

Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems

Final Report 2015

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<http://highereducationstudentevaluation.com>



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List of acronyms used

eTEVALS – Electronic Teaching Evaluations
SECT – Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching
SET – Student Evaluation of Teaching

Definition

The following definition has emerged out of the project teams' analysis of interviews and focus groups.

Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching (SECT) is the collection, analysis, reporting and application of feedback from students about the design, facilitation and quality of the education experience. The most common means of data collection is through electronic surveys distributed near the end of the teaching semester or at the conclusion of a degree.

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Executive summary

Issues, context & project aims

Online student evaluation systems are an opportunity for student engagement and learning improvement. However, they are currently limited by low response rates. Educators tend not to trust them and students describe the activity of filling in multiple surveys as futile. Student feedback processes have largely become academic performance review instruments rather than evaluation and change catalysts. However, there are universities successfully using student evaluation to measure student course engagement and learning development, and then involving students in improving the overall student experience. This completed OLT Seed project was designed to fully develop six such innovations into case studies. The project pursued the questions: How can we measure student engagement and learning success using student evaluation processes? And how can students contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching? The team drew-out a cohesive set of key issues, strategies and recommendations, and disseminated these to the higher education sector through a symposium and a website.

<http://highereducationstudentevaluation.com>

The aims of this project were to describe and disseminate Australian case studies of effective systems, approaches and strategies used to measure and improve student course engagement and learning success through the use of online student evaluation systems. The six institution project partners have developed innovations. This project aimed and accomplished dissemination of these and additional strategies to the sector.

The following definition has emerged out of the project teams' analysis of interviews and focus groups.

Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching (SECT) is the collection, analysis, reporting and application of feedback from students about the design, facilitation and quality of the education experience. The most common means of data collection is through electronic surveys distributed near the end of the teaching semester or at the conclusion of a degree.

The **project approach** was conducted in three phases.

Phase one – case study development: First, a full case study was developed at each of the universities. The Project Manager: travelled to each of the universities to research the cases, interviewing students, academics and professional staff responsible for administering student evaluation, and senior executives such as Deputy Vice-Chancellors; facilitated focus groups with students and academics; collected and analysed documents such as surveys and reports; observed practise, asked questions and recorded field notes. In total, there were 97 project participants.

Phase two – deriving recommendations from case studies: Second, project team members from each of the six universities collaborated (online) to draw-out a cohesive set of key issues, strategies and recommendations from the Phase one case studies.

Phase three – dissemination through a student evaluation seminar: This phase focused on dissemination, including a report (print and online) and a symposium for sharing student evaluation good practice and recommendations. Seventy-five delegates attended.

Overall results / key findings

How can we measure student engagement and learning success using student evaluation processes? Project participants explained that as a stand-alone process, student evaluation does not yield valid data to measure student engagement and learning success. However, when student evaluation data is strategically integrated with a full suite of other quality improvement tools, processes and data-bases, student survey responses are a rich and informative means of evaluating the effectiveness of higher education.

How can students contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching? A salient theme across interviews and focus groups was that student evaluation surveys are part of a suite of quality assurance tools through which students can contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching.

Overall sentiment towards the student evaluation process Student project participants were neutral to positive about student evaluation (SE). Most student responses indicated an acceptance that the SE process was necessary and potentially useful, albeit for future semesters of students rather than immediate benefit for themselves. Academic project participants were accepting of the role of SE in the educational experience, acknowledging that SE is a standard process across universities. The responses of the professional staff were strongly aligned with those of the academics. The major theme of their comments was a conceptualisation of students as *evaluators* as opposed to only survey *respondents*. Professional staff said that students should be consulted, included and informed. Project participants from the senior executive stakeholder group expressed positive sentiment towards SE, stating that the system enables the student voice.

Strengths and needed improvements to the student evaluation process

Project participants perceived three main strengths of student evaluation processes at partner institutions:

- Online administration means that the systems are automated, accessible, user-friendly, convenient and environmental.
- The process results in meaningful data that allows change and improvement.
- Universities administer frequent and standard survey administration such that historic evaluation is possible.

The main need for improvement was that survey questions need refining as some are vague, confusing and/or ambiguous.

Project outcomes

The project identified effective online student evaluation systems in Australia and developed case studies, strategies and recommendations for dissemination to the higher education sector. As proposed, the project outcomes included:

1. Development of case studies at each of the partner institutions, regarding effective online student evaluation systems;
2. Identification of the key issues, strategies and recommendations for measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems; and
3. Dissemination via a student evaluation symposium (75 delegates), an emerging community of practice and conference presentations/papers (6) accessible through a website <http://highereducationstudentevaluation.com>

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Recommendations for improving student evaluation

Numerous recommendations were expressed by various stakeholders throughout the interviews and focus groups. The recommendations are clustered by theme below.

Survey timing and accessibility

- Leave surveys open as long as possible including during exam block.
- Provide an additional digital drop-box whereby students can submit feedback as it occurs to them.
- Consider moving beyond a sole summative measure of satisfaction by asking students at the start of the semester to outline their expectations and then evaluate at the end.
- Design surveys to be as user-friendly as possible, such as by designing them to feel like apps whereby the student clicks on a rating circle.

Survey design

- Use as few surveys as possible.
- Include as few questions as possible.
- Provide room for extensive free text.
- Allow the students the option of responding to some or all questions.
- Ask questions about courses and programs in addition to subjects or units.

Provide the opportunity for additional feedback

- Include a survey space for students to insert their name and contact information if they wish to provide additional verbal feedback.
- Include a survey space for students to insert their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted to talk about their own learning and/or progress.
- Insert a line in the survey stating, "If you have any problems or concerns you are also welcome to contact me [insert teacher's name] directly and I will see what I can do."

Engage in conversations

- Teachers are encouraged to discuss the importance of student evaluation with students.
- Do not rely on surveys as the sole source of evaluation.
- Senior executives are encouraged to visit classes periodically to ask students for their opinions on educational matters.
- Schedule focus groups.
- Engage class representatives.

Refine reports and improve reporting

- If using the mean score on Likert-scale items, also provide the median and/or mode.
- Email students a link to the overall student evaluation results.
- Present 'this is what I am going to change for next year from your feedback.'
- At the beginning of the semester review results from prior surveys and action taken.
- Facilitate feedback sessions with student cohorts.

Provide professional development

- Teach students how to write appropriate, professional and constructive feedback.
- Provide workshops for academics on how to interpret and take appropriate action.

Provide an opportunity for academics to respond and/or rebut

- Formalise a process for academics to respond to student feedback.
- Provide an opportunity for appeal if student evaluation feedback is perceived as inaccurate and/or unfair.

Chapter 1: Literature review

All universities seek to maximise contribution to student learning, engagement and the overall student experience (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005; Ramsden, 2003; Shah & Nair, 2012a; Tucker, 2013; Velliari, Palmer, Picard, Guerin, Smith, Green, & Miller, 2012). Evaluation is playing a heightened role in that there is increasing emphasis on collecting and reporting evidence of quality contributions (Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008; French, Summers, Kinash, Lawson, Taylor, Herbert, Fallshaw, & Hall, 2014; Ginns, Marsh, Behnia, Cheng, & Scalas, 2009; Nair, Patil, & Mertova, 2011; Nair, Pawley, & Mertova, 2010; Ramsden, 2003; Shah & Nair, 2012a; Shah & Nair, 2012b). Furthermore, there are heightened expectations for universities to use data to benchmark against one another, resulting in attempts to rank them (Cheng & Marsh, 2010; Shah & Nair, 2012a). Beyond collecting the data, universities are searching for ways to *close-the-loop* on evaluation, making responsive changes that improve and/or enhance learning and teaching (Brightman, 2006; French, Summers, Kinash, Lawson, Taylor, Herbert, Fallshaw, & Hall, 2014; Nair & Mertova, 2011; Nair, Patil, & Mertova, 2011; Santhanam, Martin, Goody, & Hicks, 2001; Shah & Nair, 2012a).

There is a long history and robust literature base regarding student evaluation of courses and teaching - SECT (Hativa, 2013a; Marsh & Bailey, 1993; Tucker, 2013). Despite this history, evaluation issues, problems and controversies continue to populate the literature, and contemporary universities are striving to improve evaluation systems and the associated change processes, in part to align evaluation with student perceptions as to what matters in quality teaching and learning (Catano & Harvey, 2011; Chen & Hoshower, 2003; Hativa, 2013a; Shah & Nair, 2012b; Tucker, 2013). Boud and Molloy (2013) defined feedback to students as "a process whereby learners obtain information about their work in order to appreciate the similarities and differences between the appropriate standards for any given work, and the qualities of the work itself, in order to generate improved work" (p. 6). A parallel definition may be used to describe feedback *from* students to universities – *a process whereby educators obtain information about their work ... in order to support improved teaching and learning*. In this context, education scholars are recognising SECT as a key system with strong, but largely unfulfilled, potential to improve higher education (Barber, Jones, & Novak, 2009; Hativa, 2013a; Nair & Mertova, 2011). Education scholars have described SECT as a system of "progress along the way" in that it has the potential "to measure differences in the quality of teaching, namely those aspects of teaching in which students have direct experience and therefore validity to comment" (Taylor & Taylor, 2003, p. 79). Beyond teaching improvement, some universities have used student feedback to further engage students and improve learning (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2005; Ramsden, 2003; Tucker, 2013).

Almost all universities collect student feedback, usually via surveys distributed near the end of the teaching semester or at the conclusion of a degree (Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008). In recent years, many universities have achieved a functional proficiency with student feedback that was not previously possible, through electronic administration (Bennett & Nair, 2010; Kinash, Naidu, & Wood, 2012; Knight, Naidu, & Kinash, 2012; Watt, Simpson, McKillop, & Nunn, 2002). Some universities have further harnessed the benefits afforded by electronic student evaluation systems, despite the documented lower response rates for the majority of electronic, as compared to paper surveys (Avery, Bryant, Mathios, Kang, & Bell, 2006; Kinash, Knight, & Hives, 2011; Knight, Naidu, & Kinash, 2012; Nulty, 2008).

A prior Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) project collated and reported the overall use and characteristics of student feedback processes in Australian universities (Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008). The team invited all Australian universities to provide information on SECT use in their institutions, resulting in survey data from 27 universities. Analysis was consistent with the assertions of other literature (e.g. Catano & Harvey, 2011; Hativa, 2013a; Nair & Mertova, 2011) in that historically SECT data has most commonly been applied to academic career pursuits such as promotion, contract extension and teaching award applications rather than student engagement and learning. However, the ALTC project team reported emerging awareness of the contribution SECT data *could* make to learning and teaching improvement and aspiration for future development of quality assurance processes. In their concluding comments, the authors observed, SECT systems currently “seem poorly suited to the task of supporting outwards-looking institutions seeking to cooperate with each other in *improving* learning and teaching” (p. 103).

The ALTC team’s (Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008) findings have been supported over time through descriptions of outward-looking student feedback systems and processes at, for example: Bond University (Kinash, Naidu, & Wood, 2012); Deakin University (Palmer & Holt, 2012); RMIT (Barber, Jones, & Novak, 2009); Curtin University (Tucker, 2013); and UWA/Adelaide (Santhanam, Martin, Goody, & Hicks, 2001). Some of these publications were included in a project commissioned to map Australian published scholarship in tertiary education learning and teaching (Velliari, Palmer, Picard, Guerin, Smith, Green, & Miller, 2012). One of the themes this team identified was “student experience – perceptions” addressed through the sub-theme of “student evaluations” (p. 45). The authors summarised their analysis as revealing a problem in that “student evaluations appear to have become ... a tool to (a) evaluate the performance of teaching staff and identify poor teaching for remediation, and (b) attempt to validate and prove to the research community the enormous effort and success that has been achieved through one’s own teaching program/unit.” (p. 46) Despite the current manifestation, there is widespread recognition that students are important stakeholders in the higher education experience and acknowledgement for their role as evaluators (Bennett & Nair, 2010; Kinash, Knight, & Hives, 2011; Kinash, Naidu, & Wood, 2012; Knight, Naidu, & Kinash, 2012; Nair, Patil, & Mertova, 2011). Notably, the distinction between the student role as *evaluator* or *rater* is contested, with many academics agreeing with the latter, in which students are conceptually positioned as respondents to surveys, which university administrators use for evaluative purposes (Hativa, 2013b). Nevertheless, students’ perspectives about evaluation and their educational experience are emerging as published in the literature. Writing from a student perspective, Conlon (2004), for example, stated that the contemporary education evaluation processes “have done little to improve the accessibility, quality or accountability of ... universities” (p. 47). It is apparent from the literature that, overall, student *evaluators* remains aspiration rather than reality (Kinash, Knight, & Hives, 2011; Tucker, 2013).

