
Academic Board Processes Policy

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Purpose:	The purpose of this policy is to define the processes used by the EIT Academic Board, its Course Development and Advisory Committee and its Teaching and Learning Committee, in considering and acting on relevant data. This data includes teaching evaluations, student feedback, student attrition, progress rates, grade distributions, course completions and graduate satisfaction.
Scope:	This policy applies specifically to the members of the EIT Academic Board, academic staff and students (both prospective, current and alumni).
Overview:	The Australian higher education sector has two distinct sub sectors, namely, the Self Accredited Institution (SAI) sector and the Non-Self Accredited Institution (NSAI) sector. The Australian Universities Quality Agency generally considers the NSAI sub sector to be weak in the creation and management of four main sources of data that are referred to in this policy. Hence, this policy sets out what is required to ensure that the EIT, as a non-self accredited institution, has a set of well defined and workable processes in this area.



Essential Supporting Documents:

References

Winchester, H. (2010). *Executive Summary of: A Review of the First Twenty NSAI Audit Reports*. Melbourne Victoria: Australian Universities Quality Agency.

Australian Universities Quality Agency, *Academic Governance and Quality Assurance: Good Practices for NSAs*. (2010). Melbourne Victoria: Australian Universities Quality Agency.

Mikilewicz, S. (2008). *Guidelines for Evaluation Activities Involving UniSA Students and Staff*. Planning and Assurance Services. Retrieved from www.unisa.edu.au/pas/bai/.../GuidelinesforEvaluationActivities.doc on 10th November 2010.

Shale, D. & Gomes, J. (1998). *Performance Indicators and University Distance Education Providers*. *Journal of Distance Education/Revue de l'enseignement a distance*: 13, 1.

Related Documents:

EIT Governance Board – Terms of Reference
EIT Academic Board – Terms of Reference

1.0 Introduction

This policy was developed through discussion of a general outline of issues encountered by the Australian Universities Quality Agency in their regular audits to serve as a basis for the development of guidelines appropriate for the processes required for an academic board of a non-self accredited institution.

Higher Education quality assurance is increasingly focused on the quality of outcomes and standards rather than on inputs and processes. There are four main sources of data:

1. Student and graduate evaluations
2. Viability indicators such as attrition, retention, success rates participation and access.
3. Grade distributions for subjects and courses
4. General items such as budgetary and financial information, usage statistics, service and research



2.0 Key issues for the Academic board in the creation and application of relevant data

In its publication *Academic Governance and Quality Assurance: Good Practices for NSAs*, the Australian Universities Quality Agency suggests that it is important that the following issues are noted:

Evidence based:

Decisions at the EIT must be made based on actual hard data, as opposed to using anecdotal evidence which may not be objective.

Regular reporting:

Data rapidly goes out of date and the data must be applied as soon as they are generated to optimise the identification of areas for improvement. This should be undertaken at least once a year.

Development of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

A comprehensive set of key performance indicators needs to be generated which the Academic Board can monitor and apply. It should be noted, however, that while the term KPI is used extensively by organisations such as the Australian Universities Quality Agency, some of the data used in the context of a survey may not necessarily be formally described as a KPI as such.

Contextualisation of data:

Many key performance indicators may be misinterpreted if directly compared, for example, when a comparison is made between a distance learning institution such as the EIT and a residential university. There can be significant differences in KPIs such as employment (as mature age professionals, EIT students may already be employed) and attrition rates (distance learning has a high rate due to the perceived isolation). Hence KPIs need to be carefully contextualized when they are compared and interpreted.

Trends and comparisons:

A comprehensive set of data needs to be built up to enable easy but systematic comparison over many cohorts of students and courses.

Standard reports:

Standard reports and instruments should be preferably used to ensure the most meaningful comparisons with other institutions.

Implementation of action:

Well documented, timely and clear action should be taken by the EIT in applying the KPIs in a systematic way to effect improvements.

Close the Feedback loop:

Students, staff and industry will invest valuable time in completing surveys for the generation of KPIs. Even though students may not benefit immediately, all parties should be advised in a timely way about the results of surveys in which they have participated and the steps taken to implement any suggested improvements. This creates an inclusive and positive approach in applying the KPIs.

Regular evaluation:

Regular evaluation is a key part of the EITs quality assurance program and will ensure that quality improvements are maintained. Data from the feedback provided in surveys needs to be assessed and reported to decision makers and thus underpin a regular continual cycle of improvement.

3.0 Guidelines for considering and acting on survey and feedback data

3.1 Define the objectives of a survey.

The Dean will encourage members of the EIT community to identify areas of the EIT's operations that require review and evaluation together with reasons for suggesting why they should be undertaken by means of a survey. The questions that require consideration include:

- What does the EIT need to know?
- Why does the EIT need to know this?
- What is the optimal way of collecting this information?
- Who will conduct the survey and analyse the results?
- What are the likely outcomes and how will the data collected assist the EIT in achieving its mission and goals?

It is possible that any staff member can initiate a survey but it is the Dean who will formally authorise a survey as part of a continuing series of surveys designed to be part of an annual EIT quality assurance improvement program.

3.2 Define and agree on the evaluation priorities for the year

It is the responsibility of the Dean to identify and list the data collection surveys and their schedules dates for the year ahead as an outcome of discussion with the Governance Board and the Academic Board by the end of January of each year. The Dean will maintain a list of surveys that are conducted each year.

3.3 Consultation phase and scheduling

By the end of February each year, the Dean will publicise to all staff and students the planned schedule of any planned surveys, the proposed instruments to be used and their proposed dates within the coming year so as to allow feedback by the end of March. The Dean will use any feedback to modify or consolidate the proposed list of surveys.

