

CEQ and the performance regime in Australian Higher Education

A review of the policy context

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Paul Henman is Associate Professor of Social Policy. His research focuses on technology and public governance. His most recent book is *Governing Electronically: E-government and the reconfiguration of public administration, policy and power* (Palgrave 2010). He is currently leading two ARC grants. One is examining performance measurement in Australian social policy and public services. A second one is mapping and evaluating government's web presence using innovative web crawling, social network analysis and online exercise research methodologies.

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CEQ and the performance regime in Australian Higher Education: A review of the policy context

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Abstract

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) is a survey conducted with all Australian university graduates within 12 months after completing a university degree qualification. It assesses a graduate's overall experience and assessment of their university and program of study. As such it acts as a form of performance assessment of teaching in the Australian tertiary sector. The CEQ has a long history and originated from the sector, and particularly by Ramsden and other academics keen to foster reflection on and evaluation of tertiary teaching quality. This policy research paper provides an overview of the CEQ, its history and its location with contemporary Australia government policy aimed at advancing quality tertiary education. It outlines the contents and administration of the survey and its evolution, the policy context in quality assurance and teaching standards in tertiary education, and parallel practices of teaching evaluation in Australian institutions, public policy and internationally, and considers how the CEQ is located in the wider governance of Australia's university governance at both the institutional and sectorial levels. As such it sits alongside parallel processes of performance measurement and governance of research within Australian universities.

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Acronyms

AC21	Academic Consortia 21
ACER	Australian Council of Education Research
AGS	Australian Graduate Survey
AHELO	Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes
ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council
AUSSE	Australian Survey of Student Engagement
AUQA	Australian Universities' Quality Agency
AuQF	Australian Quality Forum
AVCC	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
CLA	Collegiate Learning Assessment
CTQA	Curriculum and Teaching Quality Appraisal
DEET	Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Environment, Science and Technology
DIISR	Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research
GCA	Graduate Careers Council of Australia
GDS	Graduate Destination Survey
HEC	Higher Education Council
LTPF	Learning and Teaching Performance Fund
PREQ	Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire
NSS	National Student Survey
NSSE	National Survey of Student Engagement
SCEQ	Student Course Experience Questionnaire
SFQ	Short Form Questionnaire
SRG	Survey Reference Group
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
TQI	Teaching Quality Indicator
UES	University Experience Survey

CEQ and the performance regime in Australian Higher Education: A review of the policy context

This policy research report is divided into three key parts. The first provides a succinct statement of the CEQ, its evolution and use. Part II reviews the policy context, funding of tertiary teaching and related forms for evaluating teaching performance domestically and internationally. Part III summarises policy, political and academic debates and discussions about the purposes for CEQ.

I. Case study: The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ)

The performance measurement instrument

The Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) is a survey instrument administered to tertiary graduates regarding their experience of their university course or program. It has been in use since 1992 as a national survey as part of the Australian Graduate Survey (AGS). The survey has evolved over time and has several variations. At its core, it consists of a number of scales. The most recent version (last administered in April 2013) is comprised of three core scales, which all universities have to include in the survey they administer to graduates, and eight further optional scales. The core scales include the **Good Teaching Scale** (6 items), **Generic Skills Scale** (6 items) and the **Overall Satisfaction Item**. The additional scales universities can choose from to customise the survey comprise the **Clear Goals and Standards Scale** (4 items), **Appropriate Workload Scale** (4 items), **Appropriate Assessment Scale** (3 items), **Intellectual Motivation Scale** (4 items), **Student Support Scale** (5 items), **Graduate Qualities Scale** (6 items), **Learning Resources Scale** (5 items) and the **Learning Community Scale** (5 items) (<http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/research/start/agsoverview/ctags/ceq/>). Each scale asks respondents to indicate their agreement or disagreement with an attitudinal statement and accompanying items on a five-point scale.

Purposes of CEQ

In an increasingly market-oriented higher education system, the role of students' feedback in evaluating the quality of undergraduate programs and teaching has been argued to be among the most valid and reliable evaluations (Harris & James, 2006; Ramsden, 1991) The 2008 Bradley review in higher education stated that "in the absence of agreed national standards and robust measures of the quality of Australian higher education, student perceptions are an important indicator of the performance of the system" (Bradley, Noonan, Nugent, & Scales, 2008, p. 11). The review suggests that high levels of student satisfaction will also help maintain global competitiveness by attracting international students (Bradley et al., 2008); especially when international students "have provided an important source of revenue in the face of the decline in per capita public funding and have helped create cosmopolitan campuses" (Harris & James, 2006).

Since the late 1980s, the Australian government interest in higher education has turned to quality and quality assurance; a variety of major projects to develop quantitative indicators of the quality and diversity of the higher education system has been conducted by the federal government department responsible for tertiary education (Harris & James, 2006). Since 1992, the innovative Australian Graduate Survey (AGS), which comprises the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Graduate Destination Survey (GDS), has been administered as part of an annual national population survey of the graduates of all Australian universities in the year following graduation (Graduate Careers Australia, 2011). Compared to the Graduate Destination Survey, the CEQ involves a larger dataset; therefore, it is argued to be “the most influential of the two surveys” (Harris & James, 2006).

