Strategies for assuring academic standards

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Summary

"Good ideas with no ideas on how to implement them are wasted ideas"

"Change doesn't just happen but must be led, deftly

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- **The emerging context and standards agenda for higher education**

- **Key terms – need for shared understanding**

- **A validated HE quality and standards framework**

- **Key lessons on effective implementation and continuous quality improvement in post-secondary and higher education**

- **Change doesn't just happen – it must be led, and deftly**

- **Change leadership myths**

The emerging context & standards' agenda for Higher Education

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- **How best to balance growth with quality; access with excellence; mission with market**

- **Growing competition within and beyond each country– tackling patchy standards, assuring 'academic integrity' & the HE 'export market'**

- **A new consumer and demand driven system – 'user pays'**

- **Rapid developments in ICT-enabled learning**

- **Who should determine standards and decide what constitutes 'excellence' in such a context?**

- **How do we determine *what* should be given focus in this new context and then *how* to make sure it is implemented consistently and effectively**

The emerging context & standards agenda cont'd

- **Developing a shared picture of what the key role of higher education (c.f. VET) is in such a context. Is it to produce:**
  - **'Work ready' graduates;**
  - **Graduates who are sustainability literate; inventive; change implementation savvy and ethically robust;**
  - **Graduates who have come to a considered position on the tacit assumptions driving societies and individuals in the C21st**
  - **Something else**
- **Clarifying what is a valid standard and way to measure the capabilities of our graduates**
- **Figuring out how best to balance a focus on proving vs improving quality**
- **Working efficiently & productively with national HE standards to ensure accreditation and re-accreditation**

Some key terms

- *Standard* – **a level of achievement with clear criteria, indicators and means of testing**

- *Quality* – **fitness for purpose/fitness of purpose and performance to an agreed standard**

- *Assurance* – **process of ensuring that activities and outcomes meet an agreed standard**

- *Academic Integrity* – **honest & responsible scholarship/operations**

- *Management* – **organisation and coordination of the activities to achieve agreed objectives and outcomes successfully and consistently**

- *Strategy* – **linking relevant, desirable and clear ends to the most feasible means necessary to achieve them**

- *Evaluation* – **making judgements of worth about the quality of inputs and outcomes**

TEQSA provider registration standards

- **Provider standing**
- **Financial viability & sustainability**
- **Corporate & academic governance**
- **Primacy of academic quality & integrity**
- **Management of human resources**
- **Responsibilities to students**
- **Physical & electronic resources/infrastructure**

Provider categories: HEP; *University College; Australian University; Australian University of Specialisation; Overseas University; Overseas University of Specialisation.*

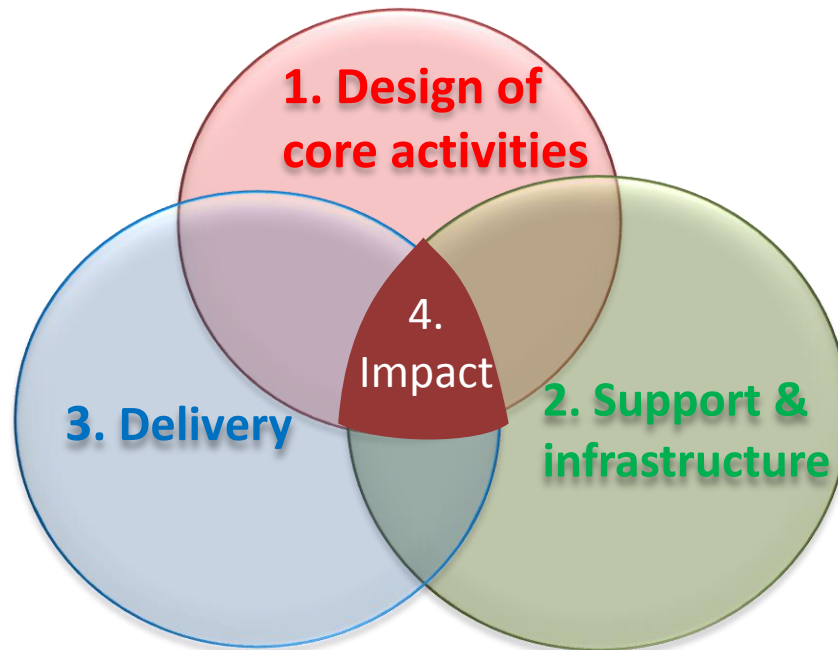# UWS as a case study: performance trends on L&T since 2005

