

## Reframe: QUT's evaluation framework

### Encompasses a multi-faceted approach to meet stakeholder needs

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Before I start I should introduce myself. My role at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) is that of Associate Director – Academic Quality and Standards, and in that role I have leadership over two portfolio areas. The first one is evaluation of courses which is Bachelor of Business, (Accounting) would be a course in our terms, courses, units which is a subject like Information 101 and teaching and student experience so that's the first portfolio area that I have. The second one is course quality assurance and I have been leading those two areas since 2007. It has been my privilege to first of all adopt, I came into the university and they had an online system already established, so I have sort of adapted a system and then I have been able to facilitate the bringing in of another system in evaluation. I became interested in this area as when I was doing my PhD I was trying to look at evaluation of teaching. I came from vocational education I had to have a Bachelor of Adult Education to teach in that area. When I came into higher education in New South Wales I couldn't understand why everyone didn't have an education qualification. I was quite bemused by this because in one sector in New South Wales it was a legislative requirement but in higher education it was not. So my interest was in teacher evaluation but when I did my research I found that it was very difficult to document teacher evaluation, when there was no documentation about the effect policy that the government was actually imposing on the sector was having on teachers. My PhD was about policy borrowing and I looked at the 2002 review of higher education to see what were the implications for learning and teaching in Australia for that sector. While I was doing that, I was collection data about whether there was any impact and the data I was collecting was employment opportunities for academics across the country. I found a job application for Queensland University of Technology, and I was quiet surprised as in a three year period no other university had advertised that they wanted to employ an educator in a learning and teaching unit and they wanted to know how to use the data. It was the only position that was not about collecting data, it was actually about data usage, ethical application of usage and how can we build capacity in academic staff. I put my hand up and applied for the position, and was successful and commuted between Newcastle and Brisbane for five years waiting for my family to come up. Therefore, I have a fair commitment to evaluation, I am very strong in the advocacy for academic staff and I have had

a very strong relationship with Queensland University of Technology where we are about supporting academic staff to do a very good job in their area as well as reduce some of the complexity. Having giving that introduction I am challenging you to ask me questions that I haven't before because I have had a long conversation with academics at our university. So I want five questions. So is anyone prepared to give the first question and of course no question is trivial and no question is not to be received with respect. So would anybody like to be challenged to give the first question?

Question 1. How does one get a decent student evaluation on a voluntary basis which by my definition which is going to actually be an accurate representation of your teaching?

Lyn: And we are taking about student evaluation being a survey

Question 2. Is a student satisfaction survey an adequate evaluation of teaching quality?

Question 3. How do we implement sustainable teaching or sustainable efforts with relatively short term popularity student evaluation, when we properly reflect the teaching may not be popular in the first instance but may be popular in the long term?

Question 4. How do you implement academic evaluation and overcome the cultural resistance?

Question 5. Is there good evidence that students can actually evaluate the quality of teaching?

One of the things is I think you should know, I'm not sure if it is comforting to know I have heard the questions before, or it is comforting to know that you are not alone in those questions. There is a sort of balance where you think it's a shame that we are all in the same position. Ok so eight years ago when I started at QUT, I came into a single survey system, there was a fantastic policy. And the policy environment has not changed in that time so go to our policy, it's robust. It says "you must use multiple lines of evidence to evaluate teaching". That's it. It's a really short policy and that's it. What we found is that we had a fantastic, really robust policy environment but at a corporate level we only supported a single survey, so as you can imagine the single survey took precedence over everything. So what had happened is there was a survey called the Learning Experience survey which was the Unit and Teacher survey put together. It ran, QUT is very well known for over doing it, it ran every teaching period, every semester, every year, every time it was run. So if you were in the Faculty of Business and it run three times a year, you were surveyed three times a year. So we had a lot of data, that was lovely, they did employ me and a group to help use that data that was a very positive thing but what happened was the data was open to misuse, and there is no doubt that sometimes in the form of non-employment. For example with sessional staff

