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12. STANDARDS IN HEALTH PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Contextualising Standards Design and Implementation

Academic standards are not new to higher education. Universities seek to provide quality education. Today, we face increasing internal as well as external scrutiny in higher education, while at the same time the health sector, which is engaged in workplace learning aspects of health professional education, is also encountering ever-increasing demands for quality. This context provides the background for this exploration of standards in health professional education.

THE NATURE AND RATIONALE FOR ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Defining Academic Standards

Academic standards are expectations of levels of performance; they are benchmarks of quality and excellence in education. They imply that the means to achieve this performance will be in place, as well as the outcomes to be attained. Standards may relate to the performance of students and to the performance of educational institutions. For example, the UK Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education provides the following definitions:

Academic standards are “the standards set and maintained by institutions for their courses (programs and modules) and expected for their awards”. (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/glossary-a.aspx#a3>)

“Threshold academic standards are the minimum acceptable level of achievement that a student has to demonstrate to be eligible for an academic award.ⁱ The Quality Code sets out expectations which higher education providers are required to meet to ensure that academic standards are set and maintained”. (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/AssuringStandardsAndQuality/quality-code/Pages/UK-Quality-Code-Part-A.aspx>)

A subject benchmark statement is a “published statement that sets out what knowledge, understanding, abilities and skills are expected of those graduating in each of the main subject areas (mostly applying to bachelor’s degrees), and explains what gives that particular discipline its coherence and identity. The statements are consistent with the relevant generic qualification descriptors”. (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/glossary-s.aspx#s7>)

S. Loftus et al. (Eds.), Educating Health Professionals: Becoming a University Teacher, 129–144.
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Quality Agendas and Standards

Standards occur as part of the quality imperative for higher education. It is a responsibility of universities to achieve high quality in the resourcing, provision and outcomes of higher education and to promote high-quality learning experiences for students. Other stakeholders, including university staff, employers, professional bodies and the community, also have a vested interest in high-quality experiences, engagement and outcomes of university education. Quality, then, refers to the attainment of *high quality*, meaning superiority with reference to the standards in the given field, as opposed to *the quality*, level or degree of excellence of something. Inherently, high quality contains dimensions of contextual relevance, fitness for purpose, and suitability. High-quality children's education would contain different parameters from those in university education, for instance. Quality is also referential and subjective, particularly when it relates to experience and perceptions. What may be perceived as high quality for one group or individual might not be so for others.

Quality is thus a response to influence and expectations. Evaluation of quality is therefore a complex and not easily evaluated endeavour. Quality cannot be assessed via a single dimension. From his extensive evaluation of quality assurance in Australia, Coates (2010) proposed a multi-dimensional framework as the most useful means for evaluating academic quality, because of the complexity of influences on the quality of learning. Factors such as student entry capabilities, teachers' experience and the institutional climate all impact on the quality of learning and teaching. Similarly, Ehlers (2009) identified a number of factors that influence interactions between teachers and learners, such as the skill of teachers, the abilities of students, the organisational context, values and structures.

The indicators of quality in a multi-dimensional framework must be valid, relevant to standards, non-trivial, assessable, and relevant to the university school/discipline, industry, professions and the broader community. In assessing attainments against the multiple indicators within such a framework, measures must be used that provide evidence of what is being achieved. The data provided as evidence should be based "on fact, on subjective feedback, or on objective assessment" (Coates, 2010, p. 8). A key factor in evaluating quality is recognising the importance of not just measuring outcomes, performance or infrastructure but also using such measures to enhance quality. Given the scope of the factors impacting on quality, a multi-dimensional approach is needed to effect positive change.