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- **Overall satisfaction up 25% 2005-10**

- **Retention up 4% 2005-10**

- **L&T awards**

    12 ALTC/OLT awards including Teacher of the Year in   both 2011 and 2012 (Nil in 2005)

- **Assessment-focused learning guides to foster academic integrity, productive learning & clarity of expectations**

- **Commended in its cycle 2 audit by AUQA for its Academic Quality & Standards Framework for L&T**

- **The UWS Tracking & Improvement System for L&T is on the AUQA good practice database**

- **National assessment moderation project is complete**

How has this improvement been achieved?

- **A focus on the right combination of 'what' and 'how'**

- **Building a change capable culture**

- **Culture = 'how we do things around here'**

Higher Education Quality & Standards Framework

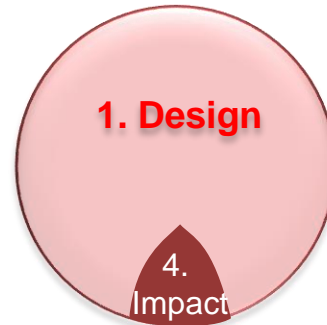# Higher Education Quality & Standards Framework

4. Impact

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- **Provider standing**
- **Validated standards**
- **L&T– +ve demand, retention, assessment outcomes, progress, graduate success**
- **Research - +ve ERA, awards, grants, stakeholder impact**
- **Engagement - +ve feedback from partners & impact**

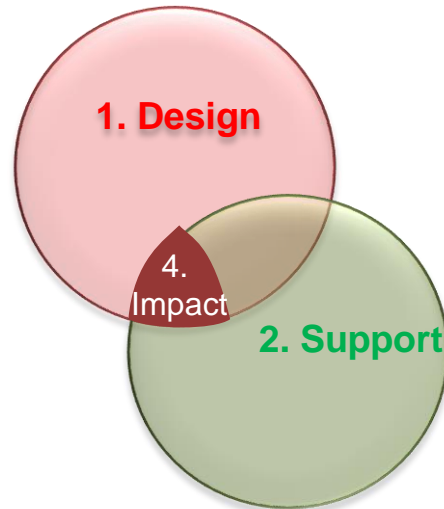# Higher Education Quality & Standards Framework

1. Design

4. Impact

1. Design standards

- **Relevance to mission & stakeholders**
- **L&T - Active Learning including eLearning, Theory-practice links, Expectations & direction clear, Capabilities that count are the focus, Learning pathways are flexible, quality assessment,** capable staff, aligned support, convenient access.
- **Research – relevant, desirable, deliverable, monitored, ethically confirmed, safe, compliant; HDR student support matches PREQ Priorities**
- **Engagement – two-way, mission and regionally aligned, deliverable**

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Higher Education Quality & Standards Framework

1. Design

2. Support

4. Impact

2. Support/infrastructure standards

- **Admission/articulation**
- **Transition**
- **Library**
- **Student services/safety/support**
- **ICT, eLng & eResearch support**
- **Staff selection, performance management & development**
- **Research management**
- **Aligned facilities & administration which adds value**
- **Certification**

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Higher Education Quality & Standards Framework

3. Delivery standards

- **Staff matched to needs, quality, accessibility, responsiveness and skills**
- **Consistency and quality of delivery of core activities & support systems**
- **Performance standard on surveys 3.8/5 = good practice; <3.2/5 = improvement needed**

1. Design

4. Impact

3. Delivery
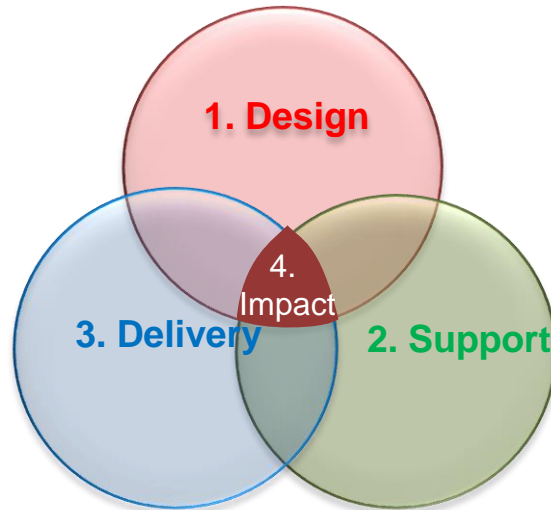
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Key reference points for learning standards (see National Standards Panel March Paper on learning outcomes): whose voice counts most/least?

