Future Directions in Course Quality Assurance

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Key Questions to be answered:

- What does the new Quality Assurance System at QUT look like?
- How can course performance data be visualised in a helpful way to suit both Course Coordinators and Executive Management?
- Is providing the data and embedding it in a quality cycle enough to bring about course improvement?
- What do we have to do to get positive cultural change happening around course improvement?

Please note: At QUT 'course' refers to the whole degree or award e.g. Bachelor of Justice
Main Elements

- Individual Course Report
  Target audience: Course Coordinators

- Consolidated Courses Performance Report
  Target audience: Faculty & University Executive Management

- Underperforming Course Checkpoint
  Target audience: Faculty & University Executive Management

- Strategic Faculty Courses Update
  Target audience: Faculty & University Executive Management

The Big Picture
The Individual Course Report

-A 3 page online snapshot of data released in January each year

(Handout #1)

Indicators are grouped together in three sections – Viability, Quality of the Learning Environment and Outcomes. Further pages give different breakdowns of the data. The final page includes text fields where course teams enter the comments and action plans for the year.
11 of the 28 data sets were used in a performance metric resulting in an Overall Performance Score being attributed to each course.

The scoring system is of most benefit to Executive Management who can get an at a glance view of the ‘redness’ or ‘greenness’ of a range of courses across a faculty or the whole institution.
From a Course Coordinator’s point of view, the score does not take into account unique contextual features that cannot be captured in quantitative data and which makes comparison with other courses unreasonable.
We are a boutique course with a small elite enrolment. We have dedicated studio space open 24 hours a day just for our students.

We are a generic course with a large enrolment. We expect many students to change courses as they identify their special interests.

They changed the Government Funding for our course and now we are losing enrolments.

Our Industry Association runs its own Professional Development courses and won’t recognise Masters level study.

The Course Context
Then there is the hidden context...

"My course team is dysfunctional."

"I have no control over course change issues."

"The Faculty doesn’t listen to the needs of this course. I’ve seen it all before."

"I was thrown in here at the last minute. I thought I was supposed to be doing research."

"No one explained to me how to do these things."

How do we work with Course Teams in a way that acknowledges the data and the course context...?
# The Course Environment Portfolio (Handout #2)

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<tr>
<td><strong>Excellence</strong></td>
<td><strong>Outcome</strong></td>
<td>Leadership in Course Coordination is systemic, recognized and valued</td>
<td><strong>Score</strong></td>
<td>Evidence based approaches to annual course planning are valued, integrated and rigorous</td>
<td><strong>Score</strong></td>
<td>Industry, Professional body and QUT stakeholder involvement is valued, monitored and regularly reviewed</td>
<td><strong>Score</strong></td>
<td>Staff and their industry, academic and administrative expertise are valued, acknowledged and supported</td>
<td><strong>Score</strong></td>
<td>The student experience is valued, monitored and supported</td>
<td><strong>Score</strong></td>
<td>Marketing and communications are valued, effective and supported</td>
<td><strong>Score</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum design and delivery is aligned, holistic and has ongoing momentum</td>
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<td>1.5</td>
<td>Course leadership contributes to the alignment of Faculty/GUT T&amp;L plans and policy</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>Leadership creates a positive culture that provides opportunities for development and values and rewards contributions</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>Course team members contribute their expertise to decision making</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>The course has a clear philosophy, purpose and direction</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>The course has an active course team and effectively structured meetings</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Data analysis outcomes align and support strategic planning for the course</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>The course team actively seeks benchmarking opportunities with stakeholders</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
<td>Institutional expertise is sought in the validation and improvement of data gathering and analysis</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>Annual stakeholder feedback informs strategic direction and course innovation</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>Staff succession planning and risk management strategies are effective and ongoing</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>Students, including alumni, are represented in a range of course forums</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Institutional expertise is sought to extend and monitor effectiveness of communication approaches</td>
<td>7.4</td>
<td>The curriculum structure supports the course purpose, direction and desired outcomes</td>
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<td>2.3</td>
<td>All forms of stakeholder and student feedback are considered in planning and are used in an ethical manner</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Course team members are represented on professional committees, at conferences and in research projects</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>Staff are actively involved in T&amp;L development through training, awards, grant applications, mentoring &amp; project leadership</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Student diversity and learning needs are recognized, supported and evaluated</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Marketing and communication plans are linked to the priority action areas identified for the course</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>Assessment is mapped in detail and evaluated at whole of course, year and major levels</td>
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<td>3.2</td>
<td>Regular opportunities for stakeholder interactions are evaluated and new opportunities are actively sought</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Orientation of staff to the course environment is planned, timely and effective</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Student entry pathways are aligned with transition and support strategies</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Media and communication items are mapped, monitored and evaluated</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>Graduate capabilities, course objectives, teaching &amp; assessment are mapped, aligned and monitored</td>
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<td>3.1</td>
<td>Stakeholders have defined roles and responsibilities</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Recruitment of staff is rigorous and systematic</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Students are provided with effective course advice and academic support</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>Strengths and weaknesses are identified</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Delivery elements (eg mode, timetable, space allocation)</td>
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The Course Environment Portfolio