In summary, despite widespread collection of feedback from students across the sector, the evaluation processes are not as effective as they could be because the purpose and justification for collecting feedback from students are poorly aligned. The project described in this final report seeded initiatives to expand the power of student evaluation systems at Australian universities to enable the higher education sector to effectively engage students and connect the evaluation to learning improvement.

[All References fully cited in Appendix B]

Chapter 2: Project activities

The questions addressed by this project were:

- How can we measure student engagement and learning success using student evaluation processes? and
- How can students contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching?

This project formalised a naturally emerging informal community of practice. Through reading one another's publications and attending one another's conference presentations, a student evaluation group had emerged. The project team members are passionate about the power of student feedback and have led innovations at their respective universities. The project team has proven its viability and efficiency, producing three pre-funding dissemination outcomes on student evaluation.

The project approach was conducted in three phases.

Phase one – case study development: First, a full case study was developed at each of the universities. The project manager: travelled to each of the universities to research the cases, interviewing students, academics and professional staff responsible for administering student evaluation, and senior executives such as Deputy Vice-Chancellors; facilitated focus groups with students and academics; collected and analysed documents such as surveys and reports; observed practice, asked questions and recorded field notes. Through literature review, the project team developed interview and focus group questions (Appendix C). Each site visit took two days. Interviews and focus groups were audio recorded.

Phase two – deriving recommendations from case studies: Second, project team members from each of the six universities collaborated (online) to draw-out a cohesive set of key issues, strategies and recommendations from the Phase one case studies. Through the literature review, the project team developed a criteria based rubric (Appendix D) focusing analysis around six key questions as articulated in the proposal: can response rates be used as a proxy for student engagement; how can technology-enhanced student feedback systems be used to increase student involvement; what are the benefits/issues in reporting outcomes back to students; how are students involved in learning/teaching improvement processes resulting from student feedback; is there alignment between the content of the questions (e.g. teaching) and the application of the responses (e.g. learning); and what is the relationship between subject (course) evaluations and teaching evaluations. The project leader created a series of worksheets, each depicting an element of the rubric. The worksheets created spaces for plotting responses of stakeholders against institution partners. The project leader, project manager and a project team member independently conducted data analysis. They listened to the audio recordings multiple times and transcribed applicable verbatim transcripts into the appropriate worksheet sections. The project manager reconciled the worksheets, creating a master set.

Phase three – dissemination through a student evaluation seminar: This phase focused on dissemination, including a report (print and online) and a symposium for sharing student evaluation good practice and recommendations. Personal invitations were extended to all stakeholders participating in case studies and open invitations were sent to all Australian universities through their office of learning and teaching (or equivalent). 75 delegates attended. Symposium materials and the evaluation report are available in Appendix F.

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Chapter 3: Results

As shown in Table One, a total of 97 people across six universities participated in interviews and focus groups about student evaluation (SE) of courses and teaching. The number of participants per university ranged from eight at Curtin University to 29 at Central Queensland University. Equivalent recruiting methods and available research hours were used at each university; the number of participants was most affected by the response to recruitment. There were four types of stakeholder groups. The largest participation was by academics (n=38), with 47% located at Central Queensland University. The next largest group of stakeholders was students with 33 total participants. Results were informed by 14 senior executives (e.g. Deputy Vice-Chancellors) and 12 professional staff, all of whom had SE as a major component of their position description.

Table One: Interview and focus group participation

Institution Partner	Students	Academics	Professional Staff	Senior Executives	Total Participants
Bond University	6	5	2	2	15
Australian Catholic University	8	3	2	5	18
Central Queensland University	8	18	2	1	29
Charles Sturt University	3	8	2	4	17
Curtin University	3	3	2	0	8
The University of Western Australia	5	1	2	2	10
Total	33	38	12	14	97

Overall sentiment towards the student evaluation process

Student project participants were neutral to positive about SE. Most student responses indicated an acceptance that the SE process was necessary and potentially useful, albeit for future semesters of students rather than immediate benefit for themselves. An illustrative response was, “you get to take the time to actually sit down and think about what the classes and teachers have been like through the semester.” Academic project participants were accepting of the role of SE in the educational experience, acknowledging that SE is a standard process across universities. An illustrative comment was, “I think one of the things you have to do is convince your students that you are going to take some notice of what they say, and that you are very keen to get their feedback.” Academics also expressed a

concern about “over surveying.” The responses of the professional staff were strongly aligned with those of the academics. The major theme of their comments was a conceptualisation of students as *evaluators* as opposed to only survey *respondents*. Professional staff said that students should be consulted, included and informed. An illustrative comment was, “it is absolutely essential that students are involved. So it’s a real tragedy when universities design a system that isn’t driven by the students, and leave the students out of that consultative development process.” Project participants from the senior executive stakeholder group expressed positive sentiment towards SE, stating that the system enables the student voice. For example, a senior executive said, “the only way you can find out about the student experience is by asking the students.” Aligned with the academics, senior executives presented a caution about “over surveying” students.

Emergent themes

Emergent themes were classified by content and stakeholder group and then counted. Notably, there were small numbers in each theme respective to the size of the sample. For example, in regards to the perceived strengths of the student evaluation process, the most salient response was “online” which was evident in only 16 of the 97 responses. The overall interpretation is that there is little common ground in relation to the thinking about student evaluation in universities. Even within the same universities, different views were expressed from people regarding such issues as the extent of student involvement in the student evaluation process. The project team’s overall conclusions were that there are disparate observations, experiences and opinions about student evaluation processes between and within stakeholder groups and universities, and that further communication and consultation appears to be necessary.

Strengths of the student evaluation process

Across the four stakeholder groups, 23 different strengths of the respective university’s SE systems and processes were expressed. Table Two presents the number of people in each stakeholder group who expressed each theme. Twelve of the articulated strengths were expressed by no more than one respondent per stakeholder group and were deleted from the table for purposes of reporting brevity. Strengths were expressed in regard to all six institution partners and by all four stakeholder groups. No distinctive patterns emerged related to specific universities or within/between stakeholder groups. Where five or more people across stakeholder groups articulated a comment on the same theme, the appropriate row in Table Two has been shaded for ease of reference.

Table Two: Perceived strengths of student evaluation process by stakeholders

Perceived Strengths	Students	Academics	Professional Staff	Senior Executives
Online (automated, accessible, user friendly, convenient, environmental)	6	3	4	3
Results in meaningful data that allows change and improvement	0	2	1	3
Frequent and standard survey administration such that historic evaluation is possible	0	4	0	1
Process and surveys consistent across the university (centrally managed)	0	1	2	1
Student anonymity and confidential results for staff	1	2	1	0
Surveys appropriate length (brief)	1	0	2	1
Automated reminders to complete are issued	1	0	2	0
Surveys customisable (e.g. unique questions can be added)	0	1	0	2
Survey space provided for comments	2	0	0	0
Efficient and immediate reporting to staff	0	0	2	0
Staff buy-into the relationship between student evaluation, quality learning/teaching, student experience	0	0	0	2

As shown in Table Two, sixteen project participants (six students, three academics, four professional staff and three senior executives) commended the online design of the student evaluation process, resulting in a system that is *automated, accessible, user friendly, convenient and environmental*. An illustrative quote was, “It’s in the learning site for their courses. They are already there and it’s not hard to find the button. So it is pretty flexible. Most of it is automated now.” Another comment was, “It is online so it saves paper, is environmentally friendly and widely accessible.” Six respondents (two academics, one professional staff and three senior executives) described the student evaluation process as one which *results in meaningful data allowing change and improvement*. An illustrative comment was, “We are asking questions that speak to things that are important for student learning. They reflect more directly the sorts of things we believe that students value about the experience and things educators can modify if there is an issue.” Five respondents (four academics and one senior executive) commented about *frequent and standard survey administration such that historic evaluation is possible*. An illustrative comment was, “I think that what is good about the system is that it is consistent and that it has been consistent for years. So it’s more or less standardised and you can do comparisons. You can see trends. You can redress issues.”

Improvements needed to the student evaluation process

Project participants were asked what they perceived as needed improvements to the SE process. Across the four stakeholder groups, 26 different needed improvements to the respective university's SE systems and processes were expressed. Table Three presents the number of people in each stakeholder group who expressed each theme. Seventeen of the articulated needed improvements were expressed by no more than one respondent per stakeholder group and were deleted from the table for purposes of reporting brevity. For ease of reference, the identified needs for improvement have been listed in the same order as the equivalent strength. Where there were five or more comments applicable to a particular need for improvement, this row has been shaded.

Table Three: Perceived needed improvements to the student evaluation process by stakeholders

Perceived needed improvements	Students	Academics	Professional Staff	Senior Executives
It is up to academics to do their own analysis and academics are not trained to fully apply the data and close-the-loop	0	2	0	1
Need more program-level evaluation as opposed to focusing on units	0	3	0	0
Detail should be added to the instructions at the top of the surveys (including sample responses)	2	0	0	0
Surveys are not customisable (e.g. unique questions cannot be added or do not suit particular student cohorts)	0	2	0	0
Not enough room for comments and positioned at the end of the survey (i.e. impression of being tacked-on)	4	0	0	0
Perceived Needed Improvements	Students	Academics	Professional Staff	Senior Executives
There is an over-emphasis on student satisfaction and students as consumers	0	3	0	1
Questions need refining as some are vague, confusing and/or ambiguous	1	2	1	1
Need improvement to number and quality of student comments	0	1	1	2
Need better coordination between departments and data-bases to ensure accurate assignment of evaluations (who teaches what subjects)	0	1	2	1

As is depicted in Table Three, the cited needs for improvement were varied and widespread. Needed improvements were expressed in regard to all six institution partners and by all four stakeholder groups. No distinctive patterns emerged related to specific universities or within/between stakeholder groups. All but one theme were expressed by less than five people. This described need for improvement (one student, two academics, one professional staff person and one senior executive) was that *questions need refining as some are vague, confusing and/or ambiguous*. The equivalent cited strength, raised by three people (one student, one academic and one professional staff person), was, *effective questions prompt valuation of teachers, content and whether students believe they have learned*. An illustrative comment regarding the questions needing improvement was, “It would be better if the questions were far less ambiguous. You can interpret them in many different ways.”

Innovative strategies used in student evaluation

Project participants at five of the six institution partners described innovative strategies used in their university’s student evaluation processes. In all five of these universities, the professional staff persons responsible for administering student evaluation were the most vocal stakeholders regarding innovations. Students did not describe innovations at any of the universities. The project team interpreted this to mean that students are likely not aware of the student evaluation practices of other universities in order to make comparisons. Further, students appear to interpret student evaluation as matter-of-course rather than as a process that particularly lends itself to innovation. There were only two strategies listed as innovative by more than one stakeholder group including that *teachers can enter the system and check real-time response rates* (comments about two different universities) and *a separate survey is used for work-integrated-learning due to the unique context* (comments about the same university).

Innovative strategies in student evaluation described by:

Professional Staff

- Teachers can enter the system and check real-time response rates.
- A separate survey is used for work-integrated-learning due to the unique context.
- Teachers have the option to include their own questions.
- Teachers can refer back to previous reports at any time, in order to track progress.
- Students were involved and engaged in the design and process of student evaluation from the origins of the online system.
- Surveys are flexible and provide student options, such as completing some or all questions.
- Surveys are optimised for completion on mobile devices.
- Course coordinators review reports and flag inappropriate student comments for deletion prior to releasing reports to academics.
- Student evaluation data is interlinked with other databases and extensively used for learning analytics. For example, student evaluation data informs reports on demographics of particular student cohorts and predictors of passing or failing. These reports are then used to target priorities for quality improvement.