Within educational institutions the review and assurance of the quality of education is an ongoing endeavour, driven by internal accreditation processes, government-led quality review agendas, external accreditation requirements linked to professions, government targets and incentives. Consider, for example, the following statements by quality agencies in which they describe their agendas:

(The) Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education: Our job is to uphold quality and standards in UK universities and colleges. We guide and check the quality of teaching, learning and assessment in UK higher education, because we want every student to have the best possible learning experience. (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/>)

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) is Australia's regulatory and quality agency for higher education. TEQSA's primary aim is to ensure that students receive a high-quality education at any Australian higher education provider. (<http://www.teqsa.gov.au/>)

(In Australia) Mission-based Compacts are three-year agreements that show how each university's mission contributes to the Government's goals for higher education, and include details of major higher education and research funding and performance targets. (<http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Policy/Pages/Compacts.aspx>)

Academic Standards

Standards or expectations are framed by those who have an interest in higher education: students, families of students, educational institutions, professional bodies, regulatory authorities, quality assurance agencies, society and governments. All of these people and agencies have their unique perspectives on what interests should be served by higher education and what such education should realise. What value should be added through university education – to the individual student and to society? How should the student and society benefit from the costs (time, private moneys, public funds, resources and infrastructure) of higher education? In addressing these questions we see that standards are clearly a matter of accountability; they form part of the university's implicit and explicit contracts with stakeholders. When they articulate standards, universities are identifying what performance, resourcing and outcomes they are agreeing to provide.

Pursuing Quality Assurance and Standards

The time demands of external quality assurance and accreditation processes can be considerable and can compete with other university work requirements, especially if seen as simply an obligation. Quality assurance can be counterproductive if the processes are driven by checklists and targets that focus more on compliance than quality promotion and attainment. Staff involved in accreditation and quality assurance can become frustrated if different drivers/groups have competing targets, record-keeping demands and reporting strategies or forms. Moreover, there is the danger that standards (both minimal or "threshold" standards or aspirational "gold" standards) can be collapsed together and growth or improvement can be neglected in the problematic pursuit of

standardisation or the achievement of (mere) “adequacy”. There also needs to be room for viewing the pursuit of quality in the context of the stage of development, purpose and uniqueness of the course and institution in question.

Optimally, we argue, quality assurance should adopt the dual form and purpose of accountability and particularised development via enabling processes that foster curriculum frameworks for good education, risk management, benchmarking and continuous quality improvement. Standards can be pursued in quality–action cycles involving such phases as planning, implementing, reviewing and improving.

In health professional education, an important consideration is that academic standards cannot be limited to university-managed strategies. When we consider various approaches to professional education, including problem-based learning, practice-based education and work-integrated learning, each approach emphasises the key role of the world of practice and practitioners in the education of future health professionals. For this reason we need to consider the role of practitioners as role models of practice, and it is valuable to remember that academics are also seen as role models of professionalism and academic standards. The standards agenda needs to consider practice standards as well as educational standards, and practitioner educators need to be part of the pursuit of educational standards.

THE CONTEXT OF ACADEMIC STANDARDS

Standards in Higher Education – International Perspectives

Over the past two decades, increasing external quality assurance demands have been imposed on higher education worldwide (Westerheijden, Hulpiau, & Waeytens, 2007; Ewell, 2010). With external quality assurance, evaluation of the higher education institution’s performance and outcomes is set and measured by an agency (e.g. a professional regulatory authority) outside the institution, whereas internal quality assurance processes are driven within the institution itself.

In general, the aims of quality assurance processes are to enhance learning (processes and outcomes) in higher education and to set benchmarks for the achievement of qualifications. For instance, recent trends in European higher education have been implemented to encourage the development of quality mechanisms and to promote quality cultures in European universities (Gvaramadze, 2008). In the U.S., Ewell (2010) has noted that the focus of quality assurance has changed from 20 years ago when it was largely on resources and process: now it requires institutions to provide evidence of learning outcomes and an examination of the levels of performance achieved by students.

External quality assurance processes are designed to stimulate change and bring improvement in courses, but there is a body of literature that questions the ability of the quality assurance process to achieve this aim. External monitoring has been identified as having less impact on quality than the internal self-

evaluation process that takes place prior to the external audit (Berlin Communiqué, 2003; Stensaker, Langfeldt, Harvey, Huisman, & Westerheijden, 2010). The *Trends* series reports on the effectiveness and impact of the Bologna Processⁱⁱ which has identified the need for a move away from “governmental actions” to that of internal quality assurance processes (Birtwistle, 2009, p. 58). The *Tuning Project*, developed in Europe in 2000 (<http://www.unideusto.org/tuningeu/home.html>), is an approach to evaluating and enhancing quality in European higher education, as well as providing guidance for design and implementation of curricula. Its members consider that the responsibility for quality lies within a university, and acknowledges that external agents can identify problems but are unable to create and implement quality within the institution.

