



Welcome to the second Planning and Quality newsletter for 2009

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The year so far...

It has been an interesting eight months for UOW and the Higher Education sector. Following the Bradley and Cutler reviews, the Federal Government announced a raft of policy and funding reforms in the May 2009 budget. They are aimed at opening up higher education opportunities for greater numbers and sustaining Australian research and innovation. Offsetting these initiatives are performance-based compacts with each university and a new Quality & Standards Authority, this one carrying compliance and funding "stick".

We are entering a period of change where even the key definitions are still fluid – "what is a compact?", "what is a standard?" To prepare, we have tightened our planning and review processes, checked compliance with national "standards" and embarked on significant benchmarking projects. We are also using the second cycle AUQA audit as an added impetus for necessary quality improvements. And, yes...preparations are underway for the next audit in early 2011. It promises to be a preamble to a more rigorous standards-based system and many of you will be involved in the self-reviews conducted during 2010 and in the audit visit.

2009 Planning Conference and the new Federal Agenda

The University Planning Conference was held this year in the more temperate climate of Gerringong. The bracing air of the usual Bowral venue was replaced by a bracing wind shift from Canberra which cleared the way for:

- Funding on the basis of student demand, enabling an additional 50,000 new students to commence a degree by 2013 (217,000 additional graduates by 2025)
- 40% of all 25-34 year olds to hold a bachelor degree by 2025; with 20% of higher education enrolments at the undergraduate level from low SES backgrounds
- Mission-based compacts with individual performance targets for funding
- An increase to university indexation
- A phased move to address the gap in funding for the indirect costs of research
- Major investment through the Education Investment Fund (\$3 billion dollars)

The keynote speaker, Mr Bill Burmester, Deputy Secretary, Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, had a clear message for the Conference. In this demand-driven climate, universities needed to adopt a proactive approach, with attention to strategic positioning; funding opportunities; the key quality and standards issues; and student and employer satisfaction.

The conference took this message to heart. Session teams tackled the main issues of: Student Recruitment & Retention (Domestic and International); Equity & Participation; The UOW Graduate profile; Research; and Quality Improvement and Standards.

The key conference outcome was a strategic commitment to a UOW 'Growth Strategy' which aims to address the government's targeted participation targets and ensure UOW's position as a university of choice in a demand-driven system.

The Strategy is expected to cover: active outreach to communities, TAFE and schools; enhanced pathways; first year academic transition; academic and other student advice; online communication; staffing and resources; and capital developments. A Social Inclusion Working Party, chaired by the Dean of Students, has been established to develop the equity initiatives which will be discussed at the **Planning Forum for Heads of Schools and Units on 15 October**.

Planning & Review



Participants face the full glare of the federal agenda at the 2009 Planning Conference

A New Strategic Plan

The UOW Strategic Plan is the blueprint for the University's development over a three-year planning cycle. Next year, 2010, is the last year of the current cycle.

The Vice-Chancellor will launch a review of the 2008-10 Plan in October in preparation for the drafting of a new Plan next year. The development of the new plan will be overseen by the University Planning and Quality Committee (UPAQ), in consultation with members of the University and the community.

The next UOW Strategic Plan will be critical for guiding the University in a dynamic external context. Our mission, and our performance against the goals that sit under it, will be a basis for negotiating funding compacts.

Faculty and Unit Planning

Why it is important

The alignment of faculty and unit plans with the University's Strategic Goals is central to our quality improvement system. Compliance is also mandated by the National Protocols for Higher Education and checked via the AUQA quality audits. UOW is now entering an intensive preparation period for an audit in early 2011.

Planning alignment will be a basic requirement of the new federal Tertiary Education and Standards Agency (TEQSA).

New Reporting and Planning Templates

Faculties and professional units are reporting this year to a later timetable that reflects the link between planning and budget. Review and planning templates have been simplified and aligned more visibly to the strategic goals and the annual performance targets. **Review reports are due on 12 October and the 2010 Plans are due (for most areas) on 29 January.**

Data packs have been prepared by Planning Services and, for the first time, include "views" prepared by the Performance Indicators Project team (PIPs). This change is designed to improve access to both "point-in-time" and updated data.

Review against National Protocols

What are they?

The [National Protocols for Higher Education](#) govern the delivery of higher education in Australia and are approved by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

Why do they matter?

The requirements under the Protocols must be met before an institution can be approved to operate as an Australian university or provider. Existing universities are expected to demonstrate that they continue to meet the criteria in Protocols A and D. A "desk review" of compliance is a pre-requisite for an AUQA audit.

