales used in calculation of the LTPF

2. Do you believe that the LTPF influenced how learning and teaching are valued:

a) in individual universities?

The existence of the LTPF has had a significant impact on staff at UTS who now, as well as being proud of their research record, are very proud of their learning and teaching performance as measured against that of the sector.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that this has also been the case for other universities in the sector, particularly for those universities at either end of the scale – those who have performed well, and those who haven't, but now aspire to do so.

b) in the sector as a whole?

The LTPF is critical not only for the recognition for learning and teaching as noted above, but also for the ongoing viability of a diverse higher education system. Were governments to provide infrastructure and funding for research only, that would send a significant message to the sector that they should be research intensive. Funds such as the LTPF are needed to balance the perceived focus on research.

You cannot have a mechanism to reward research performance (IGS, RTS) and not have a mechanism to reward teaching and learning performance and expect a diversified public University system.

3. To what extent has the LTPF improved information available to students, staff and the general public about universities' learning and teaching policies and practices?

This is difficult to measure, but UTS has made strong endeavours to publicise its performance to current and prospective students through its website, and in other communication media.

4. How has your university made use of any LTPF funding it has received?

UTS has used a significant portion of its LTPF funding to drive a process of continued improvement in teaching and learning.

Stage 1 involved a process of **systematic renewal of: the curriculum**; the **deployment of innovative teaching methodologies and technologies** to support that curriculum renewal; and the **design and development of innovative teaching and learning spaces** in keeping with the new models of curriculum and the deployment of new technologies to support that.

Stage 2: Other funds were expended across a variety of projects aimed at significant improvements in teaching and learning. These projects included:

- Large and small grants for improving teaching and learning using the framework developed in Stage 1 (described further below).
- Development of online Student Feedback on Subjects (<https://www.sfs.uts.edu.au/index.php>)
- Development of an Integrated Student Engagement Website (<http://www.think.uts.edu.au/>)
- Development and piloting of Peer Assisted Learning and Support (PALS/PASS) for students
- Support for University and Faculty teaching forums. The 2007 UTS Forum featured a workshop and keynote address by Sister Kathleen O'Brien Alverno College in the USA which has achieved international recognition for its work on developing graduate attributes.
- Support for development of major new cross-disciplinary courses.

Examples of the work undertaken include:

Curriculum Renewal of the *Bachelor of Arts in Communication* degree (large grant). The project identified the graduate attributes that will underpin current and future offerings of the undergraduate degree. Each of the interconnected challenges (Enhancing Pedagogical Practices; Exploring Collaborative Spaces; Identifying ‘common core’; and Addressing Convergence) were addressed with specific outcomes for each. For example, the Enhancing Pedagogical Practices team developed a learning resources repository to support ‘best practice’ pedagogy. Work is continuing on ensuring that the curriculum is international; on developing effective tools for assessment, and providing a variety of learning activities both face to face and online.

A number of small grants were awarded to project with complementary themes such as:

- towards practice orientation;
- authentic learning/experiential learning;
- integrating informational learning;
- internationalising curriculum;
- equity underpinning learning;
- interaction;
- developing learning cultures;
- enhance learning experience;
- cross-disciplinary learning; and
- student engagement with learning

Graduate attributes - *Improving Students’ Work Ready Knowledge and Skills* in the Faculties of Business and Information Technology (large grant).

The project designed, developed, implemented and evaluated a series of work ready modules and new subjects into the curriculum to better prepare final year students for the professional literacies required in the contemporary workplace.

A number of small grants also further explored graduate attributes including:

- authentic learning;
- improving writing skills;
- work readiness;
- professional literacies and competencies;
- graduate preparedness for careers; and
- Shopfront activities.

Infrastructure support for curriculum renewal A series of large and small grants have been awarded to complement the work undertaken including

- Development of a university-wide system for the use of ePortfolios and their application for graduate attributes;

- Further development of 'ReView' which enables student self-assessment using criterion based assessment;
- Further development of 'SPARK' which enables anonymous online self and peer review of contributions to groupwork.

5. In your view, what scope is there to improve either the operation of the LTPF (including methodology and timing) or its policy objectives?