The way quality assurance processes are designed is important for creating an environment where positive change to actual learning occurs. Huisman and Westerheijden (2010) questioned the ability of the 2005 European Standards and Guidelines to manage and enhance quality. The authors stated that the effect is only at the “meta-compliance level” and does not flow down to teachers and students. The need to comply with an extensive checklist stimulates a tick-box approach at the organisational level rather than promoting change in teaching and therefore outcomes in learning. Blackmur (2010) wrote that the guidelines for good practice in external quality assurance processes, created as part of a quality provision in cross-border education established by UNESCO in conjunction with the OECD and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education, are superficial and incomplete. Blackmur contested the assumption that a quality assurance process incorporating so-called best practice and peer audit will result in quality higher education outcomes, arguing that important aspects required for identifying higher education quality are absent in the current process.

Measures applied in quality assurance processes may fail to evaluate the effects of “quality” teaching and learning, such as whether students’ attitudes change through their participation in a course. Higher education should promote citizenship, ethical and professional reasoning and behaviour. Birtwistle (2009) echoed this sentiment in his overview of the effect of the Bologna Process; he concluded that there is a fundamental need to judge the development and performance of students. Learning outcomes are proposed as a means for judgement of students’ performance, but Birtwistle acknowledged that this strategy can only address to a degree this aspect of quality assurance.

The approach taken in quality assurance programs has a direct effect on the actual program outcome. Processes that employ a control (top-down) approach focused on bureaucratic documentation or atomisation of specific aspects of higher education fail to develop a quality culture within the institution. This approach reduces the potential to create positive change and improvement within the organisation (Ehlers, 2009; Stensaker et al., 2010).

Stensaker et al. (2010) reported that external quality assurance more often impacts on structural, organisational and managerial processes, while the desired

improvement in teaching and learning is not realised. If, for instance, an external body sets minimum standards for the specific level of qualification and failure to achieve these requirements results in a loss of accreditation for the university, this process will not necessarily bring an improvement in teaching and learning. A combination of control (top-down) and enhancement (bottom-up) processes is required to result in a positive impact on teaching and learning (Ehlers, 2009; Stensaker et al., 2010).

Accountability for quality teaching and learning lies at a number of levels, for example, both at the teaching level and at management level in the provision of adequate resources. If positive outcomes to teaching and learning in higher education are to be achieved, a shared understanding of common goals and agreement to support them is required. The development of a quality culture within the institution, where quality assurance principles are embraced by all those involved, has a greater positive impact than external scrutiny.

Australian Context for Standards in Higher Education

In 2008 the Australian Government commissioned an independent review of higher education in Australia with the aim to determine whether Australian higher education was “structured, organised and financed” to compete effectively in the global market (Department of Education and Employment Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2008, p. xi). The final report noted dramatic changes to Australian higher education over the past 30 years and the need for further change to ensure a high-quality education system of world standing. Stronger accreditation and quality assurance processes, including a standards review, were recommended. The rationale for the standards review was that by “getting the standards right”, the quality assurance process could better measure the effectiveness of higher education, thereby working towards enhancing quality.

Australian higher education has moved from a small number of publicly funded universities to a substantially greater number of providers (including private universities) that derive a large proportion of their income from sources other than government funding. The *2008 Higher Education Review* reported the proportion of Australia’s 25–34 year olds with degree-level qualifications as 29%, which is less than the typical 50% goal set by other countries in the OECD. (p. xi). The review identified that changes to financing and regulation of higher education were required if Australia was to be an effective competitor in the global market.

Broadly, the Higher Education Review goals for reform in Australia by 2020 are to have a high-quality system with equitable entry, increased participation rates for 25–34 year olds, and adequate resourcing of higher education. To achieve this high-quality system, with increased participation rates from a greater diversity of student backgrounds (e.g. low socioeconomic, rural and remote) than previously accepted into universities, a more rigorous accreditation and quality assurance system with national benchmarking is required.

Currently, a proportion of Australian government university funding is determined by the institution's performance against agreed teaching and equity targets (<http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Pages/IndicatorFramework.aspx>). The quality of the student experience has a substantial impact on success rates, with a "stimulating and rewarding experience" being more likely to result in students completing their course of study and returning later in life for further education (DEEWR, 2008, p. 69). In line with this concept of quality education, the Review recommended that a set of comprehensive teaching and learning measures be developed to monitor the student experience (DEEWR, 2008).