Senior Executives

- A separate survey is used for work-integrated-learning due to the unique context.
- The process includes an effective survey opt-out system requiring students to intentionally decide if they want to participate.
- As a participation incentive, students who complete the surveys have access to their subject results two days before students who have not participated.
- Student participation is increased by embedding the surveys as a standard part of the subject sites in the learning management system.
- Surveys resemble modern apps whereby there are five empty stars and when students click, the respective number of stars 'light up.'
- Workshops and tip-sheets (including from senior executives) are offered to students educating them about how to write professional, constructive comments.

Academics

- Teachers can enter the system and check real-time response rates.
- The student evaluation system/process is rapidly, readily and responsively refined and evolved.
- Faculties are actively involved and included in refining the student evaluation system/process.

Issue - Student role/involvement in student evaluation processes

As outlined in Chapter One: Literature review, there are varying perspectives on the role of students in the evaluation process. Table Four depicts the perspectives of participating stakeholders by university. The partner institutions (PIs) are shown in a random order for anonymity. The information depicted in the cells are summaries of the responses to the interview/focus group questions - *Are students involved in determining how student feedback is given? Describe,* and *How are students involved in learning/teaching improvement processes resulting from student feedback?* In Table Four, M=minimally, PI=partner institution, SA=student association, SFG=student focus group and SR=student representatives (on university committees).

Table Four: Student role/involvement in student evaluation processes

Stakeholders	PI-A	PI-B	PI-C	PI-D	PI-E	PI-F
Students	No	No	Unsure	Some of the questions	No	M through SRs
Academics	No	Unsure but would guess yes	Student led by SRs	No idea	No	No idea
Professional Staff	Possible involvement in pilot	SFGs to inform changes	Yes, but new SA needs to be informed	Question design; students run separate surveys	M. via SFGs on questions	Feedback during pilot phase
Senior Executives	Question development	Design, development	Ongoing input through SRs	No	M. via SRs	Through SRs

Patterns emerged between stakeholder groups with respect to beliefs about whether students are actively involved in the evaluation processes (beyond filling out surveys). Students at three of the universities said that they had no knowledge of student involvement and students at the other universities were unsure or commented on minimal involvement. Academics from two of the universities said that students were not involved and at two other universities, academics were unsure. All of the participating professional staff provided examples of student involvement including in question construction, in pilot phases and in consultative roles when changes are made to the process. One of the professional staff persons commented, “The new [student] executive starts out with the opinion that they are going to have to lobby, until they come to talk to us and we say, *no it’s your system. ...By all means we want you involved, not just in giving us the feedback, but in determining how that feedback is given and how it’s responded to.*” Among the participating senior executives, one stated that students do not have an active role in evaluation design. At the other five universities, participants provided examples of student input and involvement, with representatives on university committees being the repeated example.

Issue - Are student evaluation results reported back to students?

Some authors of academic literature about student evaluation (Chapter One: Literature review) encourage universities to report survey results back to students. Table Five details the perspectives of participating stakeholders by university. The partner institutions (PIs) are shown in a random order for anonymity. The information depicted in the cells are summaries of the responses to the interview/focus group question - *Are student evaluation results reported back to students at your university?* Notably, this question probes both whether the results *are* made available and whether stakeholders *perceive* they are being made available. In Table Five, M=minimally, PI= partner institution, Quant=results from Likert scale survey items, SER=subject evaluation results and UO=unit outline.

Table Five: Are student evaluation results reported back to students?

Stakeholders	PI-A	PI-B	PI-C	PI-D	PI-E	PI-F
Students	Changes often missing from UOs	Difficult to find	M reports of changes made	Access to SERs and overall averages	Some reports on student website	No idea
Academics	Changes reported in UOs	No idea	No idea	As above	No idea	No idea
Professional Staff	As above	Full quant access; summary qual reports	No idea	As above; Indicating changes via UO optional	Student dashboard showing results	All quant in a portal and on CD in the library
Senior Executives	As above; reports can be improved	Unit summaries outline changes	Reported actions taken; quant in portal	Access to all <i>subject</i> evaluation results	Website posts all <i>subject</i> quant	As above

Patterns emerged within stakeholder groups across the six universities with respect to reporting results to students and student awareness of these reports. Students from only one of the six universities stated that sufficient reporting was available to them. Three illustrative student comments are as follows. “There is not enough feedback to the students. We can get involved as much as we want, but we get a sanitised version.” “I thought it went off into an abyss somewhere and someone read it.” “This year I saw something hidden on a home screen. But you have to search for it.” Overall, academics were also unaware of reporting to students. At one university, academics commented on fully available student reports, and at another university, partial reporting. In contrast, professional staff at all but a single university readily commented on available student reports. Senior executives at all six universities were well-informed about the status of student reports.

Issue - Closing-the-loop in student evaluation of teaching

In the literature (Chapter One: Literature Review), authors define *closing-the-loop* as (i) making improvements based on student evaluation and then (ii) reporting these results to students. Confirming issues identified in the literature (e.g. Chen & Hoshower, 2003), evidence from the project participants’ interviews and focus groups indicates that work needs to be done on both aspects of closing-the-loop. Students at five of the universities offered no comments on what their universities were doing in this regard. At the sixth university, the students indicated that the message from the university is unclear. Two illustrative quotes were as follows. “We never really know if they listen to what we say. It would be nice to know that they consider what you say in the survey.” “You see the subject change from semester to semester, so I guess you can predict that it is based on feedback from the surveys.” Academics at two of the six institutions commented about closing-the-loop. One academic stated that the link between the surveys and changes are sometimes articulated to future cohorts, but that the responding students are not told what changes will be made in response to their feedback. Another academic explained, “Personally, for

years I would get my surveys, look at them and say, *they didn't like this text, they thought I wasn't punctual enough, ok I'll do this*. But I never told the students who had done this survey what I am going to do next. I never thought about it." Professional staff at three of the six partner institutions did not offer comment on closing-the-loop and the other three emphasised that it is the priority in student evaluation. An illustrative comment was, "Primarily the teaching evaluations are used to close-the-loop so that truly we are using the feedback as a mechanism to improve the student learning experience." Two of the senior executives did not offer comment on closing-the-loop. The other four indicated that it is a priority but that this was a necessary growth area for their universities.

Recommendations for improving student evaluation

Numerous recommendations were expressed by various stakeholders throughout the interviews and focus groups. There were no distinctive patterns in responses by stakeholder group or by universities. Each of the recommendations was repeated multiple times by different stakeholders. The recommendations are clustered by theme.

Survey timing and accessibility

- Leave surveys open as long as possible including during exam block.
- Provide an additional digital drop-box whereby students can submit feedback as it occurs to them. Teachers review this feedback periodically and discuss key themes with the class and/or cohort.
- Consider moving beyond a sole summative measure of satisfaction by asking students at the beginning of the semester to outline their expectations, feeding forward by discussing these expectations and then asking them to report their perceptions against those expectations at the end of the semester.
- Design surveys to be as user-friendly as possible, such as by designing them to feel like apps whereby the student clicks on a rating circle.

Survey design

- Use as few surveys as possible.
- Include as few questions as possible.
- Provide room for extensive free text.
- Allow the students the option of responding to some or all questions.
- Ask questions about courses and programs in addition to subjects or units.

Provide the opportunity for additional feedback

- Include a survey space for students to insert their name and contact information if they wish to provide additional verbal feedback and/or have an extended discussion about the teaching and/or subject.
- Include a survey space for students to insert their name and contact information if they wish to be contacted to talk about their own learning and/or progress.
- Insert a line in the survey stating, "If you have any problems or concerns you are also welcome to contact me [insert teacher's name] directly and I will see what I can do."

Engage in conversations

- Teachers are encouraged to discuss the importance of student evaluation with students.

- Do not rely on surveys as the sole source of evaluation. Teachers are encouraged to ask the students for feedback at multiple times throughout the semester and facilitate a discussion regarding that feedback and appropriate actions.
- Senior executives are encouraged to visit classes periodically to ask students for their opinions on educational matters.
- Schedule focus groups on particular topics whereby students can attend to provide feedback on student-perceived matters of importance.
- Engage class representatives to facilitate evaluation information flow between students and teachers.

Refine reports and improve reporting

- If using the mean score on Likert-scale items, also provide the median and/or mode. Some project participants expressed their view that the mean score should never be reported.
- Email students a link to the overall student evaluation results from their completed subjects.
- In class at the end of the semester, or after the conclusion of the semester via email to the completed students present ‘this is what I am going to change for next year from your feedback.’
- At the beginning of the semester review results from prior surveys and what action has been taken historically in response to the student feedback.
- Facilitate feedback sessions with student cohorts. Senior executives are encouraged to address student cohorts about strategic actions being taken in response to student feedback.

Provide professional development

- Teach students how to write appropriate, professional, constructive feedback.
- Provide workshops for academics on how to interpret, respond and take appropriate action on student feedback.

Provide an opportunity for academics to respond and/or rebut

- Formalise a process for academics to respond to student feedback and explain their perspective to students and/or course coordinators as appropriate. For example, provide academics the opportunity to explain why they choose not to act upon a student’s recommendation.
- Provide an opportunity for appeal if student evaluation feedback is perceived as inaccurate and/or unfair.

Chapter 4: Meaning & implication of results

This chapter provides a summary response to the two main questions addressed by this project: how can we measure student engagement and learning success using student evaluation processes, and how can students contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching. In addition, the chapter provides a summary response to the six sub-questions posed to further explore student evaluation in higher education.

- Can response rates be used as a proxy for student engagement?
- How can technology-enhanced student feedback systems be used to increase student involvement?
- What are the benefits/issues in reporting outcomes back to students?
- How are students involved in learning/teaching improvement processes resulting from student feedback?
- Is there alignment between the content of the questions (e.g. teaching) and the application of the responses (e.g. learning)?
- What is the relationship between subject (course) evaluations and teaching evaluations?

How can we measure student engagement and learning success using student evaluation processes?

Project participants explained that as a stand-alone process, student evaluation does not yield valid data to measure student engagement and learning success. However, when student evaluation data is strategically integrated with a full suite of other quality improvement tools, processes and data-bases, student survey responses are a rich and informative means of evaluating the effectiveness of higher education. An illustrative comment from a senior executive was, “It is one indicator, rather than a complete assessment of the health of the unit. ... I think you have to have multiple means by which you are assessing what is going on within the class – multiple points of quality improvement. In terms of teaching, you have to use more subtle means, for example, peer-review.” A professional staff person said, “Evaluation is only one part of a complex conversation about what it is that informs the student experience.” Project participants commented that student evaluation yields direct responses from students in response to whether they believe that they are learning and whether they feel engaged. A senior executive said, “The only way you can find out about the student experience is by asking students.” In contrast, most other quality assurance metrics (e.g. pass rates, time on task in learning management systems) are proxy measures and require interpretation. A senior executive explained, “I certainly review the student evaluation of units (SEUs) as a part of ongoing quality assurance, in terms of curriculum development. I certainly look at SEUs to see if students have commented on the overlap, how the particular units sat well or not together in their program. So I look at it holistically, in terms of a curriculum and course design point of view.” Project participants also noted that each university has its own questions, reporting and process, meaning that comparative measurement is currently only possible *within* universities. A senior executive said, “It shows performance at a course, a school, a faculty and institutional level. So from a benchmarking perspective, you can do quite a lot of internal benchmarking.” A senior executive at another university expressed his desire for benchmarking to be enabled *between* universities. “It would be great if it was standardised across Australia and then we could measure [student learning and engagement.]”

How can students contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching?