Since 1992, the CEQ has been included in the Australian Graduate Survey, delivered to all domestic and international graduates with the exception of research higher degree students and students studying at offshore campuses approximately four months after graduation, focusing on graduates’ overall perceptions when looking back on their courses or programs of study after a year of course completion (Harris & James, 2006). Rather than “measuring the multitude of factors that combine to form student experience”, the CEQ has been developed “with an assumption of a strong association between the quality of student learning and student perceptions of teaching” (Griffin, Coates, McInnis, & James, 2003, p. 259). In fact, the items and scales of the CEQ are “specifically tuned to obtain information on what were considered by Ramsden... to be the defining elements of teaching and its organization” (Griffin et al., 2003, p. 259). In considering the extent to which instruction encourages deep, rather than surface, understanding of concepts and materials, the CEQ attempts to provide a domain-neutral indicator of university course quality (McInnis, 1997).

In essence, the CEQ was developed for two principal reasons. Firstly, the instrument was invented to facilitate quality assurance and accountability (Griffin et al., 2003). In fact, as a “direct measure of consumer satisfaction with higher education” (Ramsden, 1991, p. 130), the primary and motivating purpose of the instrument is to use student ratings to derive performance of teaching effectiveness in higher education institutions (Griffin et al., 2003); and to produce “as economically as possible... ordinal ranking of academic organizational units in different institutions...” (Ramsden, 1991, pp. 132, 133). Secondly, from a market-driven perspective, by internal and comparative evaluation of results, the CEQ outputs are intended to assist institutions with their quality enhancement and continuous improvement processes (Griffin et al., 2003; Harris & James, 2006) to ensure standards and to protect as well as demonstrate the quality of Australian universities in a concern about the possible effects of internationalisation and globalisation on the student market (Harris & James, 2006). Noticeably, the CEQ must provide information that is both nationally generalisable and locally sensitive (Griffin et al., 2003).

The performance indicator of teaching effectiveness, as measured by the CEQ, has been administered together with the GDS in the system-wide participation in the Australian Graduate Survey which is the result of an agreement to collaborate on the part of Australian universities, through the Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC), the nation’s council of university presidents (Harris & James, 2006). Noticeably, while the AGS is a national survey in that most higher education

institutions participate, it is not centrally administered; consequently, both the GDS and the CEQ vary between institutions (Harris & James, 2006). The variation is encouraged, in fact, in keeping with the voluntary nature of the survey and the recognised diversity in the missions and priorities of individual institutions (Harris & James, 2006). A fundamental consistency of approach is ensured through the involvement of a Survey Reference Group (SRG), including the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCA), the appropriate federal Department and the AVCC representatives (Harris & James, 2006). The Federal Government also uses CEQ data to access and plan for the needs of the higher education sector (The University of Sydney, 2011).

Survey history and evolution

The CEQ (Ramsden, 1991) is, in fact, a development of work originally carried out at Lancaster University in the 1980s (Wilson, Lizzio, & Ramsden, 1997). Originally, the development work used “an item pool derived from the **Course Perceptions Questionnaire**..., a subsequent **School Experience Questionnaire**..., **Experiences of Studying and Higher Education Questionnaire**... and items developed from an analysis of open-ended student feedback” (Wilson et al., 1997, p. 34). Based on the strength of preliminary studies, the Australian Higher Education Performance Indicators Research Project recommended a national trial of a 30-item version of the CEQ (CEQ30) (Wilson et al., 1997, p. 34). During the time of implementation, the original CEQ 30 has been modified and evolved to meet the dynamic nature of change of the higher education system and the perceptions as well as the needs of individual institutions (Wilson et al., 1997); consequently, there have been variations of CEQ among Australian higher education institutions, not only in terms of the institutional questionnaire format, but also regarding the questionnaire application purposes.

Firstly, with regard to the CEQ format, the instrument CEQ 30 was designed to measure differences in the quality of teaching between comparable academic organizational units in those important aspects of teaching about which students have direct experience and are, therefore, validly able to comment (Wilson et al., 1997). Though the CEQ 30 provides Australian tertiary institutions with valuable information on perceptions of their courses (Graduate Careers Australia, 2011), the CEQ 30 has been criticised for being problematic with regard to the survey methodology, the scale validity, the raters themselves and the generalisability by cross-validating the structure of the CEQ across several large multidisciplinary samples (Griffin et al., 2003). Significantly, it was argued that the existing CEQ instrument needed to be extended to incorporate the social, technological, interpersonal and resource aspects of the university undergraduate experience (Griffin et al., 2003), rather than only focussing on the quality of teaching (Pascarella, 1991). This broader focus is argued in the context of Australia’s the Higher Education Council (HEC, 1990, 1992) emphasizing the social relevance of education, the need for graduates to acquire a range of transferable, adaptive generic skills in a society with dynamic patterns of work and changing knowledge bases.