Following the Higher Education Review, the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) Council undertook a review to strengthen qualification outcomes, improve pathways for students, enhance the recognition of Australian qualifications overseas and provide a mapping against international qualifications (AQF, 2009). In 2011 the national revised qualifications framework (AQF, 2011) was adopted for 14 qualification levels, providing reference points for accrediting Australian qualifications and for comparison against international qualifications.

The framework uses learning outcomes as the end point measure of the qualification, justifying the use of this measure to provide consistency and clarity for qualification levels. The qualification levels are described in a number of forms. *Level attributes* are key characteristics of a level, for example, duration. *Level criteria* are descriptors of context, for example, degree of complexity. Finally, there are three *learning outcome dimensions*: knowledge (what the graduate knows and understands), skills (what the graduate can do) and application of knowledge and skills (range of autonomy and complexity of what the graduate can apply).

As part of the reform to ensure quality teaching and learning in Australia's higher education sector, the Australian Universities Quality Agency and State accreditation bodies have been replaced by a national regulatory body. TEQSA was introduced in its quality assurance role in 2011 and took up its regulatory function in January 2012.ⁱⁱⁱ TEQSA will register and evaluate higher education performance against the Higher Education Standards Framework (<http://www.teqsa.gov.au/higher-education-standards-framework>). This standards framework consists of:

- Provider Standards, comprising The Provider Registration Standards, The Provider Category Standards and The Provider Course Accreditation Standards
- Qualification Standards
- Teaching and Learning Standards
- Research Standards
- Information Standards.

As can be seen from this multi-dimensional framework, Australian higher education providers will be evaluated and monitored with considerable scrutiny.

AN EXEMPLAR: DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL AND PRACTICE-BASED
EDUCATION STANDARDS AT CHARLES STURT UNIVERSITY (CSU)

The goals of CSU include enhancing the internal quality assurance process and strengthening preparation for external quality assurance (e.g. via TEQSA's Higher Education Framework). As part of this preparation, CSU's The Education For Practice Institute (EFPI) was asked to develop a set of educational standards for professional and practice-based education (P&PBE) (EFPI, 2011). The focus on professional practice-based education links with the University's mission to provide high-quality courses that have a professional basis.

A highly inclusive approach was taken in development of the standards. Initially, a literature review was conducted to determine the key aspects of the standards and rationale for the components. The first draft of the standards was produced from a working party established and led by EFPI. The working party included representatives from all faculties and the library. Two major iterations of the standards were later presented to the entire university for review and comment. Substantial feedback was obtained on both occasions. Thematic analysis of all comments was conducted and modifications to the standards were determined.

The CSU standards comprise a set of statements or criteria that identify characteristics of good P&PBE at the course level. The standards are holistic in approach and describe thresholds for course learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and infrastructure standards at course and university level. The aims of the standards are to:

- enhance the quality of education using a cycle (plan, implement, review and improve) of continuous quality improvement
- support course teams in curriculum development
- provide a common frame of reference across P&PBE undergraduate and graduate entry courses at CSU to help in course design, delivery and review
- describe the information required to be entered into course and subject profiles in the curriculum database
- provide a means for demonstrating accountability in the delivery of professional courses at CSU
- provide a means of reflection for course teams and individuals on their performance and contribution to the quality of CSU professional courses.

The P&PBE course standards encompass and identify good practices for P&PBE across the curriculum. [Tables 12.1](#) (course goals), [12.2](#) (teaching and learning activities), and [12.3](#) (course infrastructure) are course-related. A fourth table, not included in this chapter, deals with the university-level infrastructure necessary for the P&PBE standards to be realised.