A salient theme across interviews and focus groups was that student evaluation surveys are part of a suite of quality assurance tools through which students can contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching. An illustrative comment from an academic was, “I see it as one tool. If you look at feedback and evaluation as a 360° process, I actually reflect on my teaching practice and have made great improvements based on some of the comments that have come out of that survey.” Project participants described additional and/or alternate surveys that are run to evaluate particular elements of the student learning experience. A senior executive said, “We conduct our own evaluations because we are a brand new course. We do both formal and informal evaluations on particularly the innovative projects we run here.” An academic said, “In week six, I open a short questionnaire as to where the students are having any issues throughout the term and I only leave it open for ten days max. It allows me to correct any easily manageable issues, or at least respond and identify and address the issues.” Students across universities provided examples of other quality assurance measures by which they can contribute to improvement. One means is through the class representative system. A student said, “The lecturer will leave and the class rep stands in the front and asks, *Do you have any suggestions?* So everybody is in the one space at the one time.” An academic said, “At the mid-way point, the class representatives have a public meeting where all the faculty go and the class representatives will bring any concerns to that forum. And then they are addressed at that spot.” Project participants also discussed the strategy of student-driven audits, explaining that students ran interviews and focus groups regarding numerous aspects of the student experience such as teaching quality, program design, graduate attributes, campus facilities and education technology. An academic commented, “The student audit led to a major change to the university. ... The student union ran a report and it was one of the biggest overhauls that the university has ever seen from a student-led initiative.” Other cited means by which students were described as positively influencing change was through student focus groups and elected student representatives. A professional staff person said, “We also run regular student focus groups. We work actively with the student association. They have members on our teaching and learning committee and on academic senate and various other committees. And often when we are looking at making a change with something, we will ask those reps to take it back to the student association.”

Can response rates be used as a proxy for student engagement? Project participants spoke about response rates in the context of teacher presence, student voice and respect for the role and contribution of students. An academic said, “if you don’t have a presence from day one, the students won’t complete the survey.” A professional staff person said, “There’s been a culture change from the very top - from the Vice Chancellor all the way across the system – that we are all responsible to do our bit in making sure we hear the student voice.” A professional staff person at a different university said, “when you look at the literature and you see why the response rates are low, the fundamental reason is that students don’t see that anything happens with their feedback. And I think that part of it is that we have done a good job in showing students that we actually treat their feedback seriously, and that we are doing something with it, and the actions coming from it.” A student said, “I have made a genuine effort to complete the evaluation for every unit, I would expect something more in return, something more concrete.” The project team interpreted such comments to

mean that project participants perceive a positive relationship between students feeling invited to engage in quality assurance and their willingness to provide their feedback as reflected in response rates. This interpretation is supported in the literature (e.g. Chen & Hoshower, 2003).

How can technology-enhanced student feedback systems be used to increase student involvement? The overwhelming response to the project question of how to use technology-enhanced student feedback systems to increase student involvement is to use the system to provide evidence to the students that the university is acting on their feedback. This result aligns with a salient theme in the literature. Chen and Hoshower (2003) wrote, “Students generally consider an improvement in teaching to be the most attractive outcome of a teaching evaluation system. The second most attractive ... was using teaching evaluations to improve course content and format” (p. 71). Students in this OLT project commended the automated and accessible nature of online survey distribution and asked that the same system be used to send them reports of the evaluation and actions taken.

What are the benefits/issues in reporting outcomes back to students? As described in the points above, project participants were clear that the primary benefit in reporting outcomes back to students is that students tend to feel more engaged and are thereby more willing to contribute additional feedback and contribute to other types of quality improvement endeavours. When project participants were asked the open-ended question of what issues they perceived in the context of student evaluation, the only volunteered issue about reports to students is that they are largely not happening.

How are students involved in learning/teaching improvement processes resulting from student feedback? The project participant responses indicated that there is minimal involvement of students in effecting post-survey changes. Numerous project participants commented that the surveys are almost always run near the end of the semester and changes made affect *future* cohorts of students. The only example of student involvement in the actual change process was that of student representatives on university committees. For example, student representatives on learning and teaching committees were sometimes involved in curriculum change.

Is there alignment between the content of the questions (e.g. teaching) and the application of the responses (e.g. learning)? Some of the senior executives, and professional staff administering student evaluation, commented on a growing awareness and attention to rectifying the relationship between teaching and learning in the context of questions, reports and applications. An illustrative comment from a professional staff person was, “The questions tend to focus on teaching and we ask students *how was the quality of teaching*. The application of the responses tended to be towards learning. So we have reframed some of the questions so that we are truly asking about, *did this subject help you learn*. Now we are able to use the data to inform changes and improvements.”

What is the relationship between subject (course) evaluations and teaching evaluations? There was a wide range of opinion regarding whether subject and teaching evaluation should be conducted via one survey or two separate surveys. The practices of the partner institutions varied in this regard and so too did the opinions of the project participants. Some criticised the university’s current system and others commended it.

Chapter 5: Impact

Changes (evidenced and anticipated) at:	Project completion	6 months post completion	12 months post completion	24 months post-completion
(1) Team members	New partnerships, strengthened CVs & stronger understanding of SECT	Peer-reviewed journal papers submitted for publication consideration	Peer-reviewed journal papers published and are cited in other publications	Project work provides evidence for team member academic promotion
(2) Immediate students / graduates	Student voice strengthened through participation in symposium			
(3) Spreading the word	Views to project website			
(4) Narrow opportunistic adoption	Strategies learned from one another applied at home institution	Partners invited to present at one another's institutions		
(5) Narrow systemic adoption	Enabling actions added to partner institutions' strategic plans to enhance SECT	Case studies used for student and staff professional development in partner institutions	Professional development on closing-the-loop through SECT	
(6) Broad opportunistic adoption	Project team members invited on other OLT proposals		Proposal for Innovation & Development Project	
(7) Broad systemic adoption		Initial national response to project recommendations	Attending delegates at Symposium invited to set 12 month goals. Team will follow-up on action	

Chapter 6: Lessons learned (about OLT Projects)

National, multi-institution Office for Learning and Teaching projects, not only produce outputs, outcomes, impact and learning opportunities in the context of the specific topic, but also regarding the overall experience of applied learning and teaching research.

These are the primary lessons learned by this team, to be applied in future projects by team members and openly shared with future teams.

1. Recruit an experienced, energetic and unflappable project manager. Our team is forever indebted to Madelaine-Marie Judd: for her smiling presence, no matter how close deadlines approached; for being assertive, insistent and yet always respectful and polite.
2. Develop clear and transparent processes with the lead institution's Office of Research Services, or equivalent service units managing the budget and financial transactions. Ask detailed questions such as how often the budget will be updated, how transactions will be coded and where project leaders and managers can access detailed transaction reports.
3. Clearly specify the roles and responsibilities of team members on the proposal. Include who is responsible for recruiting how many participants in project activities and who is responsible for what extent of writing output documents.
4. Participants in project activities and dissemination/engagement events are not effectively recruited via digital announcements even when distributed by large networks. One of the criteria for selecting project team members should be that they are willing to use their networks (including at their own institutions) to spread the word and invite participation.

Appendix A

Lead Institution Certification

Certification

I certify that all parts of the final report for this OLT grant provide an accurate representation of the implementation, impact and findings of the project, and that the report is of publishable quality.

Name: Professor Keitha Dunstan
Pro-Vice Chancellor (Learning and Teaching)

Date: 30/01/2015

Appendix B

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Appendix C

Interview/focus group questions

Student Evaluation OLT Seed Project Questions for Students (Interviews & Focus Groups)

1. What opportunities does your university provide you to give feedback on your [teachers and units]?
 - What is good about this?
 - What should be improved?
 - Typically how many learning and teaching surveys do you complete and how do you feel about that?
2. Are you confident that your feedback is anonymous?
3. If you were to create a new student evaluation system, what would it be like?
4. Were and are students involved in determining how student evaluation occurs at this university? Do you think you should be involved?
5. What survey results do you have access to? Which survey results do you access? Why?
6. What do you think the university uses this feedback for?
7. Do you feel your feedback is used to make improvements to your courses and learning and teaching?
8. Overall do you feel that your feedback is valued?
9. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?

Student Evaluation OLT Seed Project

Questions for project team members & administrators (Interviews)

1. What opportunities does your university provide for student feedback?
2. Clearly describe the details of all student evaluation systems. Accompanying documents are welcomed.
3. Are tutors and lab assistants evaluated (in addition to lecturers and professors)?
4. At your university, what is the relationship between subject (course) evaluations and teaching evaluations?
5. What is good about the feedback system?
6. What is innovative and/or exemplar?
7. What evidence do you have about the effectiveness of your student evaluation system?
8. What should be improved about the system?
9. If you were to create a new student feedback system, what would it be like?
10. Has your university applied technology-enhanced student evaluation systems? Describe.
11. If yes, has this technology-enhanced system increased student involvement? What is the evidence?
12. Are students involved in determining how student feedback is given? Describe.
13. Do you think students should be more involved in determining how student feedback is given? Why or Why Not?
14. How are students involved in learning/teaching improvement processes resulting from student feedback?
15. Do the survey questions that students are asked prompt relevant feedback?
16. How would you improve the questions?
17. Is there alignment between the content of the questions (e.g. teaching) and the application of the responses (e.g. learning)?
18. For what purposes are learning and teaching surveys used? [Prompt – Performance Reviews, Promotion/Probation etc.]

19. Do your student surveys ask about:

- a) learning
- b) engagement
- c) student experience

Provide your list of questions.

20. How are response rates? Why do you think responses are at that rate?

21. Do you think that response rates can be used as a proxy of student engagement? Why or Why Not?

22. Do educators see the results of the surveys? If so, how? Online?

23. Do students get to see the results of the surveys? If so, how? Online?

24. If you do, or could, see the survey results, how would you use that information?

25. Do you see evidence that your university applies the feedback students provide to making improvements? If so, how is that evidence provided?

26. Do you think that the quality of education improves as a result of your university's feedback systems?

27. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about student feedback at your university?

Student Evaluation OLT Seed Project
Questions for educators (interviews & focus groups)

1. What opportunities does your university provide you to hear and apply student evaluation?
2. What is good about the evaluation system?
3. What should be improved about the system?
4. If you were to create a new student evaluation system, what would it be like?
5. Are students involved in determining how student evaluation is given? Describe.
6. Tell us about how your university derived the survey questions and how they revise them.
7. Is the evaluation giving you meaningful information? Why? [Prompt response rates and student comments]
8. What results do you have access to? Which results do you access? [Prompt Faculty/Department/Levels and How]
9. What results do students have access to?
10. Do you use student feedback to make improvements?
11. How do you close the loop on student evaluation? [Prompt – How do you feedback and feed-forward improvements to students]
12. Does the course team (program/teaching) use student evaluation to make improvements?
13. Does the university use student evaluation to make improvements?
14. For what purposes are learning and teaching surveys used? [Prompt – Performance Reviews, Promotion/Probation etc.]
15. Do you think that the quality of learning and teaching improves as a result of the student voice? [Prompt – Is this linked to your evaluation system]
16. Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?

Appendix D

Case study rubric

Question	3 points	2 points	1 point
Can response rates be used as a proxy for student engagement?	Response rates and student engagement are both high and there is evidence of relationship.	Response rates or student engagement are high, but not both.	Efforts are being made to improve response rates and/or student engagement.
What are the benefits/issues in reporting outcomes back to students?	University reports student evaluation results/outcomes back to students, students are aware of this reporting, and benefits have been documented.	University reports student evaluation results/outcomes back to students, but students are not aware of this reporting.	University is in early stages of reporting student evaluation results/outcomes back to students.
How are students involved in learning/teaching improvement processes resulting from student feedback?	Students are actively involved in the design and application of student evaluation and engagement has been documented.	Students are somewhat involved in the design and/or application of student evaluation (e.g. voting committee members).	University is in early stages of establishing student role in the design and application of student evaluation.
Is there alignment between the content of the questions (e.g. teaching) and the application of the responses (e.g. learning)?	There is strong alignment between the questions and the application of responses. The questions adequately address learning, engagement and student experience.	There is alignment between the questions and application of responses. The questions need to be developed to address learning, engagement and student experience.	There are some efforts to apply results/ outcomes of student evaluation beyond PDRs and academic promotion.
What is the relationship between subject (course) evaluations and teaching evaluations?	There is a clear system and articulated relationship between teaching and subject evaluations.	Either the teaching evaluation or the subject evaluation is strong and the other needs improvement.	Efforts are being made to improve the teaching and subject evaluation systems and the relationship.