Chronologically, the full version CEQ 36 administered to the 1992 graduates and 1994 student samples (Wilson et al., 1997, p. 37), the CEQ 23 administered to the 1993 student sample and more recently, the CEQ 25 administered to graduates from 1996 onwards were developed in consultation with the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) and have been used in the

annual AGS national survey of graduates (Wilson et al., 1997). In the CEQ 23 version the Emphasis on Independence Scale was replaced by a new scale measuring **Generic Skills** (6 items) (Wilson et al., 1997). In addition, since 2002, in response to concern about the coverage of the instrument, such following subscales as Student Support; Learning Resources; Learning Community, Graduate Qualities and Intellectual Motivation Scales have been supplemented (Harris & James, 2006; McInnis, Griffin, James, & Coates, 2001). Another important change occurred in 2010 when GCA implemented a fully labeled CEQ scale for the first time (strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, strongly agree) rather than having only two extreme rating points labeled “strongly disagree” and “strongly agree” as in previous CEQ versions (Curtin University, 2011). More recently a variation of the CEQ, the **Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire** (PREQ), has been used to survey PhD and masters by research graduates (Harris & James, 2006).

Survey administration, analysis and use

CEQ responses are commonly collected online or on paper and recently, telephone has been included as a collection medium (Harris & James, 2006). Conducted annually and administered by individual institutions, data is collated and analysed by external agencies, the GCA and the Australian Council of Educational Research (ACER). The results of both the CEQ and the GDS are reported in a variety of aggregations and levels of detail by universities, GCA, ACER and the government (Harris & James, 2006), and more recently on the government-initiated My University website (www.myuniversity.gov.au). The CEQ results have also been reanalyzed and republished in a ‘digested’ format to rank universities on the basis of teaching in the commercial publication *The Good Universities Guide*.

CEQ data are used by government, the university sector and the wider public. The CEQ has been widely used “as part of a national strategy of providing universities with system-wide information which they can use to make informed judgments about the quality of the courses they are offering” (Ainley & Long, 1994; Wilson et al., 1997, p. 16), especially in comparison with other institutions.

Most Australian universities analyse and report their own CEQ data for internal purposes. For example, the University of Sydney reports using CEQ results to inform curriculum development initiatives (USyd, 2011). Most Australian universities have implemented the CEQ to evaluate the quality of teaching a year after the students graduate from those particular universities. The Edith Cowan University has developed and trialed a mid-course CEQ as an approved form of quality assurance for Learning and Teaching across the course since 2004 (Pedler, 2006). Though the short-term implementation of this model limits the confirmation whether a mid-course CEQ is effective in improving end-of-course CEQ scores or not (Pedler, 2006), anecdotal evidence suggests that staff have a greater level of “ownership” of a mid-course CEQ than with other Learning and Teaching reviews. As a result, they are more highly motivated to implement change (Pedler, 2006, p. 6).

CEQ data are also used for “public information and as a guide for quality review and improvement at course level” (Harris & James, 2006). It is assumed that most importantly, the use of the CEQ as a standard national instrument over a number of years will allow “the accumulation of time series data and the monitoring of change over time at various levels of academic organization- individual degree program, institution, field of study and, indeed, the whole national system” (Wilson et al., 1997, p. 47). In a broader sense CEQ data, particularly their clear potential to compare and rank institutions (such university ratings in the commercial guidebook *The Good Universities Guide*), are of interest to “government policy-makers, institutional management and prospective students and are used for, among other things, quality assurance, information for prospective students and, most recently, performance-based incentive funding” (Harris & James, 2006). In the past, the Australian Vice Chancellors’ Committee (AVCC) has invited universities to nominate courses which they consider to be exemplars of excellent teaching, as the basis of a “national symposium for the dissemination of best practice” (Wilson et al., 1997, p. 47). During 2005, data from the CEQ and GDS were used for the first time as performance indicators for a strategic national Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) administered by the DEST (Harris & James, 2006).

II. Policy context

The use of the CEQ sits within a complex array of policy objectives and policy settings. It was initiated in 1992 by the Australian Government and conducted annually by the Graduate Careers Council of Australia (GCA) (McInnis et al., 2001).

In 2003, the Howard Government instituted *Universities: Backing Australia’s Future* as a comprehensive package of measures to ensure “a strong and high quality higher education sector supporting future generations of Australians” (DEST, 2003). In light of this ten-year reform plan (2003- 2013), which sought to achieve “a more diverse, equitable and high quality higher education sector for Australia’s future”, a transparent and consistent policy framework was established through which universities would be “able to pursue their own strategic mission, to capitalise on their strengths and further engage regional communities” (DEST, 2003).