STANDARDS IN HEALTH PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Table 12.1. Course goals and learning outcomes

Students will demonstrate by the completion of the course the following capabilities and attributes as expected of graduates entering their professional communities and workplaces

DIMENSIONS/MEANING	STANDARDS
PROFESSIONALISM AND CITIZENSHIP	
Capabilities and attributes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Accountability, ethical conduct – Trustworthiness, respect, dedication – Commitment to professional values – Lifelong learner – Social inclusion, diversity acceptance – Contribution to society’s wellbeing – Commitment to quality – A global perspective of practice – Understanding of financial, social and environmental sustainability – Reflective practitioner 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrate commitment, and an ability to undertake lifelong learning through reflection, self-evaluation and self-improvement. 2. Exhibit qualities and behaviours consistent with professional values informed by social justice, global citizenship, Indigenous and cultural competencies and inclusion principles. 3. Explain how practice is informed by knowledge of continuous quality improvement, sustainability and global trends in practice.
PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT	
Capabilities and attributes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Critical reflection, analytical – Constructive criticism of own practice – Flexibility, ability to manage change – Problem-solving capability – Creativity – Ethical decision making ability – Practise according to the law 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Demonstrate critical and creative decision making and problem solving that is context-relevant. 5. Make work-related decisions that are aligned with professional values, standards and ethics and address legal requirements. 6. Demonstrate accountability by being able to report and articulate the basis for professional decisions and actions.
COMMUNICATION AND INTERACTIONS	
Capabilities and attributes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Communication according to professional values and boundaries – Supportive communicator – Cultural competence (particularly in relation to Indigenous and multicultural Australia) – Confidentiality – Team worker – Collegiality and collaboration 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Demonstrate ethical, respectful, supportive & culturally competent communication consistent with professional practice codes. 8. Demonstrate proficient and professional communication, through a variety of delivery media/modes to specialist and non-specialist audiences. 9. Demonstrate teamwork, leadership, collegiality, conflict management and professional conventions at the level of an emerging professional.

Table 12.1. (continued)

DIMENSIONS/MEANING	STANDARDS
INFORMATION LITERACY	
Capabilities and attributes:	10. Demonstrate an ability to critique new information and determine its relevance to a given situation.
– Ability to access new information	11. Demonstrate efficacy in the use of information and communication technologies as part of:
– Ability to judge information applicability to a specific work setting	a) learning
– Synthesise information from multiple sources	b) professional practice.
– Produce reports and presentations utilising multiple forms of media	
PROFESSION COMPETENCE AND WORK READINESS	
Capabilities and attributes:	12. Demonstrate the discipline-specific technical capabilities of a beginning practitioner or professional.
– Profession knowledge	13. Integrate discipline, practical and social knowledge and skills in contemporary professional practice.
– Profession skills	14. Demonstrate an understanding of legal and ethical requirements and the boundaries in which to work.
– Ability to integrate theory with practice	15. Recognise and respond appropriately to unsafe practice.
– Knowledge of and ability to work within relevant legislation	16. Demonstrate an ability to plan and manage workloads.
– Competence in safe work practices and knowledge of relevant OH&S policies	
– Competence in discipline/ profession knowledge and skills	
– Initiative	
– Ability for independent work	

Table 12.2. Learning and teaching activities and processes

The focus of these learning and teaching strategies are on professional socialisation and learning to learn and perform in communities of practice.

DIMENSIONS	STANDARDS
CURRICULUM DESIGN (planned content, learning activities and assessment)	17. The formal curriculum reflects PBE goals (dimensions making up Table 12.1) and good practice.
	18. Curriculum mapping is in place with:
	a) constructive alignment of P&PBE goals, learning activities and assessment
	b) a range of learning opportunities relevant to preparation for practice
	c) relevant sequencing of learning activities and content (particularly theory and practice).
	19. Relevant stakeholders such as students, industry partners and community partners are involved in curriculum design.

STANDARDS IN HEALTH PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION

Table 12.2 (continued)