Evidence	There are clear key performance indicators that this strategy supports quality improvement through student evaluation.	Key performance indicators have not been clearly defined, but nevertheless, there is evidence that the strategy is working.	There are no key performance indicators and no evidence that the strategy is working.
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Appendix E

Key issues, strategies and recommendations

Student Evaluation of Courses and Teaching (SECT) is the collection, analysis, reporting and application of feedback from students about the design, facilitation and quality of the education experience. The most common means of data collection is through electronic surveys distributed near the end of the teaching semester or at the conclusion of a degree.

This document has been designed to report the outcomes and share the outputs of an Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching funded Seed Project titled – *Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems*. The views expressed on this document do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

Our aim in creating this document is to inspire and promote further conversation and research about student evaluation of teaching. The project team shares a passion and belief in the potential of student evaluation for closing-the-loop, quality assurance and improving learning and teaching. We invite others to join our community of practice.

Project overview

Online student evaluation systems are an opportunity for student engagement and learning improvement. However, they are currently limited by low response rates. Educators tend not to trust them and students describe the activity of filling in multiple surveys as futile. Student feedback processes have largely become academic performance review instruments rather than evaluation and change catalysts. However, there are universities successfully using student evaluation to measure student course engagement and learning development, and then involving students in improving the overall experience. The proposed project was designed to fully develop at least six such innovations into case studies. The project, titled *Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems*, pursued the questions: how can we measure student engagement and learning success using student evaluation processes, and how can students contribute to ongoing improvement in university learning and teaching. The National OLT Seed project team drew-out a cohesive set of key issues, strategies and recommendations, and disseminated to the higher education sector through a symposium.

What we know (Issues)

This National OLT Seed Project allowed us to develop case studies of student evaluation in the context of six Australian universities. These universities are: Bond University, Australian Catholic University, Central Queensland University, Charles Sturt University, Curtin University and The University of Western Australia.

Overall, this project helped us establish that we know the following six things about higher education student evaluation.

- Student evaluation is a component of quality assurance. Feedback from students allows universities to identify strengths and areas of needed improvement.
- The most common use of student evaluation data is as evidence in academic promotions and PDR processes. While this is one use, it should not be the only use.
- Deriving helpful answers depends on asking the right questions. For example, if universities want to find out whether students perceive that their educators and subjects are supporting their learning, then it is insufficient for survey questions to ask only about teaching.
- Closing-the-loop means that universities take action in response to feedback from students. Students want to know what happened as a result of their survey responses.
- Electronic systems have allowed universities to develop comprehensive reporting, including quantitative analysis of Likert-scale items and qualitative thematic analysis of student comments.
- Universities need to be clear about the student role in evaluation processes. Are students raters or are they evaluators? The student evaluation process can heighten student engagement and involvement in their education.

Why we do it (Issues)

There are at least a dozen reasons why universities survey students about teachers and subjects. The first six are the most common motivations. The latter six are the reasons that inspired the project team to conduct research about student evaluation.

- Every university does it.
- Student evaluation data informs academic promotions and PDR processes.
- Deans and heads of schools/programs need to identify problematic teachers.
- Survey results serve as data for reviews, accreditation reports and applications for teaching awards.
- Students might think that their input matters.
- Positive results are useful in marketing campaigns.

- Student evaluation is a component of a system of quality improvement.
- Results can identify good teachers and commended subjects for recognition and rewards.
- The role of evaluator can engage and involve students in the education experience.
- Effectively worded surveys provide results that can serve as evidence of contribution to student learning.
- Data (particularly detailed student comments) can help universities improve learning and teaching.
- Benchmarking student evaluation supports the higher education system to grow and develop.

How we do it (Strategies)

A number of good practices and shared ideas emerged out of the project. Here are three of the top strategies for other universities to consider.

- *Achieving high response rates.*
The issue addressed with the highest frequency in the literature on student evaluation is response rates. Many universities discovered that the migration from paper to electronic surveys was accompanied by a plunge in response rates. Low response rates lead to doubts regarding validity of data.

One of the universities enlisted the students to come up with a solution. The student executive designed a system whereby after a certain date, students were required to complete their electronic surveys in order to access their learning management system (LMS) subject sites. Students did not want compulsory evaluation, so they also designed an opt-out option. Rather than completing the survey, students could click a button reading, *I have considered completing this student evaluation survey and decided not to complete.* Before they are given access to the LMS, they are required to respond to a single rating question reading, *Overall, rate the quality of this subject/educator.* Critics worried that this forced rating would result in skewed low-sentiment data. However, evidence showed that these ratings were high overall and equivalent to the ratings among the full surveys.

- *Qualitative thematic analysis of student comments.*
Universities commonly report means and sometimes modes, medians and graphical representation of results from Likert-scale items. However, how do universities deal with student comments so that this data can be used to inform improvements?

Increasingly, universities are choosing electronic student evaluation systems with built-in or transferable qualitative analysis systems. In qualitative research, narrative

data is often analysed by identifying common words and themes. This technology has been applied to student evaluation systems. People no longer have to read through pages of comments. Emerging themes are identified and keywords can be searched. For example, qualitative analysis means that universities can efficiently derive a report about how assessment practices are being perceived by students.

- *Embedding student evaluation in the overall culture and context of quality learning and teaching.*

Student evaluation has been criticised as largely being a tick-and-flick exercise. A common theme in the literature is that students do not believe that anything is being done with their feedback, and educators believe that student survey feedback is an unfair and inaccurate means of judging their teaching.

Universities are seeing potential in student evaluation as a part of a larger quality assurance and quality improvement process. Question sets are validated and carefully aligned with these universities' strategic priorities and enabling actions. Students are engaged in the process. Student evaluation is married with academic development, learning and teaching action research, curriculum renewal and benchmarking. One of the enabling actions to achieve these goals is for universities to choose the same student evaluation systems, questions and reporting mechanisms to collaborate for systemic improvement.

Where to next (Recommendations)

In this National OLT Seed project, six universities came together to share process, strategies and ideas. The project achieved its aims and objectives and inspired the team with future ideas. Two of the future project ideas are shared here.

- Host continued conversations and working sessions to identify student evaluation components, processes, guidelines, questions and/or reports that can be agreed upon to be common and standard in multiple universities to enable benchmarking processes.
- Focus on mid-semester, formative feedback from students so that actions and improvements may be made while the enrolled students have access to the benefits.

Appendix F

Symposium slideshow, flyer and evaluation report

Symposium slideshow



Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems

PROJECT team

Shelley Kinash (*Project Co-Leader*)
Bond University

Madelaine-Marie Judd (*Project Manager*)
Bond University

Vishen Naidu
(*Team Member & Presentation Designer*)
Bond University

Elizabeth Santhanam (*Team Member*)
Australian Catholic University

Julie Fleming (*Team Member*)
Central Queensland University

Marian Tulloch (*Team Member*)
Charles Sturt University

Beatrice Tucker (*Team Member*)
Curtin University

Jo-Anne Kelder (*Team Member*)
University of Tasmania

Sid Nair (*Team Member*)
University of Western Australia



Thank You

*...to all the students, educators,
evaluation personnel and educational
leaders who shared their strategies
and success stories*

Student Evaluation **MATTERS!**

“

Student involvement in quality processes should start from the idea of building learning communities. Practically speaking, this involves shaping student expectations of their role as responsible partners who are able to take ownership of quality enhancement with staff and engage with them in dialogue about improving assessment, curriculum and teaching.

”

- Paul Ramsden

5

The **QUESTIONS?**

01

How can we measure student engagement and learning success using student evaluation processes?



02

How can students contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching?

6

• WHAT IS • STUDENT EVALUATION?

“ To measure differences in the quality of teaching, namely those aspects of teaching in which students have direct experience and therefore validity to comment. ”

- Taylor & Taylor (2003)



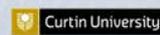
Taylor, J., & Taylor, R. (2003). Performance indicators in academia: An x-efficiency approach? Australian Journal of Public Administration, 62(2), 71-82.

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PROJECT overview



The aims of this project are to describe and disseminate Australian case studies of effective systems, approaches and strategies used to measure and improve student course engagement and learning success through the use of online student evaluation systems. Six universities have developed innovations. This project aims to disseminate these and additional strategies to the sector.



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System Highlights



Pop-up Feature

Implemented an online pop-up feature that integrates with the learning management system to achieve response rates over 90%

Usability

Created a user-friendly system, making it easy for students to enter comments and advertise the importance of the comments

Text Analysis

Implemented a text-analysis feature to identify key themes within the comments, which would enable targeted responses and resulting actions to the identified issues

Survey Design

Ensured that the wording of the questions derived the responses that achieve the goals motivating the evaluation (i.e. if the purpose of the evaluation is to improve learning, then asking the students what changes would help them learn, was important)



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System Highlights



Efficiency

Reduced administrative workload associated with setting up evaluations. Wide spread coverage of all units taught through a standardized and centralized system with efficient reporting mechanisms

Incentives

Increased student engagement and commitment by way of releasing grades early as an incentive for students that complete their evaluations

Collaboration

Working with students to provide constructive/professional comments by connecting with them through email and newsletters from the DVC

Survey Design

Ensure that the wording of the questions will derive responses that will achieve the goals motivating the evaluation (i.e. if the purpose of the evaluation is to improve learning, then ask the students what changes would help them learn)



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System Highlights



Usability

Simple, intuitive evaluation system which students can access directly through the "Have Your Say" button within their LMS dashboard

Efficiency

Centralized online system which requires very minimal resources/work in setting up evaluations and analysing and generating reports

Accessibility

Using an online system has enabled greater reach/coverage of students in remote areas or studying via correspondence

Reporting

"Traffic light" reports provide a summary/overview of high and low performing subjects within the dashboard, leading to better informed decisions



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System Highlights



Accessibility

Simple, easy access evaluations which students can complete via a mobile app

Survey Design

Administration of two separate surveys according to the type of course a student is undertaking, which has provided greater insight into how the courses are working

System Integration

Integration of evaluation data with other university databases to get more holistic and powerful reporting features

Alignment

Ensured there is greater alignment of questions with the curriculum and they reflect what students value about their learning experience



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System Highlights



 Curtin University

System Integration

Seamless integration with multiple databases to enable thorough interrogation and triangulation of data as they relate to outcomes

Reporting

Data is used as a quality improvement mechanism for the teacher, unit and course to inform areas of practice within Teaching and Learning

Construct

Survey questions are tied closely to student engagement and the student experience

Alignment

Data is utilized extensively throughout the course review and development processes which is used to inform course level decisions



13

System Highlights



 THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Achieve International Excellence

Student Voice

Ability to provide students with a voice to discuss their concerns and positive experiences

Administration

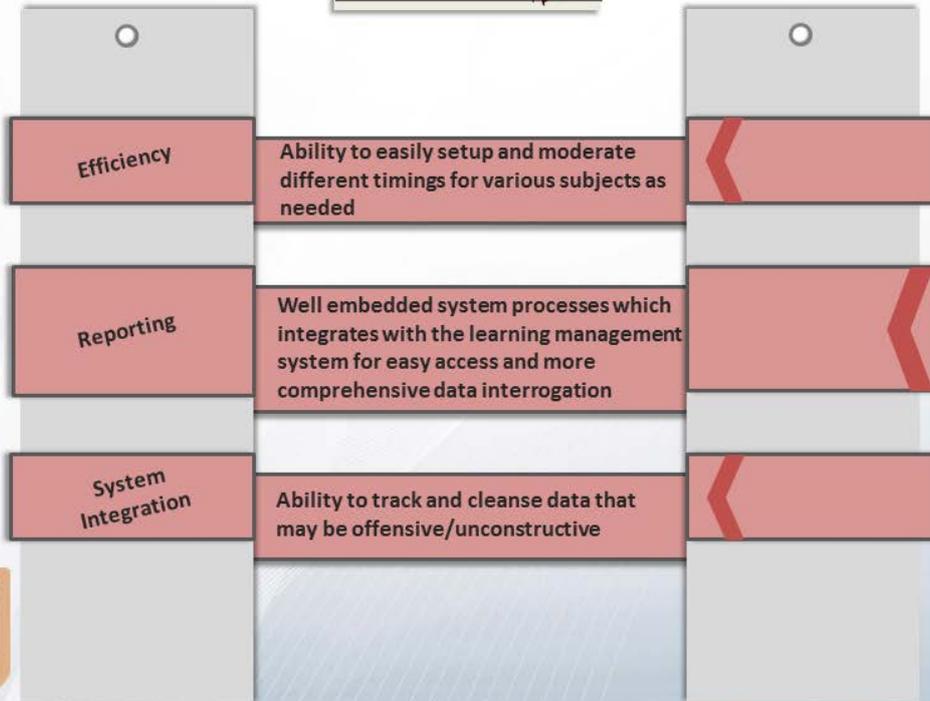
Multiple evaluation instruments allow for targeted, meaningful responses/results