3.4 Use of the EIT's data that involves access to students

The involvement of human subjects in surveys requires consideration to be given to a range of ethical issues at each stage in the evaluation process, the planning, design and execution activities and, ultimately, the reporting of results. Approval must be sought from the Governance Board before commencing any evaluation if the results of a survey will be published.



The following ethical issues need to be assessed and acted upon in the planning, design and execution of the evaluation activities.

- Confidentiality of responses
- Ownership of the activity and storage of data
- Explaining the purpose, nature and process for recording data and information during the evaluation process
- The people who will have access to the information collected
- What will be done with the data and information
- What the likely impact on the survey participants and others will be
- Reporting arrangement to the participants on the results (closing the feedback loop)

Precise details of the following items need to be provided to survey participants before they commence any evaluation activity. This should be provided in a written format.

- Name of the EIT administrative area or school conducting the evaluation
- Name and details of the contact person for the survey
- Contact for further information on ethical issues
- Title of evaluation
- Purpose of the evaluation in layman's terms
- Criteria used to select participants
- Invitation to people to participate
- The voluntary nature of participation
- What is required from participants
- Confidentiality of responses
- Any possible risks with the survey
- Benefits offered for the participation in the survey
- How the outcomes will be reported (web/written letter etc)
- Recording of the data (web/written/video etc)
- The date up to which the participants can delete data or recordings provided before publication
- Where the records of the data will be stored and who will be able to access this data
- Duration of storage (forever / 3 months etc)

3.5 Design of a data gathering exercise

It is imperative that the EIT preserve the privacy of its staff and students and that all data is kept confidential. It is equally important to minimise one of the major problems associated with surveys today, which is often termed "survey fatigue". The EIT will endeavour to ensure this does not happen with regard to consultation with EIT students and staff. Hence it must be clear that all data gathered has a definite benefit for the students, staff and the EIT as whole. If there is any doubt, the need for a proposed survey should be reconsidered by the Dean.

In addition, with the current deluge of emails to students and staff, this medium should be used with care and discretion to avoid overuse when conducting surveys. Although the EIT is essentially a distance learning institute and means of communicating are necessarily limited, preference should be given to posting details of surveys on an electronic noticeboard which can be readily accessed by EIT students and staff and thus avoid inundating them with emails.



Finally, ethical approval for any data gathering exercise will not necessarily imply that the researcher has immediate access to EIT staff and students. The data gathering exercise will still need to be explicitly approved by the Chair of the Governance Board.

3.6 Explicit Approvals

The Dean will consider the various methods of gathering data and will ensure that the appropriate method is employed before seeking approval from the Chair of the Governance Board. The various methods would include focus groups, interviews, telephone surveys, online (or web-based) surveys, postal surveys, email surveys, suggestion boxes, and community social web sites (such as FaceBook or LinkedIn).

Written approval should be granted by the Chair of the Governance Board for any data gathering exercises. This will generally be provided as approval for the schedule of proposed surveys presented to the Chair in January or February of each year so as to avoid intermittent ad hoc requests for surveys.

3.7 Implementation

Before proceeding with a proposed survey, it is the responsibility of the Dean to check that ethical requirements will be adhered to and that approval has been granted by the Chair of the Governance Board. It is also the responsibility of the Dean to ensure that the correct version of a proposed survey will be used and that it is explicitly referenced in the Data Collection Surveys Log.

The EIT would maintain ownership of all the data collected through its surveys and should ensure that appropriate EIT policies and procedures are followed with regard to the publication of the data sourced.

3.8 Assessment of outcomes

The data collected needs to be compiled and recorded accurately and correctly and processes need to be in place to cross check to ensure the highest levels of integrity are maintained. If any problems arise with regard to the integrity of the data, the Chair of the Governance board is to be advised immediately. It may be that in these circumstances the data will be discarded or that another partial or entire survey will be initiated.

A detailed summary of the data collection process and the statistical tools used will be compiled to provide a simple univariate analysis of the results. Advanced multivariate analysis, such as Factor Analysis, can be used as long as the results can be expressed in a simple understandable way. The results and assessments should be checked by the Dean of Engineering before publication. If possible results should be compared with results from any previous surveys, such as those conducted in previous years, to identify consistencies and inconsistencies. The results of this type of comparative analysis with regard to the conduct of and the outcomes of surveys should be made known to the Chair of both the Governance Board and the Academic Board.

3.9 Feedback to stakeholders and participants

Surveys are part of a continual improvement process. Hence each survey should contribute to a building up of the expertise that is required to undertake the next and forthcoming surveys. It is good practice to ensure that all participants in a survey are “rewarded” by being given appropriate and timely feedback about the survey results. In some cases participants



may not see any direct personal benefit but wherever possible results should be couched in such a way that participants can appreciate that their contribution in a survey could lead to an improvement in the processes of the EIT and could thus be beneficial for staff and students in the future.

In certain types of surveys, such as surveys restricted to staff members, data may be excluded from widespread dissemination, or only a limited set of results will be provided for public scrutiny.

3.10 Reporting and dissemination of results and assessment of results

The numerical results of surveys should be made available on the website of the EIT so that they are available to all staff, students and prospective students. Such survey results should not include any transcribed comments from participants or otherwise allow for any possible indication of the individual from whom the data was sourced. A good practice model as to way results of surveys can be published on a website is provided by the Carnegie Mellon University, which publicises student feedback on its staff and its courses for all to review.

3.11 Implementation of Improvements

Following identification of improvements that need to be addressed, it may be appropriate to engage in further discussions with the participants in the data gathering exercise to ensure that a clearly defined list of improvements is obtained. The list can then be submitted to the Dean and the Chair of both the Academic Board and the Governance Board, so that consideration can be given to strategies for implementing changes. It is the ultimate responsibility of the Dean to define the improvements required and how they should be implemented.