DIMENSIONS	STANDARDS
CURRICULUM REVIEW (continuous quality improvement)	20. The curriculum is regularly reviewed internally to ensure the PBE standards are addressed. 21. The curriculum is subject to external scrutiny to ensure that external expectations of professional education are addressed. 22. Relevant stakeholders including students, industry partners and community partners are involved in curriculum review.
RISK MANAGEMENT OF THE CURRICULUM	23. Staff in WPL placements ensure a relevant balance between student learning and client services priorities and appropriate levels of student supervision. 24. Relevant processes are in place to manage risks (legal, health, safety, environment, values, ethics, reputation) for students, site, university. 25. Recognise and address the risks inherent in any mal-alignment between the hidden and planned curricula.
(ACTUAL) PBE TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES	26. Teaching methods activities (lectures, learning materials etc.) explicitly demonstrate relevance of content to practice (i.e. the practice of the students' future profession/occupation or a broad work arena e.g. business). 27. Strategies other than teacher-led learning and assessment activities (e.g. self-directed and peer learning/ assessment). 28. Learning activities include considerations of and/or opportunities to engage with relevant stakeholders and CSU's communities (rural and regional Australia; Indigenous Australians; professions, industries and students; national and international institutions, scholars and researchers) through responsiveness, partnerships, ethical reciprocity and inclusiveness in relation to these communities. 29. Distance students have learning activities to develop practice skills, cultural capabilities, interactive skills, professional identity etc. 30. Assessment activities that accurately evaluate and promote learning related to the goals in Table 12.1 and identify the need to take action (e.g. with failing students).
INCLUSION OF WIL/WPL ACTIVITIES	31. Provide WPL activities to gain real-world and/or simulated experiences to develop sound decision making in practice. 32. Provide WIL strategies (e.g. simulations, e-learning, visits by industry partners and clients) to bring the practice world into the classroom. (E-learning is of particular value to distance students.) 33. Assessment methods promote learning as well as evaluating students' practice ability.

Table 12.3. Learning and teaching infrastructure

DIMENSIONS	STANDARDS
STAFFING (numbers, expertise)	<p>34. Skilled staff that can provide effective learning to a diverse range of students are available and in appropriate numbers.</p> <p>35. Staff collectively have a range of expertise and experience including relevant theoretical and scholarly knowledge and relevant professional experience. A whole course approach is required to achieving and improving the standards.</p>
STAFF SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS	<p>36. Staff have support for quality teaching e.g. workloads that provide adequate time for teaching, curriculum development and career advancement.</p> <p>37. Staff development opportunities/systems are in place to enhance teaching.</p>
STUDENT SUPPORT SYSTEMS	<p>38. Learning support schemes are available to students to develop their learning skills, information literacy, etc. and to remediate learning difficulties.</p> <p>39. Systems and schemes are in place to support students' and their participation in learning opportunities (e.g. WPL placements).</p>
ON-CAMPUS WORKPLACE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS	<p>40. To enable students to gain relevant work experience either to complement real-world experience or where real-world workplace learning is not feasible, the school/faculty provides alternative learning opportunities e.g. via simulated learning and workplaces or university clinics/farms etc. These strategies provide for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - developing practice skills & knowledge of the occupation - developing professional identity - learning to work in practice communities - developing relevant interaction and social capabilities - developing professional decision making & self-appraisal. <p>41. Resources create an up-to-date practice-relevant setting that enables students to experience their practice world e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - real/simulated clients - practice workloads - real/simulated interactions with practice communities, clients and local communities. <p>42. Staff provide sound role models for the occupation/profession/discipline.</p>
LEARNING RESOURCES	<p>43. Resources available to staff and students to promote student practice-based learning are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - relevant to P&PBE goals/outcomes (See Table 12.1) - accessible and sufficient (in numbers) - current quality.

IMPLEMENTING THE CSU P&PBE STANDARDS IN CURRICULA

As discussed above, when working towards quality enhancement of teaching and learning, a greater effect can be achieved if the change comes from within the institution itself. External regulators can impose levels of achievement but these may not bring about the desired change to the quality of teaching and learning. The aim of the course-level P&PBE standards developed for CSU profession-specific courses is to provide a means for internal quality enhancement for a course.

Using the Standards to Review Curricula

Course reviews are a regular occurrence in universities, often attached to policy that mandates the frequency of these reviews. The method for undertaking the course review is not always clearly defined, and this is where a framework such as the CSU P&PBE course standards can be used as a quality enhancement agent. The design and proposed use of the CSU standards as a quality review cycle instrument evaluating performance from a multi-dimensional framework aligns with Coates' (2010) multi-dimensional framework for evaluating academic quality as described above.