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Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems

System Highlights

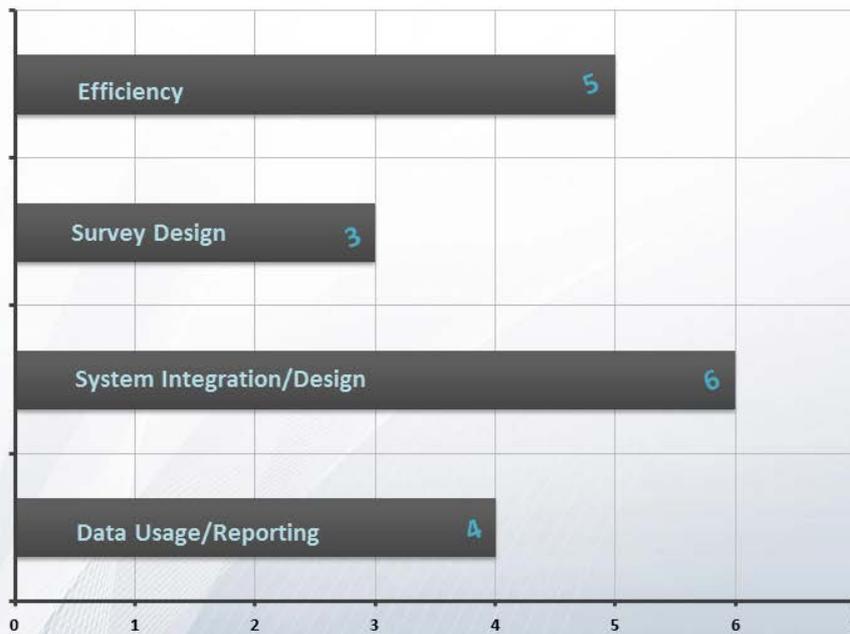


15



The Overall

RESULT



16

Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems

Closing the

LOOP

Do you see evidence that your university applies the feedback students provide to making improvements?

YES

Currently Implementing



Common Strategies/Practices:

In-class Communication

- Verbal report to class
- Written report to class
- Student Representative report

Electronic Communication

- Targeted email
- Subject/Unit Outline
- LMS/Subject Site
- Student Portal

Print

- Posters/flyers

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SHARING RESULTS *with*



STUDENTS

Institute	Reports SECT outcomes to students	Where are outcomes published
	YES - Limited	Unit Outlines
	YES – Only Quantitative Data	Student Portal, Library Reserve
	YES – Only Units	Student Portal, Course Profile/Outlines
	YES – Only Subjects	Subject Outlines
	YES – Only Units	Online, Unit Outlines
	YES – Only Quantitative Data	Online, Unit Reports
	YES - Only Units, Limited	Online, Unit Outlines

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Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems

Contacts

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Symposium flyer



Learning and Teaching Symposium

Student Evaluation of Teaching

14th & 15th October, 2014

Bond University, Gold Coast



Attend & hear from:

Educators	What are the benefits and issues in reporting outcomes back to students?
Evaluation Professionals	How can technology-enhanced student feedback systems be used to increase student involvement?
Students	How are students involved in learning and teaching improvement processes resulting from student feedback?

How do we measure and use data to improve student engagement and learning success?

The Australian Office for Learning and Teaching supports the wider engagement of innovative approaches currently being tested and evaluated at Australian universities. This seed project is led by Bond University, with institution partners, Central Queensland University, Australian Catholic University, Curtin University, University of Tasmania, University of Western Australia and Charles Sturt University.

**Register now for this
FREE Symposium!**

See inside for more information and our key speakers.



Key Speakers



DR SID NAIR

Professor of Higher Education
Centre for the Advancement of
Teaching and Learning
University of Western Australia

Sid's current role is in the area of quality of teaching and learning. Sid's research work lies in the areas of quality in the Australian higher education system, classroom and school environments, and the implementation of improvements from stakeholder feedback. Sid's recent book publications include *Student feedback: The cornerstone to an effective quality assurance system in higher education* and *External quality audits: Has it improved quality assurance in universities*.



MRS BEATRICE TUCKER
Manager, Evaluation
Curtin University

Beatrice Tucker is responsible for quality and evaluation in teaching and learning for Curtin University and has been integral to the development, validation, implementation and evaluation of eVALUate, Curtin's online student evaluation system since 2005. She is currently completing her doctorate in the area of student evaluation and her publication areas include the evaluation of teaching and learning, undergraduate student sources of stress and cardiopulmonary physiotherapy science.

What to expect from the Symposium

The Symposium is an opportunity to foster conversations between students, educators and academic coordinators. The featured keynote presentations highlight the development of student evaluation of teaching, its significance and role in improving student engagement and learning success, and how universities and educators can collaborate with students for a meaningful feedback loop.

There will be panel presentations by higher education leaders, educators and students. There will be numerous opportunities for conversation, multiple perspectives, problem-solving, sharing resources and shaping new strategies. The symposium is situated in the exquisite Princeton Room of Bond University on the Gold Coast featuring catering from our celebrated events team.

This Symposium will highlight the positive, practical and evidence-based strategies that use student feedback data to 'close-the-loop' on evaluation, making responsive changes that enhance learning and teaching.

Support for this publication/activity has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed in this publication/activity do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.

To Register for this Symposium

Online:

<https://events.bond.edu.au/register.aspx?id=%7bFADCE9D7-9022-E411-80D3-0050569C0F40%7d>

Phone: (07) 5595 1293

Email: olt@bond.edu.au

COST: FREE



DAY 1

Tuesday, 14 October 2014

3:30 – 4:30 pm	Symposium registration & networking Coffee / Tea refreshments
4:30 – 5:00 pm	Welcome
5:00 – 6:30 pm	Panel Facts, Myths, Politics and Measurements of the Student Voice Chair: Professor Sid Nair, University of Western Australia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Christina Ballantyne • Associate Professor Mahsood Shah • Mr Nigel Palmer
6:30 – 7:30 pm	OLT Seed Project <i>Measuring & Improving Student Course Engagement and Learning Success through Online Student Evaluation Systems</i>
7:30 – 8:30 pm	Dinner
8:30 – 9:30 pm	Cocktails and Dessert Student Evaluation Exemplar Poster Session

PARTNERS



Speakers



CHRISTINA BALLANTYNE
formerly Murdoch University

Christina Ballantyne has over twenty years' experience in student evaluation. Until recently she was responsible for the student evaluation system at Murdoch University, which she developed from a customised paper system to totally online over the years. In 2009 she was awarded an ALTC (OLT) citation for an outstanding contribution to student learning, for the development and sustained implementation of innovative systems of collecting and using student feedback to improve teaching, learning and the overall student experience. Christina has published several papers relating to online surveys and student evaluation. She is currently an independent consultant.



DR MAHSOOD SHAH
Associate Professor
University of Newcastle

Prior to joining the University of Newcastle, Mahsood was the Principal Advisor at RMIT University. Mahsood has also worked with University of Canberra, and University of Western Sydney in strategy and quality roles. His research expertise includes: quality assurance, student experience, student retention and attrition, widening participation, and private higher education. Mahsood has a forthcoming book titled *Measuring and Evaluating the Student Experience in Higher Education*, which is due to be published in early 2015.

Speakers



MR NIGEL PALMER

Honorary Research Fellow
Centre for the Study of Higher Education
University of Melbourne

In addition to his role with University of Melbourne, Nigel is also moderator for the ATN eGrad virtual graduate school and principal consultant for Praxis Research. His areas of research include higher education public policy, graduate participation and mobility, higher education quality assurance and management, and research training policy and practice. Nigel has been a member of the Joint Steering Group of *The Australian Universities Quality Forum* (2008-2011) and Chair of the 2011 forum Reference Group and Selection Committee. Recent publications include *Research Training in Australia* (2013), *Scope, Transparency and Style: System-Level Quality Strategies and the Student Experience in Australia* (2013).



DAY 2

Wednesday, 15 October 2014

8:15 – 8:30 am	Overview of Day One, Welcome to Day Two
8:30 – 9:30 am	Breakfast
9:30 – 10:30 am	<u>Keynote</u>
	Student Voice: Then, Now and the Uncharted Waters
	Host: Professor Sid Nair , Professor of Higher Education Development, University of Western Australia
10:30 – 11:30 am	Participatory Session to Progress a National Benchmark Framework
	Chair: Ms Beatrice Tucker, Curtin University
11:30 – 12:30 pm	<u>Panel</u>
	The Student Experience of Providing Feedback: Do Universities Listen and Act?
	Chair: Ms Madelaine-Marie Judd
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Dylan Ettridge, Australian Catholic University • Ms Tessa Daly, Bond University • Ms Cassie Jacobs, Bond University • Mr Ben Hartsuyker, Bond University
12:30 – 1:00 pm	<u>Full Delegate Discussion</u>
	The Future of Student Evaluation: Where to from here?
1:00 – 2:00 pm	Lunch and Closing

"Student involvement in quality processes should start from the idea of building learning communities. Practically speaking, this involves shaping student expectations of their role as responsible partners who are able to take ownership of quality enhancement with staff and engage with them in dialogue about improving assessment, curriculum and teaching."

- Paul Ramsden

Ramsden, P. (2008). *The future of higher education teaching and the student experience*. Retrieved from the UK Department of Business Innovation & Skills website: <http://www.bis.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2009/10/HE-Teaching-Student-Experience.pdf>

Speakers



**ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR
SHELLEY KINASH**
Director of Learning & Teaching
Bond University

Associate Professor Shelley Kinash is the Director of Learning & Teaching at Bond University. Her PhD is in Education Technology from the University of Calgary, Canada. She is leading two national Office for Learning and Teaching research projects – a commissioned project on graduate employability and a seed project on student evaluation.