In 2008, the new Labor Rudd Government launched a major review to examine the future direction of the higher education sector, “its fitness for purpose in meeting the needs of the Australian community and economy, and the options for reform” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. ix). In 2009 the Government responded to the recommendations of the *Review of Australian Higher Education* (Bradley et al., 2008) with a new ten-year plan to reform Australia’s higher education system (DEEWR, 2009, p. 3). Recognising the significant role of student perception of the quality of teaching and support and their overall satisfaction, the Australian Government introduced higher education **performance funding** for teaching and learning to “serve the dual objectives of extending reach and enhancing quality” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 3). Under these arrangements, “universities will be required to negotiate targets against indicators of performance that have a direct line of sight to the

Government's broader objectives" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 3). To put it simply, "if universities achieve their targets, they will receive performance funding" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 3).

According to DEEWR, the formal objective of higher education performance funding is "to ensure that universities are contributing in negotiated ways to the national attainment and participation ambitions and enhancing the quality of their teaching and learning by working towards agreed institution-level performance targets" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 4). In 2009, the teaching performance funding available to the sector as a whole was set at \$135 million per calendar year. "Targets and performance funding" were to be "key elements of the compacts between government and universities" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 3). DEEWR indicated that "learning and teaching is the core business of any university or higher education provider". The Australian Government invested \$50.1 million over the next three and a half years (or \$14.3 million per annum) in the Australian Learning and Teaching Council in its 2010-11 Budget (DEEWR, 2011b, p. 13). In addition, the Australian Government's higher education institutional performance funding for teaching and learning was to become "8% of total institutional performance funding" in the budget 2012-13 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009a, 2009b; cited in Moodie, 2010). However, the performance funding for teaching was ephemeral and became discretionary for government. During fiscal constraints, in 2011 the government announced, "about \$240m will be saved over four years by cuts to controversial university performance funding" and it is argued that "it is students rather than universities that will bear the brunt of the cuts" (Trounson, 2011).

In light of quality assurance mechanisms and teaching- learning performance indicators, the CEQ has been asserted to provide valuable insights into the quality of the student experience (DEEWR, 2009). In fact, it has been argued that "the only measures currently available that are even indirectly related to the quality of teaching that are suitable for the learning and teaching performance fund are those taken from the course experience questionnaire" (Moodie, 2010, p. 5). For the 2011 teaching performance targets, it was proposed that "an indicator be constructed from the CEQ Overall Satisfaction Item and Good Teaching Scale, against which universities would negotiate a single target" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13). But given the limitations of the CEQ, for the 2012 targets the Government proposed "developing a new indicator of overall quality of the student's university experience" (DEEWR, 2009, p. 13).

The Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF)

In May 2003 and in response to the review of quality assurance mechanisms, particularly the assessment of teaching and learning quality, a package of reforms that includes national strategies for the promotion of teaching excellence through performance-based rewards and incentives was announced (DEEWR, 2003; Harris & James, 2006). The National Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education was formed (later renamed the Carrick Institute for Learning in Higher Education, then replaced by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council and recently announced as the Office for Learning and Teaching within DEEWR), the existing program of national Awards for University Teaching was greatly expanded, and the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) was introduced in 2006 (Harris & James, 2006; Minister for DEEWR, 2011). With an initial

\$54.7 million, the Fund highlighted the Howard Government's commitment to teaching and learning and sought to ensure the ongoing high quality of the Australian higher education sector. The premise was that additional performance-based funding was available to "encourage universities to differentiate their missions and to achieve improvements and reform in a range of areas, including teaching and workplace productivity" (DEST, 2003, p. 3).

Noticeably, while the primary aim of the LTPF was to reward universities for "excellence in learning and teaching", from 2009, the LTPF was implemented to reward "improvement as well as excellence in learning and teaching" (The University of South Queensland, 2011). Universities are ranked on the basis of existing datasets, including the CEQ and the GDS; particularly, among the seven performance indicators of the first-time implemented LTPF 2006 round, the CEQ "contributed 55% of the overall institutional score" (Harris & James, 2006). To be specific, the CEQ data scales "graduate satisfaction with generic skills", "graduate satisfaction with good teaching" and "graduate overall satisfaction" were used in the LTPF (The University of South Queensland, 2011).

The incentive money from the LTPF was not core government funding and "compared to the overall government expenditure on higher education, the allocation to the fund is modest; however, the status outcomes are significant": the most highly ranked institutions in the "league tables" each receiving a financial "performance bonus" (Harris & James, 2006). Though the LTPF was "a contentious policy within the Australian higher education", the Australian government "appears committed to the continued use of incentive funding measures as part of the overall funding model for higher education" (Harris & James, 2006). In fact, the Howard Government believed that "rewards and incentives for excellence in learning and teaching will promote the overall quality of the higher education sector, enabling excellence in learning and teaching to be placed alongside delivery of research excellence in terms of contribution to Australia's knowledge systems" (Harris & James, 2006). Yet, as fiscal conditions changed, performance funding was curtailed, and the LTPF was disestablished.