(Handout #2)

**Purpose:**

**Empowerment of the Course Team**

- An organising structure for collecting a wide range of data.
- An inbuilt data evaluation mechanism through point scoring and gap analysis.
- A conceptualisation of ‘best practice’.
- A structure for self-reflection and holistic action planning.
Meetings with the Course Team

1. Get the approval of the Assistant Dean.

2. Present the Process to the Course team. Establish willingness to participate. Identify key problems and assumptions.

4. Present data analysis to course team. Discuss theories and assumptions.

6. Present data analysis to course team. Discuss theories and assumptions.

6. Presentation of Portfolio Evaluation. Creation of four key Action Plans

Background work at the Office of Teaching Quality

3. Ethnographic Data Gathering (ongoing) and basic analysis of quantitative data.

5. Deeper analysis of quantitative data and investigation of theories and assumptions.

7. Evaluation of Course Environment Portfolio

A long conversation

Many Meetings
Students are leaving our course to go to Law. This course is a pathway.

Not many students go to Law.

Students with Advanced Standing are struggling and then leaving.

Students with Advanced Standing have higher GPAs and less discontinuations than Standard Entry Students.

The main problem is in First Year. Students are leaving because they can't handle academic challenge.

Yes, there are some problems in First Year but there are also problems in second year. The students who leave mostly have passing GPAs.

Example of ‘the long conversation’ with JS31

Examining Assumptions
The Course Environment Portfolio

4 Main Actions

- Industry advisory panel – to lift course profile and inform curriculum changes
- Course mission statement – to create consistent communications
- Communications calendar – enable better participations by stakeholders
- Telephone survey of students – explore questions raised by the data analysis

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1. Changes in the Course Team Culture

**Management**
- Putting out fires, feeling overwhelmed by things to do.
- Systematic approach, working with a doable set of strategic priorities.

**Staff Culture**
- Feeling unheard, overwhelmed by problems, not knowing what actions to take.
- Feeling proactive, empowered to meet challenges, collaborating to solve problems.

**Course Team**
- No course team identified.
- No course team meetings.
- Fully engaged course team with set roles and responsibilities. Regular course team meetings; agendas; post meeting actions and follow up.

**Course Image**
- “Our course context makes us the ‘poor cousin’ to other courses in the Faculty.”
- “We are unique and outstanding in our field.”

**Outside Support**
- Unsupported and undervalued.
- Recognised, supported and empowered to advocate for further support.
2. Changes in the Student Experience

- Online Course Portal enhancing course identity and communication.
- New Student Enquiry System with 24-48hr turn around times.
- Employment of dedicated Student Support Officer for the course.
- Student Success Programme supporting First Year Students.
- Change in first year content.
- Negotiations with Industry for Work Placement course credits.
- Whole of course curriculum review for 2011.

Stronger Course Identity

Better communications with students

Stronger connection to Industry
3. Change in the Performance data?

Watch this space...