http://works.bepress.com/shelley_kinash

Venue and Where to Stay

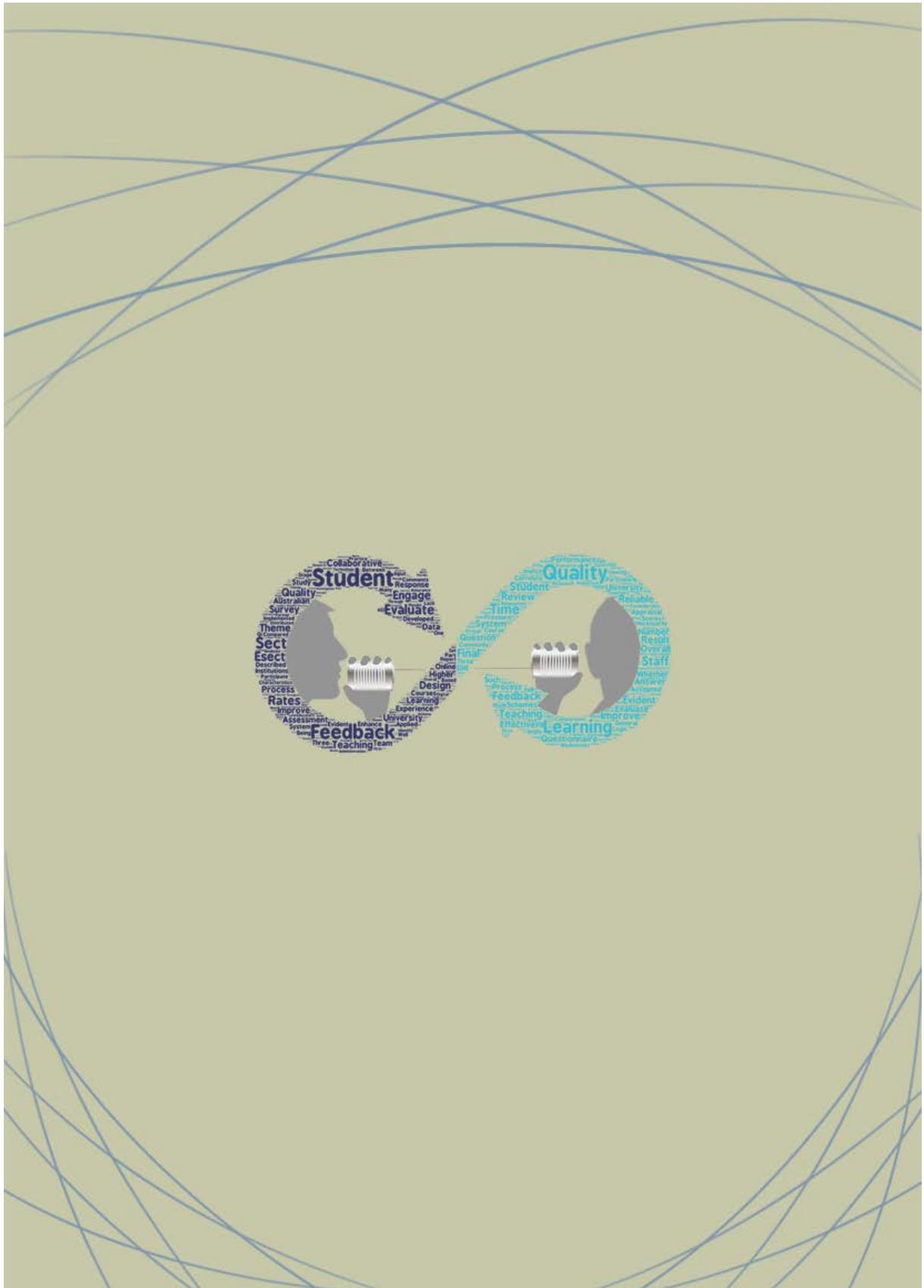
Venue: Princeton Room, Bond University
14 University Drive, Gold Coast Qld 4226

Where to Stay:
Jupiter's Hotel & Casino
Gold Coast Highway, Broadbeach Island
Gold Coast Qld 4218

To Reserve Special Rates:
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✉ jcggroups@echoent.com.au
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Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems

Symposium evaluation report

Student Evaluation Symposium

Tuesday 14th October & Wednesday 15th October

45 Registrations

20 Forms received

Student Evaluation Symposium Feedback-2014	Very Good	Good	Average	Fair	Poor	Total	Means
Day 1							
Welcome: Aunty Joyce, Shelley Kinash	11	8				19	4.6
Panel: Facts, Myths, Politics and Measurements of the Student voice: Chair: Professor Sid Nair, University of Western Australia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms Christina Ballantyne • Associate Professor Mahsood Shah • Mr Nigel Palmer 	11	8				19	4.6
OLT Seed Project	9	7	3			19	4.3
Student Evaluation Exemplar Poster Session	6	6				12	4.5
Day 2							
Keynote: Student Voice: Then, Now and the Uncharted Waters: Host: Professor Sid Nair, Professor of Higher Education Development, University of Western Australia	12	7		1		20	4.5
Workshop: Participatory Session to Progress a National Benchmark Framework: Chair: Ms Beatrice Tucker, Curtin University	9	8		1		18	4.4
Panel: The Student Experience of Providing Feedback: Do Universities Listen and Act?: Chair: Ms Madelaine-Marie Judd <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr Dylan Ettridge, Australian Catholic University • Ms Tessa Daly, Bond University • Ms Cassie Jacobs, Bond University • Mr Ben Hartsuyker, Bond University 	14	4				18	4.8
Panel: The Future of Student Evaluation: Where to from here?	12	6				18	4.7

Overall feedback / comments:	Content you would like to see in future/similar events:
Excellently organised, ran flawlessly	Student perspectives embedded more deeply into structure
A really constructive 2 days with variety of input and valuable conversations. Great to have the student involvement	More students! It was so insightful to hear the opinions directly from students. In fact this was the best part of the symposium.
Great Symposium! Well done Bond!	Student panel, Final Panel
Sid's talks were fantastic. It was very reassuring to hear that we are fighting the same battle and hearing the same issues.	Keynote & workshop is a good combination with breakfast for networking
Lovely dinner outing night of day 1 - Excellent venues, Amazing University	Best practice' sessions-What does work & how we know.
Good networking opportunity. Great balance of presentations & guided discussion & informal opportunities to talk.	Student feedback was the most useful part of the symposium. There should be regular communication with the student body as these are the client.
Would have been useful to have a session on which concentrated on evaluation from the teachers perspective. Main things taken from the session was the implications that surveys and how to address them should begin in high school. There was an assumption that we all understood the abbreviations.	I would like to be able to rate each of the speakers individually as my ticks are not reflective of all my ratings. Make sure all presenters presentations comply to high quality academic standards i.e. grammar, references etc. Feedback & P.D. must be interrelated. Keynote speech should have come first.
Would like to hear a more coordinated best practice	Panel of teachers?
A very stimulating & useful symposium	There was a panel discussion with student. Why didn't you have the same for teachers? Listening to all the stakeholders would be a benefit.
Overall, the symposium made a subject I hitherto found boring, something more interesting. There was no session for student poster session. They were simply displayed. Food and beverages were great. Great idea re personalisation of feedback.	
All very good. Earlier advertising would have improved numbers in my view. Loved the student panel	
Really helpful. Thank you	

Appendix G

Impact at Bond University as the lead institution

Most of the team partners made changes to their institutions' student evaluation processes as an impact result of sharing strategies and outcomes with one another. As a case example, Bond University made four strategic changes to the process.

1. *Wording of Likert questions*

As part of the project inquiry, the content of survey questions was thematically mapped for alignment with *learning, engagement* and the *overall student experience*. From this data rich exercise, the Bond University project leader and team member proposed changes to the questions. These draft questions were reviewed, revised and approved through the University Learning and Teaching Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching, and through Academic Senate. The previous and new subject questions are as follows.

Previous Subject Questions	New Subject Questions
The learning outcomes are clearly identified.	The learning activities in this subject helped me to learn effectively.
The assessment tasks are appropriate to the learning outcomes.	The assessment tasks are appropriate to the learning outcomes.
The organisation of the subject material is effective in helping me learn.	I felt engaged by the subject.
The workload in this subject is realistic.	The workload in this subject was realistic and appropriate.
Overall I am satisfied with the quality of this subject.	Overall I am satisfied with the quality of this subject.

2. *Wording of comment questions*

At Bond University, we have a high overall response rate, but an unsatisfactory comment response rate. We have not been receiving the number or quality (detail) in student comments that we need in order to respond with improvements. We consulted our community of practice (project team members) and received the advice to revise the wording of the questions requesting comments. These changes have recently been reported meaning that impact results are not yet available. However, project partners reported that detailed questions inspired detailed student comments.

The previous question stems requesting comments were:

Subject survey – If you would like to leave a comment then please use the comment box below.

Educator survey – If you would like to leave a comment regarding questions 1-5 then please use the comment box below.

Educator survey – If you would like to leave a comment regarding questions 7-11 then please use the comment box below.

The new question stems in an effort to inspire increased comments are:
Subject survey - What aspects of this subject did you find most helpful?
Subject survey - What aspects of this subject could be improved?
Educator survey – What aspects of this educator’s approach helped you learn?
Educator survey – What would you have liked this educator to have done differently?

3. *Change of opt-out process*

In 2012 the first whole-of-university electronic student evaluation process commenced. In order to promote student impact, the Student Association Executive requested that student be blocked from accessing their subject learning management system sites unless they either completed their surveys or opted-out. The opt-out option was -

I have considered completing the TEVAL for this subject and have chosen NOT to complete. Please provide your rationale for this decision below.

The opt-out proved effective in that the response rates were high. However, the particular design of the opt-out was ineffective in that students mostly entered garbled text rather than reasons. The community of practice was once again consulted and a new opt-out screen was designed, reviewed and approved through the University Learning and Teaching Committee (ULTC). The new opt-out option is -

I have considered completing the TEVAL for this subject and have chosen not to complete. Please provide your overall satisfaction for this subject.

Overall I am satisfied with the quality of this subject.

Response options include – Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither Agree or Disagree, Agree, Strongly Agree, Not Applicable.

The results are tabulated separately from the other survey results. One of the fears of some members of the ULTC was that being forced to give a rating would negatively skew the results. The process has recently opened and to date there are 53 opt-out responses. 38% of respondents ticked *agree* and 36% ticked *strongly agree*, providing preliminary indication that fears are unfounded.

4. *Bond University Student Association (BUSA) Executive engagement*

One of the project sub-goals was to find strategies to improve student engagement in the student evaluation process, welcoming student input and involvement in what is their evaluation of subjects and educators, and thereby the quality of their student learning experience.

Hosting the Student Evaluation Symposium at Bond University raised the profile of this learning and teaching theme among staff and students. The Symposium also provided the opportunity for students to take on the role as presenting panellists, for which they had to prepare position statements and perspectives on student evaluation. The salience of the topic has inspired a sustained series of strategic conversations. Since the Symposium, members of the Student Association Executive have raised student evaluation issues and ideas at the University Learning and Teaching Committee, with the Director of Learning and Teaching and with the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning and Teaching.

Appendix H

Evaluation report

Final Evaluation Report
OLT Seed Grant

Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems

1.0 Introduction

I am very grateful to have been invited to be the external evaluator for this Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) Seed Project entitled: *Measuring and improving student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems*. The Project has been ably led by Associate Professor Shelley Kinash, Bond University, with collaborators from six other institutions: Australian Catholic University (ACU), Central Queensland University (CQU), Charles Sturt University (CSU), Curtin University (Curtin) and The University of Western Australia (UWA). It should be said at the outset that having six universities collaborating on a Seed Project is a very ambitious enterprise. I am pleased to report that the collaboration has been very successful and enormously productive, due in large measure to the drive and dedication of the Project Leader and the unstinting commitment of her Project Manager and Project Team Members.

I have been involved in this Project since its inception and had the opportunity to comment, from an early stage, on its design and conceptualisation. Once the Project was awarded, the Project Leader and I together agreed an evaluation strategy and framework, identifying key tasks, stakeholders and critical success factors as against the Project's objectives and deliverables. Over the course of the Project, I have read and seen many of the Project's outputs and disseminations and had periodic engagement with the Project team's processes and the Project Leader.

To anticipate at the outset this Evaluation Report's conclusion; it is clear that both the OLT and the sector have been well served by the engagement with and outcomes of this Project: much has been achieved in the space of a year and on a very lean Seed Project budget. The educational issue investigated is an important one and the Project outcomes and deliverables will make a significant contribution to theorising, knowledge and practice in the area of online student evaluation systems and processes.

1.1 Evaluation Framework

Drawing on the (then) ALTC evaluation resource (<http://www.olt.gov.au/evaluation>), the evaluation criteria agreed included: achievement of the program's goals, objectives and intended outcomes; satisfaction of the needs of stakeholders such as students, staff and the funding body; establishment of good practice; the relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness, and sustainability of outcomes; potential usability for others; and dissemination among stakeholders. These criteria will be addressed in this Report under the following heads:

1. Achievement of Project's goals, outcomes and deliverables;
2. The Project's impact on and for stakeholders;
3. Sustainability and transferability of Project outcomes and approaches;
4. Effectiveness of Project dissemination.