Mission-Based Compacts

In the 2009-10 Budget, the Australian Government announced a comprehensive ten-year reform package for the higher education sector in *Transforming Australia's Higher Education System*. This package introduced "higher education performance funding for teaching and learning" (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; 2009, p. 3; DEEWR, 2011c; Moodie, 2010). In 2011, the Government had three institutional performance funds: for research; for student equity; and for teaching and learning (ie the LTPF) (Moodie, 2010). Reforms announced in 2011, built on these performance funds and included the introduction of "mission-based Compacts" (DEEWR, 2011c). In essence, the mission-based Compacts are three-year agreements that show how each university's mission contributes to the Government's goals for higher education, and include details of major higher education and performance targets as well as research funding (DEEWR, 2011c). The first compacts ran from 2011-13. They were jointly managed by DEEWR and the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research (DIISR), respectively responsible for teaching and research.

Providing incentives to universities to improve outcomes for students and achieve national participation objectives is a key component of the teaching and learning section of Compacts (DEEWR, 2011c). One of the three categories of the Performance Funding Component included in the Mission-based Compacts is the category Student Experience (the other two categories are Social Inclusion and Quality of Learning Outcomes) (Hourigan & Powell, 2011) which is partly demonstrated by the CEQ.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)

To enhance teaching quality, the Government introduced a range of measures, including the creation of a national body with responsibility for regulation and quality assurance; the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) (DEEWR, 2009). TEQSA began its operations on July 30, 2011 and commenced its regulatory functions on January 30, 2012 (Evans, 2011).

In a broad sense, TEQSA was intended to “accredit providers, evaluate the performance of institutions and programs, encourage best practice, simplify current regulatory arrangements and provide greater national consistency” (DEEWR Department of Education, 2009, p. 3). Regarding quality assurance, TEQSA provides an independent assessment of whether institutions have achieved their teaching and learning performance targets under the Compacts; and the universities “that are judged to have met their targets will receive performance funding” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 5; DEEWR & DIISR, 2009). In response to *An Indicator Framework for Higher Education Teaching and Learning Performance Fund* (DEEWR, 2009), it was argued that “the development of more sophisticated measures of student outcomes must be integrated with the standards framework to be developed by TEQSA” (Probert 2011 p. 3). In essence, in this quality assurance and regulatory environment, universities are expected cooperate with TEQSA on accreditation and development of standards and continuous improvements (DEEWR, 2009).

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA)

In order to remain internationally competitive in education and to implement a demand-driven funding model, since the late 1990s, Australia has developed a quality assurance framework for higher education, the Australian Universities’ Quality Agency (AUQA) operating as its regulator, to enhance its capacity to demonstrate outcomes and appropriate standards (Bradley et al., 2008). The *Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education* suggested that “more systematic processes at both the institutional and the individual discipline level [are] needed to provide stronger assurance of organisational and academic standards” when “the current arrangements are complex, fragmented and inefficient” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 115). Harvey (2006; cited in Bradley et al., 2008) distinguishes five conceptions of quality in higher education; among which are the “fitness for purpose” and “value for money”. The former explicitly refers to the acknowledgement of diverse institutional missions and the differences in what they achieve while the latter refers to the return on investment (Harvey, 2006; cited in Bradley et al., 2008); especially when being “given the substantial public funding of higher education sector, the Australian community needs to be assured that it is getting value for its contribution” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 115).

The *Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework*, includes the components of Independent Quality Audit and Information Provision (Bradley et al., 2008). Regarding the **Independent Quality Audit**, AUQA conducts regular quality audits of universities, some other institutions and government accreditation authorities and publicly reports findings and recommendations (Bradley et al., 2008). The **Information Provision** component includes collection of data for performance indicators as the CEQ and the GDS as well as the government-provided consumer information and websites (e.g., GoingToUni.gov.au, StudyInAustralia.gov.au) (Bradley et al., 2008). Alongside this policy agency is a regular Australian Quality Forum (AuQF)- “a series of annual conferences designed to facilitate the discussion and advancement of quality assurance, quality enhancement and the sharing of good practices in universities and private providers of higher education in Australia and the Australasian region” (AUQA, 2011, p. iii).

Other teaching performance measures in Australia

Apart from the regulatory agencies, policy settings and funding arrangements, the CEQ sits within a constellation of teaching performance measurements, some of which are inter-related to the CEQ. These have instigated by different actors and for addressing different purposes.

The use of data from student experience surveys has become a common element of governments’ and of universities’ strategies to assure the quality of higher education teaching (Barrie & Ginns, 2007). In the past decade, within “the ever-mounting pressure for universities to demonstrate the quality of teaching both internally and externally”, countries across the globe have “explicit national university teaching quality assurance frameworks and many universities have their own internal teaching quality assurance process” (Barrie & Ginns, 2007, p. 275). This section presents key national and international teaching quality performance measurements apart from the CEQ.