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- **The National Qualifications Framework**
- **The University's mission and its desired graduate attributes**
- **Learning outcome standards determined by ALTC discipline groups the UK subject benchmark process, AHELO etc**
- **External professional accreditation standards (when applicable)**
- **Employer feedback; input from External Course Advisory Committees**
- **Results from inter-institutional benchmarking**
- **Academic input, peer review and moderation**
- **Key capabilities identified by successful early career graduates**
- **The results of School/Department Reviews**
- **The learning outcomes for courses of the same name in other places**
- **Government policy and funding incentives**
- **What parents, prospective students & others rate as most important**
- **Plus?**

Governance, resourcing, quality management & strategy standards

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Governance

Governing body's composition; QA for this body; TORs, charter and constitution; its risk management system, liability coverage, business continuity plans; valid and effectively implemented and monitored suite of policies for core and support activities with clear accountabilities

Resourcing:

Financial viability, relationships, audited financial statements, income/expenditure, marketing, human resource management

Governance, strategy, quality management & resourcing standards cont'd

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Quality management of all activities

Consistent use of a valid QM framework; tracking and improvement system for core and support activities in place and acted upon; evidence of benchmarking across the sector; third party QA; assurance of consistency & equivalence between campuses; comprehensive and effective review system; assurance of academic integrity; composition, roles, effectiveness of Academic Board

Strategy

Relevant, desirable, feasible & succinct strategic plan covering core & support activities ; all staff are clear on this & their role in implementing its key directions

Your framework for assuring standards & quality

- **What is your framework and where is it similar or different to this one?**

- **How do you ensure that staff act on the key areas of improvement that emerge?**

The 'how': key lessons on the effective implementation & continuous quality improvement

- **Consensus around the data not around the table – evidence-based decisions**
- **A small number of agreed priorities for action**
- **Ready, fire, aim not ready, aim, aim, aim…**
- **Steered engagement around a small number of agreed priorities – e.g. retention**
- **'Why don't we' not 'why don't you'**
- **Change is learning**

The 'how': key lessons on the effective implementation & CQI cont'd

Learning from others

- targeted benchmarking & networked learning with a common framework and evidence; peer review

Knowing what external auditors are looking for

- **Consistency & equivalence**
- **Outcomes not just inputs**
- **Evidence to back up claims**
- **Action on agreed improvement areas**
- **Understanding where I fit, what has been achieved and still needs to be done**
- **Using critical friends to assess the veracity of your claims**

UWS system for Tracking & Improving L&T (TILT)

- **Items focus on what counts – L&T design & support standards**

- **Importance as well as performance**

- **Clear performance standard of 3.8/5 (70% explicit satisfaction)**

- **Qualitative as well as quantitative (500,000 UWS *CEQuery* comments)**

- **Annual course diagnostic reports & action plans**

- **First class tell students actions being taken**

- **Benchmarking for improvement at the unit level with clear roles**

Quality improvement doesn't just happen – it must be led
the Learning Leaders research (n=500)

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- **Listen, link then lead – 'steered engagement'**
- **Model, teach and learn**
- **Leaders model integrity & other key capabilities**
- **A change capable culture is built by change capable leaders**
- **Everyone is a leader in their own area of expertise and responsibility**
- **Most challenged when things go wrong – this is when you learn**
- **Key findings are available for every L&T role**

