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## TEACHING QUALITY MATTERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: INSTIGATING CULTURAL CHANGE

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Higher Education in Australia is once again facing a period of reform, this time addressing buzzword criteria of quality, equity, diversity and sustainability. Since winning a national teaching award in 2002, I have been asked to comment on various aspects of academic life. I have had to deliberate on my teaching practices and provide objective measures of their quality. In this paper, I make subjective comment on teaching quality from my experiences as a preclinical scientist teaching foundational biology and vocational microbiology. Obviously, my musings are biased and should not be taken as consensus opinion.

Both teachers and students yearn for quality educational experiences and outcomes. But what constitutes quality? How do we measure it? What criteria and standards apply? Who measures it? What are the consequences for good or bad performance? Will good quality be rewarded? Will poor quality be punished or remediated? Addressing these concerns will be difficult because governments, unions, university management and academic staff have disparate views on many work issues, such as academic freedom, independence, money, resources, workloads, appraisal mechanisms, performance criteria, etc.

Most universities have been progressive in their pursuit of teaching and learning quality and have established annual award schemes recognizing individual and team performance. Academics nominated by students and peers are asked to reflect on their teaching and learning activities in accordance with prescribed criteria. For example, the Australian Awards for University Teaching require nominees to address the following ten selection criteria.

1. Interest and enthusiasm for teaching and promoting student learning
2. Ability to arouse curiosity, stimulate independent learning and develop critical thought
3. Ability to organize course material and to present it cogently and imaginatively
4. Command of subject matter, including incorporation of recent developments
5. Innovation in design and delivery of content and course materials
6. Participation in effective and sympathetic guidance and advising of students
7. Provision of appropriate assessment, including worthwhile feedback
8. Ability to assist students from equity groups to participate and achieve success
9. Professional and systematic approach to teaching development
10. Participation in professional activities and research related to teaching

These criteria give an indication of the breadth of teaching and learning activities expected from modern academics. However, academics do more than just teach. Universities are professed to fulfill three main functions: to act as living repositories of accumulated knowledge; to pass on this knowledge to the younger generation; and to add to the sum total of knowledge through research.