it may be used in the form of an employment requirement and although this is anecdotal feedback, no one ever gave me that information in writing. If it was brought to our attention we would investigate every concern as that was completely outside our policy area. You are required to evaluation teaching in multiple lines of evidence. The other thing is evaluation is not an employment tool, we have very sound ways to employ people, which is by open invitation and they can apply, they can meet criteria, they can go to a panel, there can be expressions of interests. There are ways to do employment which is not exactly what evaluation is used for. Evaluation can form a line of that but it should not be a single employment tool. The other thing that we found is with this tool it ran with regularity and it was okay. We got five years of data which was wonderful because in five years of data we knew across an institution where we have over 45,000 students; we knew that the teacher evaluation satisfaction rating always sat 0.5 of a Likert scale (on a Likert scale of five) above the unit satisfaction. We were very comfortable of what was going on across the university and we were doing very good teaching, so it gave the executive a great deal of confidence about what was going on. So I will talk about why we made a change and then I am going to talk through the journey of where we are and at some point I will talk about the flyer I have handed out.

#### Triggers for Change

- Government regulations to collect feedback from students on a regular basis
- Internal criticism that the current system is applied to academics, not **for** academics
- Internal criticism of oversimplifying the art of teaching a single number on a five point Likert scale

There is a legislative requirement in Australia that we collect data, and you will collect it annually and you will do it at subject level and you need to be able to identify the academics at that level as well, so there had to be something around the teachers. So we can't turn it off. One of the criticisms was that the system was actually done to academics. In our system it was an online survey that ran whether you wanted it to or not, whether you read it or not, whether you engaged with the process or not, it was viewed as being done to you rather than for you. So it wasn't actually meeting the needs of the academics and wasn't telling them exactly what they wanted to know. And in our policy environment there is no requirement for teacher evaluation to be included in your promotion application, so there is no policy environment in promotion at QUT. But still an academic was reduced to an overall satisfaction that could be grouped at an academic level or could be grouped at the unit level and academics felt that was an over simplification and definitely our new Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), Professor Suzi Vaughan, was very keen that this representation was neither fair or correct.

## Logic model for organisational change

My Deputy Vice-Chancellor came from fashion so she loved the butterfly metaphor. And I have presented once before and someone said but “my Executive Dean is an engineer” and I could hear my project officer in the background saying “well just build a plane”. The metaphor is whatever you need it to be but basically it reads left to right and it is actually design led. We had the executive support and I cannot say how critical it is to have the executive of the university to be behind you. Basically we went into a five year process and we thought it was a three-five year body of work but it’s a five year body of work. So it is not to be taken lightly and it takes a lot of good will, collaboration, it doesn’t take a lot of money but what it does take is that cultural perspective that you were talking about before, it’s about everyone believing in the journey you are going to go on.

The reason we have a butterfly is because if you don’t do these entire aspects and people just do the middle thing which is build the product, Reframe, in the middle. So what it is, you can often just go in build the system which is what we did last time and then just disseminate it and everybody is going to get on board. But what you are doing here is starting on the left hand side and you are actually going about your stakeholder engagement. Now on the left hand side it is collaboration and engagement. Now we had 1,500 instances of activity on that left hand side of the butterfly, where academic staff, professional staff, heads of schools, executive deans, and the Vice-Chancellor all came together at different points in time to work out what was it that they wanted. And the idea of Reframe came from one of our graduate fashion students who prepared a PowerPoint for us to go out and do roadshows across the university and from listening to what we were saying she felt we were “reframing the perspective of evaluation”. Now Reframe was the project name and we have tried to ditch it but we are stuck with it because everybody at QUT understands that Reframe is about relooking at your evaluation and that name has stayed with us. So what happened is we went out and did a literature review and an environmental scan of what was occurring in universities in Australia. Everybody had a survey, they were all idiosyncratic. In the literature it would say that a survey is not enough. It’s too thin a line of evidence and there are too many variables that impact on it. What if you have just inherited a unit that is disastrously designed and then you are evaluated on that. I think ever academic has been in that position at least once in their career. If you haven’t you have been in a very luxurious position because it is the reality of what we do. The other thing is we tried to come up with a theoretical concept and I have to tell you they were wild and wholly diagrams. I have a Dean of Studies who loves to draw diagrams and you end up with 16 diagrams and you are trying to work out which one is in any way connected to the other. So basically we came up with a theoretical concept that we could live with and we talked about having agency and voice but we wanted teachers to have voice, students to have voice and