The Protocols are set to become even more significant. The federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) has announced that they will be *reviewed and tightened as touchstones for assessing quality and standards with a consequence for performance funding.*

How do we measure up?

A "desk" review of compliance under the National Protocols was conducted between March and May this year. It covered all major aspects of a university's operations - goals and culture; governance; finances and management; protection of students; quality assurance; staffing; facilities and student services; courses; culture of scholarship; and research culture.

The results were largely positive but some technical and quality improvements have been initiated, e.g. a systematic benchmarking framework. A status report will be requested in the first quarter of 2010.

Australian Qualifications Framework

The AQF is the national framework that sets the guidelines for our degrees and diplomas, including eligibility, structure, learning outcomes and articulation with each other and with qualifications from other sectors such as TAFE. Compliance is mandated under the National Protocols and checked by AUQA audits. (Masters degrees are being monitored closely).

The recent AQF review has proposed measures "to enhance the objectives of the AQF and create a more contemporary AQF architecture". The Federal Government has flagged the AQF as the second pre-eminent external reference point for assessing standards.

Key References and Websites

UOW Planning & Quality website
<http://www.uow.edu.au/planquality/>

AUQA website
<http://www.auqa.edu.au/>

Universities Australia website
<http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/>

National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/MCEETYAS/

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)
<http://www.aqf.edu.au/>

Quality Improvement

Quality is everyone's business

We all contribute to the success of our university. We all can contribute to making it better.....

What is quality management?

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) "views quality management as operating an integrated system that enables an organisation to continually reflect on, and improve, its performance" [AUQA Audit Manual June 2008].

How does it work at UOW?

Quality is primarily managed at UOW through two interconnected sets of processes:

1. **Strategic planning and reporting**
2. The processes and procedures under the **Academic Review Policy** governing the review of faculties and academic units and the curriculum.

The University's quality cycle – Plan, Act, Review, Improve – ensures that its objectives and standards are tested and improved. This cycle applies to all processes and activities undertaken at UOW at an institutional, unit and individual level. Reviews are conducted:

- at the *individual* level via annual performance planning
- at the *Unit/Faculty* level as part of their annual review and planning reports and via independent (performance) reviews triggered under the Academic Review Policy
- by major university *committees* against an annual action plan
- via *course reviews* every five years.

Reviews are also conducted against external reference points, such as the National Protocols (see page2) and as part of benchmarking.

The UOW **Quality Improvement Plan** logs and tracks identified institutional quality improvements projects.

Common Acronyms used in this Edition

AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
ARD	Academic Registrar's Division
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AUQF	Australian Universities Quality Forum
CEDIR	Centre for Educational Development & Interactive Resources
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
ITS	Information Technology Services
QAS	Quality Assurance Subcommittee (of UEC)
SPQ	Strategic Planning & Quality Office
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
UEC	University Education Committee
UPAQ	University Planning & Quality Committee
UOW	University of Wollongong
UTAS	University of Tasmania

Benchmarking Audit

An audit of benchmarking and other comparative activities at UOW was conducted in March-April 2009. The main findings were:

- Benchmarking activity has increased since the last audit was undertaken in March 2007.
- Much of this activity is informal in nature and takes the form of participation in networking groups, associations and alliances.
- Formal benchmarking partnerships have been established with UTAS (see below) and Griffith University (between UOW's Faculty of Commerce and Griffith's Business School).
- There is significant and increasing use of comparative survey data (note: for the first time this comparative data is being incorporated into faculty data packs to inform faculty planning and review).
- Improved documentation of the outcomes from benchmarking will assist the University to strengthen its quality improvement processes.

An integrated benchmarking framework, including clear definitions of the purposes and processes for benchmarking, is being developed to guide activity in this area.

Project with UTAS – An Update

A two year trial benchmarking project between the University of Tasmania and UOW is nearing completion. The project is comparing how each institution performs in the provision of support services to first year undergraduate students. The focus is on those programs and services that help students make the transition to university life and succeed in their first year of study.

The trial benchmarking project aims to:

- develop knowledge and experience in the benchmarking process, especially in preparation for the second AUQA audit cycle
- compare processes and identify good practice
- identify areas for improvement

So far, the project has involved a comprehensive self assessment of programs against **10 performance indicators** – covering policy and planning; coordination and delivery of services; promotions and communications; identifying and meeting student needs; pedagogy; resourcing; and monitoring, evaluating and improvement processes.

This self assessment involved all nine faculties, the Academic Services Division (Library, CEDIR, Learning Development and Woolyungah), Student Services, ITS, ARD and SPQ.