Internal institutional-based teaching quality measurements

Intra-institutional performance measurement and comparison can provide an institution with direction and targets for progress on multiple dimensions and levels of quality (ALTC 2008). The CEQ provides for both field of study comparisons between institutions, and comparisons between fields of study within institutions. However, because the CEQ assesses graduates and assesses a whole field of study, timeliness and disaggregation is limited. To provide such data, each university typically conducts teaching and course evaluations after completion of each semester to obtain more immediate and detailed feedback about specific courses and individual teachers, rather than programs/degrees. Such evaluations are institutionally developed, but the items included in them are often drawn from or informed by CEQ and educational literature.

Moreover, each Australian university utilizes different performance assurance tools which set out “performance expectations for schools and institutes/ centres” (The University of Queensland, 2010, p. 1). For example, the Curriculum and Teaching Quality Appraisal (CTQA) management tool of the University of Queensland is an annual process that involves an evidence-based consideration of the overall quality of a school’s teaching programs; as part of the process, schools are required to “show

CEQ

cause” if their CEQ scores on relevant field/s are not among the top 3 Go8 universities (The University of Queensland, 2010, p. 1)

Graduate Destination Survey (GDS)

The GDS, which has been conducted since 1971 by the Graduate Careers Australia, collects information on the employment and salary outcomes, continuing study and labour market status, job-search behaviour, previous education history and other key respondent characteristics of graduates (DEEWR, 2011a; Harris & James, 2006). As previously mentioned, the GDS and the CEQ are components of the national Australian Graduate Survey (AGS), regarded by the Australian government as “a part of a suite of performance instruments that improve transparency in university performance” (DEEWR, 2011a, p. 1).

University Experience Survey (UES)

Being part of a suite of performance measurement instruments, the UES is a newer measure designed to collect information about current students’ (not recent graduates) engagement and their satisfaction with their university studies “at the end of the first semester or at the beginning of the second semester of their first year of university study” (DEEWR, 2009, p. 15). Initiated in 2011, the UES is designed to measure aspects of student experience associated with high level learning outcomes such as student engagement, student-staff interactions and academic challenge (DEEWR, 2011d). A trial of the UES instrument occurred during 2011, and is being conducted annually since 2012.

Teaching Quality Indicator (TQI)

Another recent initiative is the composite Teaching Quality Indicator (TQI). Instead of measuring teaching performance as outcomes, it focuses on assessing teaching performance based on inputs. Thus it includes staff qualifications, professional development, teacher induction programs and peer review, and focuses on universities’ efforts on enhancing academics’ teaching skills (DEEWR, 2011c). The universities’ TQI information was designed to be published on the *MyUniversity* website from 2013 onwards after successful development and trial (DEEWR, 2011c). A number of universities were involved in the pilot of the TQI during 2008-09, for its implementation. For example, the University of Western Australia introduced a number of projects to improve the way it rewards and recognises teaching staff as part of a national Teaching Quality Indicators project (The University of Western Australia, 2011).

International teaching quality performance measures

Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) – USA & OECD

The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) has been widely administered in the United States since 2000 and has been adopted by the OECD as “the basis for assessment of generic skills” in its Assessment of Higher Education Learning Outcomes (AHELO) in order to provide international benchmarking (DEEWR, 2011b).

In essence, the CLA provides valuable data to assess the learning outcomes of first year and final year undergraduate students regarding their “critical thinking, analytical reasoning, problem solving and written communication competencies obtained during their university degree” (DEEWR, 2011b, p. 1). In 2011, the Australian government signaled its intention to development and trial the CLA in Australian universities and published results on the *MyUniversity* website from 2013 onwards (DEEWR, 2011b).

National Student Survey (NSS) - UK

The National Student Survey has been used nationally by universities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland since 2005 (Barrie, Ginns, & Symons, 2008) to “assist prospective students in making choices; to provide a source of data for public accountability and to assist institutions in quality enhancement activities” (Sharpe, 2007; Barrie et al., 2008). The NSS is partly adapted from the CEQ; however, unlike the CEQ, the NSS is administered to students in their final year of study, rather than after graduation (Barrie et al., 2008).

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) - USA

First piloted in 1999, the NSSE was developed from the College Student Experience Questionnaire (CSEQ) that explicitly links students’ ratings of their participation in teaching and learning activities (student engagement) with their self-report of progress towards development of key outcomes (Barrie et al., 2008). It has been argued that the principles of the NSSE are “not supported by the same level of empirical research that underpins the scales of the CEQ” (Barrie et al., 2008, p. 32).

Italy’s Short Form Questionnaire (SFQ)

In order to enhance teaching performance and to ensure homogenous evaluation in all Italian universities, since 199 Italian universities have invited university students to complete questionnaires relating to the quality of teaching experienced. The SFQ shares some features of the CEQ regarding students’ opinions on the study workload, evaluation of course structure of teachers, lesson and satisfaction (Barrie et al., 2008).