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Additional sources of information for formative evaluation over the life of this Project have included:

- Feedback and input from Project partners with regards to interview questions for case studies;
- Review of work achieved to date as set out in conference presentations and drafts of Project deliverables;
- Engagement with Project team processes and Evaluator's conversations with the Project Leader;
- The Project Symposium – the *Student Evaluation Symposium* – held at Bond University over 14-15 October 2014 and feedback from delegates;
- Review of the Project website.

2.0 Seed Project Evaluation

2.1 Achievement of Project's goals, outcomes and deliverables

Building on an earlier, 2008 Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Project that explored the institutional student feedback practices of 29 Australian universities "with a view towards developing a framework that would assist in making sense of the vast array of SET data already collected by universities" (Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008, 8), this Seed Project aimed to describe and disseminate Australian case studies of effective *online* student evaluation systems, approaches and strategies and how they are used to measure and improve student course engagement and learning success. The Project Team investigated the six collaborating institutions' innovations in this regard and developed six good practice Case Studies. Analysing the six case studies, the Project Team then derived a suite of key issues, strategies and recommendations. These findings have been disseminated to the higher education sector through presentations, publications, a Student Evaluation Symposium and a Project website <http://highereducationstudentevaluation.com>.

As set out in the Project's Application, the two main questions to be directly addressed by this Project were:

- How can we measure student engagement and learning success using student evaluation processes?
- How can students contribute to on-going improvement in university learning and teaching?

Over the life of the Project, six further sub-questions on student evaluation in higher education were identified from the research in the field and further explored as follows:

- Can response rates be used as a proxy of student engagement?
- How can technology-enhanced student feedback systems be used to increase student involvement?
- What are the benefits/issues in reporting outcomes back to students?
- How are students involved in learning/teaching improvement processes resulting from student feedback?
- Is there alignment between the content of the questions (e.g. teaching) and the application of the responses (e.g. learning)?

- What is the relationship between subject (course) evaluations and teaching evaluations?

As also set out in the original Project application, across the Project’s three phases, anticipated deliverables and outcomes included: the development of six case studies; a set of Recommendations; the convening of a Student Evaluation Symposium; Final Project Report; Project disseminations via conferences and papers; and the development of an OLT Innovation and Development proposal. An acquittal of each of these anticipated deliverables is set out in Table 1.

Table 1: Acquittal of Seed Grant Deliverables

Deliverable	Comments
<p>Phase One: Deliverable One Six case studies of good practice in student evaluation, one from each of the collaborating institutions.</p>	<p>A full case study has been developed from each of the six collaborating universities – Bond University, Australian Catholic University, Central Queensland University, Charles Sturt University, Curtin University and The University of Western Australia. The six Case Studies appear at Appendix H of the Final Report. In preparing these case studies, the Project Manager travelled to each university to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • research the cases (for example, observe practice, ask questions, record field notes); • interview students, academics, professional staff and senior executives (see Chapter 3 Table One); • facilitate focus groups of students and academics; and • collect and analyse documents (such as surveys and reports). <p>It is noted that, in total, 97 project participants were engaged in the Seed Grant by way of interviews and focus groups about student evaluation of courses and teaching.</p>
<p>Phase Two: Deliverable Two Derive recommendations from the Case Studies developed.</p>	<p>Project Team Members collaborated to draw-out a “cohesive set of key issues, strategies and recommendations” from the Phase One case studies using a criteria based rubric (Final Report Appendix D), which focused analysis around six key questions (the six sub-questions referred to in 2.1 above). This set of key issues, strategies and recommendations appear in the Final Report and on the Project website as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall Results/ Key Findings (Executive Summary at 6): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Responses to the two key questions posed by the Project; ○ Summary of stakeholder sentiment re student evaluations; and ○ Summary of student evaluation strengths and areas in need of improvement. • Recommendations clustered by seven themes (Executive Summary at 7; Chapter 3 Final

	<p>Report)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Answers to the two key questions posed by the Project and to the six sub-questions subsequently posed (Chapter 4 Final Report). • "Three of the top strategies for other universities to consider" (Project website at http://highereducationstudentevaluation.com/good-practices/)
Phase Three: Deliverable Three Student evaluation symposium.	<p>A <i>Student Evaluation Symposium</i> was held at Bond University over 14-15 October 2014. The Symposium:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provided a forum for sharing student evaluation good practice and recommendations. • attracted 75 delegates • produced materials and an evaluation report (see Final Report Appendix F).
Phase Three: Deliverable Four Project Final Report	A comprehensive Final Report has been produced.
Phase Three: Deliverable Five Conference presentations/ disseminations	<p>The Seed Project's Team Members have already engaged in a number of disseminations:</p> <p>Kinash, S., Judd, M-M., Naidu, V., Fleming, J., Nair, S., Santhanam, E., Tucker, B., Tulloch, M. (2014, November). <i>The student experience of providing feedback: Do universities listen and act?</i> Paper presentation at Australasian Association for Institutional Research and Australasian Higher Education Evaluation Forum, November 19-21, 2014, Melbourne, VIC, Australia.</p> <p>Kinash, S. (2014). Presentation of National Graduate Employability Research and National Student Evaluation Research. <i>Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development</i>. October 23-24, Sydney, Australia.</p> <p>Kinash, S. (2014) Symposium Chair & Panelist – National student evaluation research. <i>Student Evaluation Symposium</i> (Dissemination/Impact Event of Australian Government, Office for Learning and Teaching SEED Project), October 14-15, Gold Coast, Queensland.</p> <p>Kinash, S., Naidu, V., Fleming, M., Fleming, J., Nair, S., Santhanam, E., Tucker, B., Tulloch, M. (2014, July). <i>Benchmarking student evaluations domestically and globally</i>. Poster presentation for Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia (HERDSA) Conference 2014. July 7-10, 2014. Hong Kong, PRC.</p> <p>Kinash, S., Naidu, V., Knight, D., Nair, S., Miller, J., Santhanam, E., Tulloch, M., & Tucker, B. (In press). Student feedback: A learning and teaching performance indicator. <i>Quality Assurance in Education</i>.</p>

	Naidu, V., Kinash, S., & Fleming, M. (2014). Surveying students online to improve learning and teaching. <i>Education Technology Solutions</i> , 61, 50-52.
Phase Three: Deliverable Six Development of a full Innovation and Development proposal	This is underway. At the Student Evaluation Symposium held in October 2014, additional team members expressed interest in collaborating in the I&D proposal.
Additional deliverables. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Website • Answers to the six sub-questions subsequently posed (as set out in 2.1 above). 	<p>An extensive Project website has been developed at http://highereducationstudentevaluation.com/</p> <p>Following analysis of the Project’s activities, these questions (together with the two key questions posed by the Project) are answered in Chapter 4 of the Final Report.</p>

By any measure, and particularly so for a Seed Grant, this has been an enormously successful and productive Project. All of the Project Leader, the Project Manager and the Project Team Members are to be congratulated.

2.2 The Project’s impact on and for stakeholders.

This Project’s investigation of student course engagement and learning success through online student evaluation systems is particularly timely given the contemporary higher education environment and the current federal government’s policy agenda. It might seem obvious to say, but it is salient nevertheless to observe, that the current sectoral foci on student learning outcomes, success and retention and on the assurance of student satisfaction with their learning experience will become even more important should student fees be de-regulated and students be required to contribute a higher percentage towards the cost of their education.

Even absent these policy imperatives, the current Higher Education Standards Framework’s [Threshold Standards](#) refers to the necessity for robust student evaluation processes and provides relevantly as follows:

- in the *Provider Registration Standards* –
 - 5.6 The higher education provider compares its performance on teaching, student learning outcomes, graduate outcomes, and research with other higher education providers, and uses regular, valid and reliable feedback from internal and external stakeholders to improve its higher education operations.
- in the *Provider Course Accreditation Standards* –
 - 4.2 The higher education provider ensures that staff who teach students in the course of study:
 - ...
 - are advised of student and other feedback on the quality of their teaching and have opportunities to improve their teaching.

It is also noted that the revised [Higher Education Standards Framework](#), proposed by the Higher Education Standards Panel (HESP) and now with the federal Minister, also relevantly provides, under “5.3 Monitoring, Review and Improvement”:

5. All students have opportunities to provide feedback on their educational experiences and student feedback informs institutional monitoring, review and improvement activities.
6. All teachers and supervisors have opportunities to review feedback on their teaching and research supervision and are supported in enhancing these activities.

As noted in the Final Report, this Seed Project essentially “formalised a naturally emerging informal community of practice” (at 10). Leveraging this community of practice, and the expertise of the Project Reference Group, the Final Report and Project’s deliverables provide rich insights into current practice, innovations and perceptions of online student evaluation systems and processes. Remembering that this is a Seed Project, now that that Project has concluded and there is the opportunity to disseminate further key Project findings and outcomes, there is every prospect for greater impact on and for stakeholders, beyond the collaborating universities. By way of example in this regard, as to matters canvassed in the Final Report that will be of interest to sector stakeholders, Chapter Three of the Final Report sets out findings on the following key matters

- strengths of the various collaborating institutions’ student evaluation systems and processes (Chapter 3 Table Two);
- aspects of student evaluation systems and processes in need of improvement (Chapter 3 Table Three);
- innovative elements of student evaluation systems and processes (at 15 and as further explicated in the individual case studies);
- perspectives of Project participants on the student role/involvement in student evaluation systems and processes (Chapter 3 Table Four);
- perspectives of Project participants on whether student evaluation results are reported back to students (Chapter 3 Table Five); and
- recommendations for improving student evaluations clustered by the following themes:
 - survey timing and accessibility
 - survey design
 - provide the opportunity for additional feedback
 - engage in conversations
 - refine reports and improve reporting
 - engage in professional development
 - provide an opportunity for academics to respond and/or rebut.

Of particular value also is that, across the six participating institutions, there is a good range of third party evaluation systems that are utilised, which also augurs well for further take-up and impact.

Most of the collaborating universities have effected changes to their own institutions’ student evaluation processes as a result of the Project. In Appendix G to the Final Report, a case example of the Project’s impact at the lead institution, Bond University, is set out. It is clear from this reporting that the Project has enabled change and enhanced practice in almost every aspect of student evaluations at Bond

and has also raised the profile of this learning and teaching theme among both staff and students at the university.

2.3 Sustainability and transferability of Project outcomes and approach.

The Project's engagement with the range and number of both institutions and Project participants has undoubtedly contributed significantly to the Project's success. As mentioned in 1.2 above, the Project has also formalised what was already an informal, engaged and productive community of practice. These factors also position the Project well in terms of sustainability and transferability of Project outcomes and approaches.

As the Seed Grant application referenced, beyond collecting data, universities are continually searching for ways to 'close-the-loop' on evaluation and making responsive changes that enhance learning and teaching (Santhanam, Martin, Goody, & Hicks, 2001). Institutions are also looking for ways to: achieve higher response rates; embed student evaluation in the overall culture and context of quality learning and teaching; and maximise the efficiency, survey design, integration, data usage and reporting of student evaluations. All of these matters, and more besides, have been canvassed under the auspices of this Project – accessibly and transferably so. The device of the six institutional cases studies has been particularly effective and should aid transferability in the longer term. At a different level of engagement, if interested colleagues from across the sector did no more than skim the Symposium Slideshow at Appendix G of the Final Report for ideas and innovations – particularly the "System Highlights" there presented from each of the collaborating institutions – I suspect they would easily find something there that resonated with their own practice context and could be adopted/adapted for practice enhancement.

2.4 Effectiveness of dissemination

As has been the case for all other aspects of this Seed Project's design and implementation, the effectiveness of the Project's dissemination strategy, both engaged and information provision, has been both comprehensive and wide-ranging.

3.0 Conclusion

In summary, this Seed Project has delivered exceptional value for money for the OLT and has produced everything that was promised and then some. The Project Leader, Project Manager and Project Team have built considerable momentum around this important educational issue and are to be congratulated on their work. The Project outcomes and deliverables will make a significant contribution to theorising, knowledge and practice in the area of online student evaluation systems and processes. A full Innovation and Development Grant on this topic, when submitted, would be worthy of most favourable consideration.

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