unit coordinators to have voice. Then to have something about courses as well because at our university course level activity is sort of subsumed within the delivery of the unit so we wanted to make sure that the courses had their space. But we had executive support, but we had no idea what we were doing. People kept saying “what is it you’re going to build” I don’t know. It’s design led, what do you need. It was about meeting the needs of the stakeholders, not managing them. We had no preconceived ideas on where we were going. But what happened was we build Reframe and this was the outcome. (Lyn showed one page document) and then we tested it. But what we had to do was come up with a communication plan, I have a communication budget of \$45,000 a year, we had to training. Last year I trained 540 academic staff on how to use the data, what was important about using the data. One year I went out and met with HOS three times. So that was 110 one-to-one meetings with heads of school to introduce the framework. So this is not lightweight activity. This is serious business but it is about providing agency to academic staff and the target audience, one year my target audience was heads of school because they were line supervisors. Another year its academic staff, another year it is sessional staff, so we try and move the audience around. And we are talking about ongoing improvement, we want the very best student experience that we can provide for our students. That’s the core, that’s what we are about and we need to provide a safe working environment for academic staff at the same time.

## Capability Building

How is it we went about our business? The thing is, it is a journey that you go on and that everybody needs to have a voice and everybody needs to be able to say that they can actually acknowledge something on the framework so that it actually feels like it is a part of their lives as well. Teaching is personal, someone said moving curriculum is like shifting graves in a graveyard. Its highly emotive but that is curriculum which is a little bit more objective than when it is your personal teaching. And so you can discount the fact that it is personal and it has a great deal of impact on you and you put a great deal of effort into it therefore evaluation should be sensitive. So what we did is have two years of collaboration, one year of building it and I was on the working party, I was on every working party I had to attend. I was on the working party to build the instrument. Twelve months of fortnightly meetings and they couldn’t agree on anything and I didn’t really care. I didn’t mind what the survey was, there was no intent from the university to say what the survey questions should be but it was really difficult. Everybody’s context was different. It was really hard to come to an agreement, that everybody was happy with. But we did get there. But the working party really was traumatic.

## Reframe: QUT's Evaluation Framework Document

So this was our framework. The biggest change we did was that all teacher evaluation was turned off. All surveys around the teacher were turned off and the university decided that they were very comfortable with 5 years of data, that their staff were doing a very good job. So what happened is we changed the performance planning and review policy so academic staff are required to have a personal evaluation strategy and they need to speak to their line supervisor about that once a year.

We were giving agency to academics staff saying you can choose your own adventure here as long as long as you choose something, as a long as you are engaged in that, and you could demonstrate impact on student experience. So instead of it being done to them, the agency was given to academic staff. So, on the left hand side we have surveys that are automated. So we do have surveys and on the right hand side we have optional opportunities where we say to academic staff you can choose to do any of these.

So I will just quickly run through the surveys. Everything is up online and under my ePrints so you can find all of the papers we have written and you can find all of the questions. Basically we have a three question survey. First question is about did this unit provide you with learning opportunities, the second question the academic staff insisted that we reminded the students that they have a responsibility in the learning. So the second question is about whether the students engaged in the opportunities. And the third question is overall I am satisfied with this unit. Nothing about the teaching. Everything on this is a requirement of someone, we must have a personal evaluation strategy because there is a legislative requirement, and external requirement requires us to do something.

The Pulse Survey students wanted to have a say and can you improve this experience rather than wait until I have gone. So we have 13 week semesters and this runs Week 4 and 5 and the Monday of Week 6 academic staff have reports pushed to them and they can see what the students are saying. It's about how is it going.

The second survey is the Insight Survey with the same three questions, different tense and it's about how did it go. It runs the last week of the teaching period and it runs all the way across exam period because student said we don't have a say on exams. This survey finishes on the Sunday night and the reports are pushed to academic staff on the Monday.