Higher education leadership capability framework

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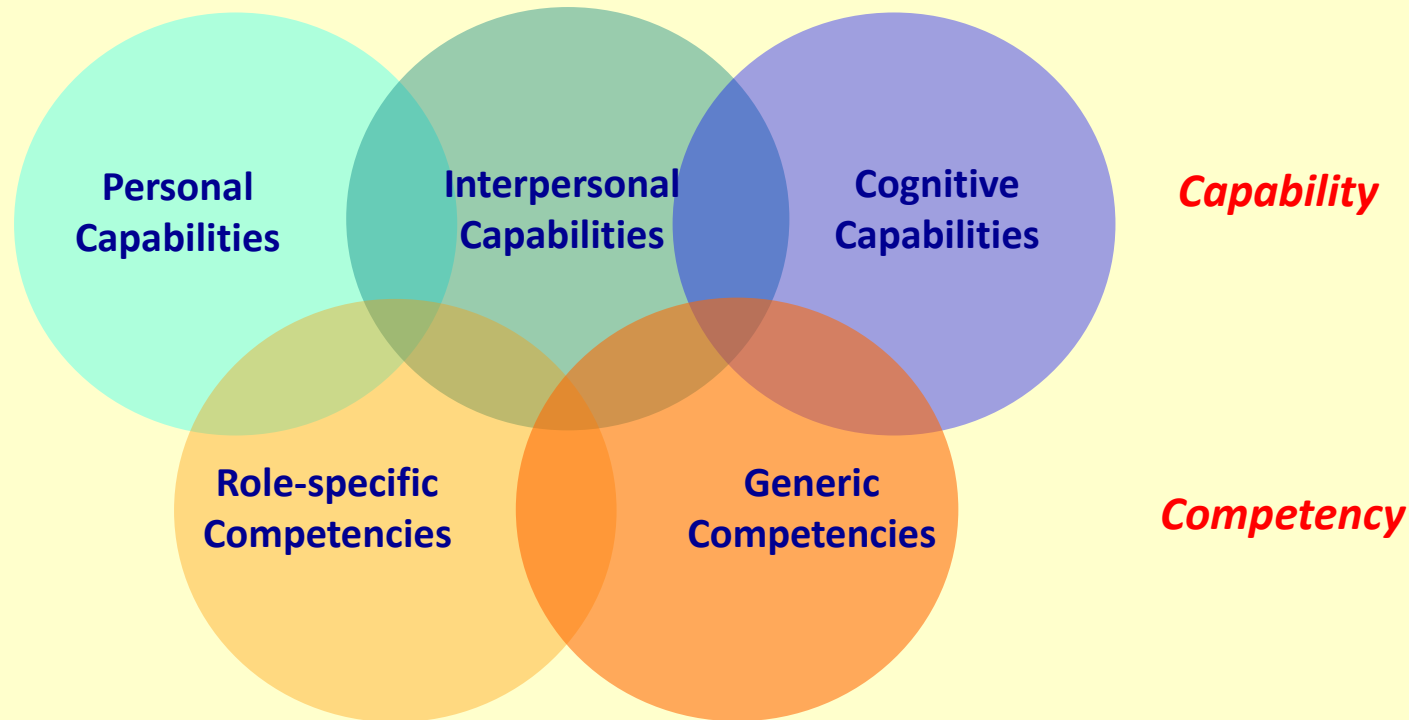
Change leadership myths to watch out for

- **The knight on the white charger myth**

- **The brute sanity myth**

- **The restructure myth**

- **The inputs = quality myth**

- **The information is learning myth**

- **The change event myth**

- **The why don't you myth**

- **The learning only occurs in the traditional classroom myth**

What next?

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- **One key insight you have taken from this presentation**

- **One key area you would like to follow-up**

- **One area you would like to clarify further**

Further reading

- **Fullan, M & Scott, G (2009):** *Turnaround Leadership for higher education*, Jossey Bass, San Francisco
- **Krause, K & Scott, G (2013):** *A sector-wide model for assuring achievement standards through inter-university moderation*, OLT
- **Scott, G (2008):** *University student engagement & satisfaction*, commissioned report to the Bradley Review
- **Scott, G, Coates, H & Anderson, M (2008):** *Learning leaders in times of change*, ALTC
- **Scott, G, Tilbury, D, Sharp, L & Deane, E (2013):** *Turnaround leadership for sustainability in higher education*, OLT, Sydney
- **Scott, G (forthcoming):** 'Improving learning & teaching quality in higher education', *South African Jnl of H.E.*
- **Scott, G & Hawke, I (2003):** Using an external quality audit as a lever for institutional change, *Assessment & Evaluation in HE, 22 (3)*

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