A **UOW self assessment workshop** identified areas of good practice and key areas for improvement and highlighted differences and similarities between faculties and support units.

Outcomes of the self assessment were shared with UTAS at a **peer assessment workshop** conducted via video conference in mid June 2009. As well as highlighting similarities and differences in processes, the peer review also identified areas where each could learn from the other, and areas for further collaboration.

A **Project Report is due for release in October**. Findings will be communicated to the University community via the [Strategic Planning & Quality](#) website and in the next edition of this newsletter.

The project is being conducted and monitored by a Quality Assurance Subcommittee (QAS) Working Group of the University Education Committee. For more information contact Dale Dumpleton on ext. 4748 dalded@uow.edu.au or Jan Sullivan on ext. 3573 jsulliva@uow.edu.au

Focus on: Academic Standards

What are they?

The promotion and maintenance of standards are seen as important for Australia's competitive position in the international student market and they inform ongoing public and employer opinion. *Under a student-driven system, standards become a way of providing a basis for student choice.*

An agreed definition of standards has become a "holy grail" in the Australian sector. AUQA's working party on standards issued a discussion paper in May this year in which they were still wrestling with the term.

Basically, academic standards are the minimum levels of achievement (learning outcomes and abilities) that must be reached for a student to be eligible for a qualification. Setting and maintaining standards relates fundamentally to the quality of policies and processes for developing, implementing and reviewing programs and practice.

Standards are set through:

1. broad external indicators and codes of practice, as set, e.g. by the National Protocols and the AQF (the extent to which more detailed standards might be set at this level is still under consideration).
2. faculty and disciplinary benchmarks, developed within the universities with reference, e.g. to scholarship and research; external references, professional/accreditation requirements; good practice models (e.g. as identified through benchmarking); community/employer needs.

What UOW will need to demonstrate:

To meet, firstly, AUQA and then increasingly rigorous government requirements (related to funding decisions) we will need to show:

- How standards are set – external reference points/ benchmarks
- How we assure consistent implementation – policies and procedures
- How outcomes are monitored – quantitative and qualitative measures
- How standards are compared nationally/ internationally
- The result of those comparisons
- How and how often we improve and update standards

Many of these questions will be addressed over coming months through a self-review and a benchmarking project on assessment.

The Australian Universities Quality Forum 2009

The AUQF, held from 1-3 July, was attended by AUQA quality auditors and senior staff from Australian universities and education providers. The theme for 2009 was *"Internal & External Quality Assurance: Tensions & Synergies."* The context was the changing expectations and systems for quality assurance, here and overseas.

The messages from the AUQF included:

- Factors critical for Cycle 2 audits: an aligned Strategic Planning and Review system; a demonstrated Academic Reviews process; Compliance with National Protocols; Benchmarking; key reference checks; quality of data.
- The risk (raised by international speakers) of leaving quality standards to be determined by external markets (with consumer cultures and 'best buy' mentalities) and/or the rating agencies (to whom quality was a number). They argued that external authorities should not "judge" standards but make sure they were in place.
- The two key important external references for setting high level standards will be:
 - *The National Protocols for Higher Education*
 - *The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)*
- The continuing role of AUQA, pending its absorption into the Tertiary Education Quality & Standards Agency (TEQSA). The institutions recently audited in Cycle 2 took the AUQA audit process seriously and had in place comprehensive and often sophisticated quality/audit arrangements.

What will be the impact of TESQA?

The Tertiary Education Quality & Standards Agency (TEQSA) will be looking to identify minimum standards for registration and accreditation of all higher education providers, including the private sector. It will evaluate performance, encourage best practice and assure national consistency.

TEQSA will carry out formal evaluations every 5 years but could initiate "infringement" audits so issues could be quickly addressed. At the extreme, penalties could be imposed, including, eg, change of accreditation status, loss of funding, blocks to enrolments in certain disciplines. "Risk" audits based on an analysis of national risk would also be undertaken as necessary.

TEQSA's evaluations will inform performance funding decisions.

TEQSA timetable:

1 July 2009	TEQSA established
Sept 2010	TEQSA operational
2011-12	Staged transition from AUQA to TEQSA
2012	TEQSA begins audits
2015	Move into VET area

Cycle 2 AUQA Audit

The sector has been advised that cycle 2 AUQA audits will proceed as planned. UOW expects to be audited under Cycle 2 in early 2011. Confirmation of dates is expected by September 2009.

More information on how the University is preparing for the AUQA Audit will be provided in the next edition of this newsletter.