The third survey is the Exit Survey, where students who are leaving the unit and withdrawing and weren't enrolled at the deployment of these surveys have no voice so these students said they

want to have a voice so we have an Exit Survey where there are seven questions from the literature as to why maybe students would leave maybe health reasons, financial reasons, there are a whole range of reasons and we ask them can you name the top three reasons why you have left the unit. Because it may be that it is not about the teaching or the unit, it may be personal issues.

**Questions: Do you feel that you may be over surveying students.**

That's interesting we have just been for review and the answer is no, because it is only three questions and an open comment. It's really fascinating, we are now two and a half years into this, so I have three years of data for semester one. The students who fill in these surveys are different students and I find that fascinating because we have three surveys that run and Exit Survey runs every week, week 3-12, Pulse is Weeks 4 and 5 and Insight is Weeks 13+. They are not the same students so in fact our survey response rate is one element but the engagement of students is 10% higher. So we didn't know this at the start and we were worried like you said are we over surveying. We used to have a survey that had 15 questions and now we have three, three and seven questions but they are mostly different students.

**Question: Just in relation to that can I ask how many units a student will do.**

Four in a semester and they are collected together and they will get one invitation and they can do the four together. They get a single invitation and it is a diminishing email so once they have finished them they don't get any more information.

**Question: How many students on average would engage with these surveys?**

Pulse 14%

Insight 21%

Exit 5% and with the exiting student they are also asked if they would like student advisors to contact them.

Can I just explain though in doing that this is the only time I have been in an environment, where we have an increasing response rate? From the first year to the second year it has increased, from last year to this year there has been a 6% increase. At the same time academics are invited and we get about 30-35% response rate from the teaching teams and their question are how do you believe your students are going at this point in time. You end up with five lines of data out of a unit, two lines of participants (teaching teams and students). And they are different but I haven't had three years of data to do all the big data analysis yet but it is encouraging because the students and using it more and they are leaving more comments so they are actually engaging at a higher level.

## Question: Do you have any incentives to complete the survey

At the end of the survey they are invited to (we looked at a whole range of things, there was no evidence in the literature to say that incentives have any impact or any causal relationship with response rates at all, so if you can find any literature that says that send that to me but there isn't any). We give the students the choice to donate ten cents to the students' scholarship fund or they can change it because that's the default and they can give ten cents to the students food bank. I think that it is encouraging that 50% of the students read to the end of the survey and actually make a change. So I know the students actually finish the survey to the end. But we have given \$25,000 so far as part of this initiative.

On the right hand side it is optional, there is a teacher survey that they can deploy if they choose, if they get the data back and they are not keen on it they don't have to share it with anyone, it is completely private and confidential and we don't see the outcomes. Peer review – we have collegial peer review so you can engage in peer review. You can choose all of these or any of these.

Instant Response if you do something like tell me what's of interest to you just stick a post it note on the back of a wall. That would be legitimately considered an evaluation strategy by your line supervisor.

We have Existing Data, we have course level reports, unit level reports, evaluation reports, we have a Consolidated Courses Performance Report for the whole institution, where there are hundreds of lines of data. So you don't have to do all of that you only have to look at your data.

Customised: You may have customised an evaluation strategy no one else is done but your line supervisor can actually validate that that is a creative thing to do. People are doing good practice that goes under the radar.

That's the conceptual framework and it has just been external reviewed by the University of Melbourne. And after interviewing 65 stakeholders at the university, nobody has asked for the framework to be changed, which I think is successful. The other thing is that they found evidence of *widespread organisational change* and that's the phrase I use in all of my literature. Therefore, I know that the external evaluators read the papers which was really good because they rephrased using the same words that I used. So I think that is fairly successful. One of the other things I might say is examples of success:

- The Vice-Chancellor reads every comment from every student every time. So we print out a pack, and he reads everyone and it is fascinating and then he asks his



executive deans what they thought about their comments so they have to read them.

- Then the executive deans asks the heads of schools what do you think about your comments.

Basically there is this thirst to use the comments because they strongly believe that there are some things academics who cannot deal with and must be an institutional responsibility and we have had institutional change from that.

Thankyou.