

Guidelines for Course Quality Assurance

No. 1 – Course Quality Assurance Process

Academic Policy and Programs Unit

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These guidelines accompany [MOPP C/4.10](#)

Once courses or major changes to courses have been approved, there is a continuing process of regular and proactive course improvements which is consistent with quality assurance principles ([MOPP C/4.10](#)). This quality assurance process is the responsibility of each faculty. Overarching this faculty-level process for individual courses, there is a more strategic process in which each faculty reports annually the academic program (the complete suite of courses) offered by the faculty.

The quality assurance process

A quality assurance process means that those responsible for the course are responsible for monitoring its progress through critical evaluation of the course by stakeholders, and making changes to the course in response to their evaluation of various indicators.

In making this analysis, course teams should have regard to available comparative standards or benchmarks. Faculties are therefore expected to consult their clients (graduates, current students, prospective and current employers, and professional bodies) systematically and regularly. The evaluation should cover anything involved in the offering of the course, and the progress of the student through the course through to graduation and should include the admissions process, the induction of students, the teaching, or the infrastructure, such as access to computers and technology. Once course improvements have been made, faculties are expected to evaluate these improvements.

A quality assurance process could involve the following elements:

1. Collect data
2. Analyse data and collect further data if required
3. Design a course improvement, including the means to evaluate whether the improvement has worked
4. Undertake the improvement
5. Evaluate the improvement
6. Report to appropriate body
7. Repeat the cycle

Such a process is analogous to the steps employed in scholarship, where course improvement and evaluation could be compared to development and testing of an hypothesis. Viewed in this way, course quality assurance represents a legitimate application of academic processes and standards to its own endeavours.

The quality assurance process can be thought of as an attempt to answer the following questions in relation to a course:

- What is it that we do?
- How well do we do it?
- How do we know how well we do it?
- How did we attempt to improve what we do?

- How do we know whether the changes that have been made have actually been improvements?
- How have we reported our process?

Audits and Inspections

Two possible models in quality assurance are the audit model and the inspectional model. An audit model of quality assurance is the situation where a panel of persons external to the organisational unit conducts an audit of some or all of the quality assurance mechanisms that the unit has in place. An inspectorial model of quality assurance is the situation where a panel of persons external to the organisational unit reviews the outcomes of the quality assurance process (i.e. the improvements that have been put in place and their effectiveness), and/or compares the course outcomes to established standards or benchmarks.

The QUT model of individual course quality assurance has neither of these components built in as a matter of deliberate policy. No processes exist for any University level (i.e. external to the faculty) audits or inspections of individual courses. Quality assurance for these courses is entirely in the hands of each faculty and its academic board.

However, this is not to say that faculties may not wish to arrange their own external review panels for individual courses, or certain aspects of courses, if they see that this is appropriate. Indeed, some faculties already do that. For example, the Faculty of Information Technology for some years used a system of having 'external examiners' come in to look at their courses. Also some courses are subject to monitoring by professional regulatory bodies, of which one example is the Queensland Nursing Council.

Another possible mechanism involving external persons that some faculties may wish to consider is the notion of benchmarking against a specific external partner. However, this is best done in terms of processes, and is something which no faculty has yet tackled with regard to courses. Notwithstanding this, some comparison of this University with others within discipline fields is available through the Course Experience Questionnaire, by comparing QUT's scores on any scale with other institutions, on the national average, and so on.

Reporting aspects of course quality assurance

The reporting aspects of course quality assurance are summarised below.

1. Individual course performance reports

Individual course performance reports cover evaluation of performance and course improvements for individual courses. These are submitted annually to the faculty advisory committee, which then prepares a report to faculty academic board on each course. The integrity and monitoring of the ongoing quality assurance and improvement processes for individual courses is therefore a critical role for Faculty Academic Boards.

A suggested [proforma for individual course reports](#) is available.

2. Faculty Academic Program Reports

Faculty Academic Program Reports are based on data from the individual course performance reports. They must also address the issues raised by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor in his [Course Performance Report](#) which is presented to University Academic Board in October of the preceding year. These reports are considered by Teaching and Learning Committee and University Academic Board (usually to Teaching and Learning Committee in June each year).

A suggested [proforma for Faculty Academic Program Reports](#) is available.

3. The faculty review process

Each faculty is reviewed every six years by a panel of mainly external experts. Typically one of the terms of reference for faculty reviews involves the effectiveness of policies and practices implemented by the faculty for quality assurance, self-evaluation and improvement. To assist its assessment of a faculty's course quality, the review panel is given the series of annual Faculty Academic Program Reports.

With respect to courses, review panels may consider

- the appropriateness of the mix of courses offered by the faculty
- the range and level of courses offered
- the quality assurance processes used by the faculty for improvement in continuing courses
- the outcomes of the quality assurance processes, such as the major developments, improvements and achievements in the faculty's academic program over the previous five years as identified in the reports from Faculty Academic Boards to University Academic Board on the faculty's academic program or complete suite of courses
- the graduate and teaching and learning outcomes from the range of courses.