The CSU P&PBE standards evaluate performance from multiple aspects and provide measurable standards that have been extensively reviewed by the CSU community in relation to applicability across the range of disciplines. The four tables comprising CSU's P&PBE standards can be used as a means by which course teams can evaluate and frame their curriculum. A series of questions based on these standards can be used as a simple but effective method to prompt course evaluation and review. This process aids in supporting a culture of quality enhancement because a grass-roots approach is taken. With this approach, those in the course team have ownership for what is to be changed and how to make the change. The types of questions and possible means for review are presented.

- Question one: *What is the course aiming to achieve?* This can be assessed by reviewing the dimensions of [Table 12.1](#) and their related meanings. These are key components of professional practice and therefore should be the goals that a practice-based course aims to develop in their learners. Are these goals present in curriculum statements and activities? Does assessment provide evidence of the achievement of the 16 learning outcomes (listed as standards in [Table 12.1](#))? If all the goals (dimensions) are not part of the present course, this informs the course team as to where change to the curriculum may be required. Similarly, if the 16 learning outcomes are not well represented in a course, identification can provide the direction for future change.
- Question two: *How is the course addressing the desired learning goals?* A review of the course against the dimensions and standards in [Table 12.2](#) will provide a framework for evaluating the teaching and learning activities and processes in the course. For example, investigating the types of teaching activity used in a subject or the risk management processes for the course

might indicate where any difficulties may lie. The standards described in [Table 12.2](#) can provide a strategy to improve any identified issues.

- Question three: *How well is the course supported at course level to achieve the teaching and learning goals?* [Table 12.3](#) of the standards defines standards for local infrastructure to support quality teaching and learning. An evaluation of the course context against these standards helps to determine whether there are issues adversely impacting on the course quality. For example, if a course has poor student employment rates post-graduation, review of the workplace learning environments and up-to-date resources may be part of the solution.

As indicated above, learning is influenced by a range of factors and therefore a multi-dimensional frame of reference is required to adequately evaluate quality. Finding where current course strengths exist or where deficiencies or missed opportunities in a course may lie is an important step, but equally important is the need to create a plan for prioritising and implementing changes. One method for such planning is to set targets based on the following factors: the relative importance of the deficiency/opportunity to the course, the level of urgency in addressing the identified risk, and the feasibility of addressing the risk. The severity of risks will influence the priority for support, correction or enhancement. In other words, a plan should be made to enhance quality over a cycle of time, depending upon the importance of the need for improvement.

Incorporating the Standards into Curricula

As an example of how the P&PBE standards have been used, in 2011, the four CSU Faculties and the EFPI jointly funded five teaching fellowships focused on enhancing teaching and learning by using the standards. The funds awarded to successful applicants provided staff with teaching relief to conduct their project. As well, a staff member from the EFPI mentored the successful teaching fellows for the year of their fellowship.

A brief description of the projects conducted by the 2011 fellows is provided to demonstrate the range of possibilities associated with employing the standards in curricula. Project 1 used the course goals ([Table 12.1](#)) and teaching activities ([Table 12.2](#)) as a framework for creating a new Masters professional entry coursework program. Project 2 developed three new workplace learning subjects for a course that previously was without such subjects. The rationale for including these subjects was to bring a greater depth of practice understanding and decision making into the course. The P&PBE standards were used as a framework to determine how the subjects would be structured and their overarching aims. Project 3 evaluated the degree of practice relevance of a masters coursework program by using the course goals ([Table 12.1](#)) and teaching activities ([Table 12.2](#)) as a framework for review. Project 4 was part of a larger program creating an online Faculty-based quality assurance instrument. The P&PBE standards were incorporated in this instrument. Project 5 developed a process for a course review that required evidence of attaining a specific set of professional accreditation standards. The course goals ([Table 12.1](#)) were used as

the framework for mapping the professional accreditation standards in the course.

CLOSING STATEMENTS

In this chapter we have reflected upon academic standards and the quality agenda facing higher education. An example of P&PBE standards that are highly relevant to health professional education was provided to illustrate how standards can be used to enhance curricula and students' education.

NOTES

- ⁱ Course expectations are spelt out in qualifications frameworks. In the UK this refers to the “formal structure identifying qualification levels in ascending order and stating the requirements for qualifications to be awarded at each one”. (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/aboutus/glossary/pages/glossary-q.aspx#q3>)
- ⁱⁱ <http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/>
- ⁱⁱⁱ Under the *Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011* (<http://www.teqsa.gov.au/>)

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