The LTPF has not been without its critics, but this is not an unexpected phenomenon when processes designed to reward performance are turned into rankings. Those who fare well tend to be supportive of such processes, while those who do not, are critical. It is always surprising when there is a reversal of trends, that those who were previously supportive, are suddenly not so.

Universities have, to greater or lesser degrees, invested in student support schemes, and in strategies to improve teaching and learning. At UTS for example, we have invested heavily in student systems, in student support and retention schemes, especially among the disadvantaged; in a curriculum review and a commitment to a "UTS model" which involves an emphasis on work integration with industry and the professions in our teaching and learning programmes. We have invested in enhancements to e-learning, students' experience of groupwork, assessment and feedback, and in communication skills. Correspondingly the main area of improved performance for UTS in the 2008 LTPF was student outcomes, where we were the only university to rank in the top 5 across all 4 categories.

An argument commonly used against the LTPF is the following: How can it provide an incentive to perform when there are such large shifts in the rankings each year? The answer is that with the exception of two cases, there was not a lot of movement in the last two years. The two exceptions are the University of Queensland and Macquarie University. UQ suffered a decrease in 18 of the 28 categories, and Macquarie had decreases in 12 out of 21 categories. Whatever the reasons for this, if performance is not decided by hard evidence such as data, how else might it be decided? One solution is to average data over a moving two year average as is done for research performance fund.

We are now in an environment where everybody else is lifting their performances, precisely because of the incentives this fund has given; staying at the same levels is equivalent to going backwards.

The LTPF has been in existence for three years and the methodology has been refined and improved each year. For 2008 there were three changes to the methodology.

First, universities were not allowed to use so-called "imputed" data where student survey responses are lacking. This gives much greater uniformity in the data and much greater data integrity; this alone would have changed the rankings.

Second, there were changed fields of study and disaggregated data within each cluster was used to give much greater meaning to the comparisons. Third, the adjustments made were on a reduced set of indicators (although the LTPF expert committee indicates that this did not affect the results in any way).

There is no doubt that each of these three is an improvement in this process. If the methodology is stabilised we can prevent erratic shifts in the future by use of moving averages, in much the same way as is done for the research block grant schemes.

The university sector has been working in the last few years to come up with adequate performance criteria for learning and teaching, and while the measures are not perfect no one has come up with a better system. To stop rewarding learning and teaching performance would send a very bad message to the sector, because then only research would be rewarded through performance funding.

This would substantially undervalue the teaching and learning environment, and disenfranchise 800,000 students who are owed the best that we can give them.

The debate over the LTPF has mimicked the debate over the research block funding schemes, where the sector has torn itself apart arguing over minutiae. Since these schemes represent less than 10% of government funding, it is time to stop arguing against performance funding and concentrate on performance. We then have a stronger base to convince our stakeholders to invest in us.

Our view is that there is not enough funding driven by performance, and performance funding should be extended into other areas of university activity including regional and community engagement. If we are to have a first class university system in Australia, then substantial performance funding is a necessary, although not a sufficient, condition. We owe it to our students.

PART III

Collaboration and Structural Reform Fund (CASR)

1) *In your opinion, did CASR achieve its objective of promoting better higher education outcomes in teaching, learning, research and innovation by:*

a) *Promoting structural reform?*

The Collaboration and Structural Reform Fund has had no effect on Structural Reform in the Australian Higher Education System. It has not resulted in one merger of Universities, nor one rationalisation of campuses. The reasons for this are two-fold: first, the funding requirements for such rationalisations are huge and outside the financial scope of this fund; second, the largest cost component of such rationalisations are the resulting capital costs, which are not allowable from this fund.

b) *Increasing collaboration:*

The CASR fund has led to collaboration but almost exclusively in curriculum design.

However, it has stifled diversity by providing funding to keep afloat otherwise financially unviable programs.

2) *In light of the Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund, is there an ongoing need for a program such as CASR to promote collaboration and if so, why?*

Like the collaboration component of CASR, the DSAF encourages the good (collaboration) and the bad (non-diversity) and there is no need for CASR.

3) *If so, why should the Government provide funding for this purpose (as opposed to funding being provided from other sources)?*

Not applicable