Cross-national initiatives

Two international consortia of universities in which some Australian universities participate, the Academic Consortia 21 (AC21) and Universitas 21 have also sought to enhance teaching performance within each consortia. AC21 has explored “the possibility of using a common student feedback instrument across member institutions to gather data on student experiences for benchmarking purposes” (Barrie et al., 2008, p. 36). The survey being used for this is the University of Sydney’s Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ), which is an adaptation of the CEQ for use with currently enrolled students (Barrie et al., 2008). In fact, the SCEQ has been used at other non-Australian universities such as Oxford in the UK (Barrie et al., 2008).

III. Justification and rationale

This section presents prominent policy justifications for using the CEQ. Education is at the core of any national agenda for economic and social change and development. It is often argued that Australia needs a higher education sector that is “responsive to unpredictable change on a global scale” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 3). Tertiary education is “a major driver of economic competitiveness in an increasingly knowledge-driven global economy (OECD 2008a, p. 23; cited in Bradley et al., 2008, p. 4) and “higher education with its twin functions of teaching and research” is anticipated to “make a critical contribution to the nation’s capacity to adapt and to shape the nature of social and economic change” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 4).

As the Bradley report summarized, the policy directions in higher education in Australia over the last two decades have been improving productivity and efficiency in higher education, introducing competitive or performance-based funding and increasing the diversity of university income sources, including from international students (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 4). Noticeably, Australia was “once a world leader in the measurement of student perceptions with the development and introduction of the Course Experience Questionnaire in 1993” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 79)..

Competitive Performance and Funding

Some argue that Australia has been losing ground against a variety of its competitor countries on a range of indicators. In order for Australia to attain a long-term competitive position, the Bradley report argued that the Australian Government should make a similar choice to other countries in increasing their investment in tertiary education so that the citizens can use knowledge to “help create national competitive advantage” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 3). Moreover, it argued that if

“the Australian Government publicly committed to ensuring that it stayed within the top group of Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD) nations in relation to the quality and performance of its tertiary education system and developed transparent measures to track and report its achievement annually, greater clarity would exist

in relation to the inevitable debates about what is the right level of public funding and what should be expected from this level of public funding” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 3).

Such an initiative was viewed as not only making it less likely that Australia would fall behind other countries, but also maintain “the real wealth of the nation – the capacity of its people – permanently on the public agenda” (p. 3). As can be seen in the above quote, performance measurement and reporting is at the heart of driving this agenda.

Visible performance reporting, it is argued, helps provide public support for public funding of universities. There has been a steady decline in the proportion of university revenue provided by the Australian Government. In 2006, universities were found to “receive [on average] less than half of their annual revenue from public funding” (Harris & James, 2006), and this has declining since then. CEQ is one performance indicator which is used for universities to compete for students and more institutional budgets, based on the comparison of the quality of teaching in the annual CEQ reports of universities and made visible in the *Good Universities Guide* (Harris & James, 2006). In essence, there is a belief in government that “performance-based funding with the combination of financial rewards and substantial prestige effects will focus institutional activities and energies in beneficial ways” (Harris & James, 2006).

Accountability

Funding systems require appropriate public accountability frameworks to ensure that both the government and the community can have confidence in higher education and to assure the efficient as well as effective use of public funding (Bradley, et al., 2008, p. 174). Importantly, the accountability for the performance of institutions within the largely demand-based funding framework proposed in the *Review of Australian Higher Education* should aspire to be relatively “simple, clear and transparent” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 175). Hence, simple, aggregate, numerical performance data are preferred instrument to more qualitative, audit-like processes.

Outcomes-based accountability system which “focuses on the ‘value’ added to students by their higher education experience, in terms of satisfaction with the quality of their experience and the quality of the skills they have developed” (Chalmers, 2008, p. 5) is a further dimension of accountability that performance measurement can potentially provide. This approach is aligned with the “student as customer” culture (Chalmers, 2008, p. 5), the “performativity” (Lyotard, 1984; cited in Hardy, 2010), and “‘audit culture’ ...which is seen as demanding improved output in teaching and research” (Hardy, 2010, p. 392).

Transparency

Currently, there has been a greater transparency of higher education than previously; not only in terms of funding, when the Australian community needs to be assured that public funding investment is “getting value for its contribution” (Bradley et al., 2008), but also with regards to information transparency about the features and quality of the education system. The strength of Australia’s

quality assurance regime as well as government transparency have seen Australia placed second in a new international index rating countries on their policies regarding the engagement and promotion of internationalisation in higher education (Hare, 2011). In fact, the transparency of Australia's higher education sector is regarded as having benefitted international education (Hare, 2011). The public reporting of additional university performance data as it becomes available on the *MyUniversity* website is also viewed as enhancing transparency (DEEWR, 2011). The creation of *MyUniversity*, a publicly available website with performance data, was argued to "support the move to a new more student-centered higher education system and improve transparency" because "universities' performance against the participation indicators to be used for performance funding will be published" there (DEEWR, 2011a).

International Comparisons and Competition in the Higher Education System

In the context of an increasingly international and market-oriented higher education system, benchmarking performance against other countries is another argument put forward for using performance measurement (Bradley et al., 2008). Indeed, the CEQ has been one of the popular performance indicators of teaching effectiveness to be used for this purpose. Apparently, high levels of student satisfaction helps to maintain global competitiveness by attracting international students; indeed, by international standards, the satisfaction of students with the quality of Australian higher education teaching and learning is of great concern (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 11). Noticeably, a 2008 *University World News* analysis ranked the Australian system third in the world (Gerritsen, 2008; cited in Bradley et al., 2008, p. 2). Other reports have the level of student satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning of Australia as significantly behind that of the United Kingdom, The United States and Canada (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 11). With regards to the item Overall Satisfaction item of the CEQ, in each of the years 2005-2007 the UK performed 15% higher than Australia on average (85% versus 70%, respectively) (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 75). The Bradley report argued that given the slow rate of improvement, it will be a long time before the Australian results are comparable to those achieved in the United Kingdom unless action is taken, and proposed "greater recognition is needed in government and within the community about the competitive position of the Australian tertiary education system" (2008, p. 3). In this case performance measurement can be seen as highlighting a problem and providing a justification for government action and funding.

Skilled workforce demand

In response to the increasing labour-market demand, the demand for good-quality teaching is high (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 24) to improve student outcomes and to meet socioeconomic demands. In a recent report *Skills for Prosperity Information Sessions: A road map for Vocational Education and Training* (Skills Australia, 2011), recommendations were made on the basis that "Australia is poised for long-term prosperity through the resources boom but will be held back unless we can meet the requirement for the additional skills our economy demands and ensure those skills are well used" (Skills Australia, 2011, p. iii). The importance of good tertiary teaching is also seen in addressing skills shortages: "Australia has suffered persistent skill shortages in a number of professional areas

served by the higher education sector” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 17). These realities critically result in more pressure on the quality of university teaching to meet future skills needs and to “improve workforce participation, enterprise productivity and social inclusion” (Skills Australia, 2011, p. iii) .

Better information for student choice

Australian higher education institutions play a significant role in information provision as part of their marketing to students (Bradley et al., 2008). The public availability of good quality information on courses and institutions about higher education and for current and potential students is generally “a form of ‘soft’ regulation that can help to improve the workings of the Australian higher education system” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 138). The results of performance in the CEQ and a variety of other Australian student experience surveys (e.g. GDS, the Australian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)) are factors that influence student choice (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 139). One of the suggestions to the Bradley review involved requiring “aggregated teacher, course and student survey data to be available in a consistent format on university websites for benchmarking purposes” (p. 138), for this very purpose.

Providing students with a stimulating and rewarding higher education experience

A high-quality student experience has been regarded as central to the future of higher education; especially when the Australian student body is highly diverse and changing rapidly (Bradley et al., 2008). In this diverse and complex environment, the most effective way to ensure that students enjoy a stimulating and rewarding educational experience is to encourage Australia’s higher education sector to have the flexibility and “to be responsive to student demand”. This requires that higher education providers have the flexibility “to be rewarded for the quality of their teaching and research” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 69). Changes over the last decade have significantly increased the personal financial cost of higher education to tertiary students and have reinforced student perceptions that “they are customers with a right to good service” (Bradley et al., 2008, p. 71). Having choice, accountability and an opportunity for feedback on performance is an essential element in a customer-service provider relationship.

IV. Final reflections

The governance of Australia’s higher education, while having specific domestic conditions, reflects international trends in the globalisation of tertiary education. Not only is this a trend of a university as a largely independent, autonomous, self-regulating institution to one that is more complex, integrated into society and more regulated by government within a marketised public service milieu, but it also sits within a competitive international marketplace for students. This policy summary sketches the way in which the CEQ is part of a wider performance regime of teaching in Australia’s higher education and has a parallel performance regime for university research (see Gable, 2013).

CEQ

The CEQ forms part of this performance regime, which a range of funding, governance and reporting mechanisms. The function of the CEQ is nevertheless important and particular, namely to assess the overall experience of a recent graduate of their field of study within a specific institution. This is the design purpose of the instrument. As such performance data is unable to be disaggregated to reflect particular courses/subjects or be attributed to specific teachers. Yet, the CEQ is enmeshed with a multiplying constellation of other teaching performance measurements that seek to cover the multiplicity of teaching experience. Indeed, the CEQ has arguably given rise to some of these.

While the centrality of the state in the governance of university teaching performance is evident, what is also interesting in the case of the CEQ, is its origin from within the university sector by academics, not the state. The state has latterly adopted and mobilised it more broadly to advance its own multiple goals and agendas.

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