1. Introduction

The Teaching Quality Indicators (TQI) benchmarking statements have been developed as a tool from the TQI Framework. They provide an opportunity for Australian higher education institutions to review their policy, procedures and practices against the TQI Framework and determine priorities in learning and teaching for enhancement and development based on evidence. The criteria contained in the benchmark statements are supported by the research as likely to contribute to improved student learning outcomes (Chalmers, 2007).

The TQI project is a national Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) funded project aimed at developing indicators and metrics for evaluating teaching and learning in Australian higher education institutions. Stage 1 of the project involved the development of the TQI Framework. Stage 2 involved a trial implementation of the TQI Framework developed in Stage 1 by eight pilot universities. As part of that implementation, the University of Western Australia and Macquarie University have jointly developed the TQI benchmarking statements for the reward and recognition of teaching and learning. This collaboration came about as a result of the similar focus of the two institutions’ pilot projects, and an early decision to use the TQI project as an opportunity to pursue a benchmarking relationship.

The TQI Framework identifies four dimensions of practice that have the potential to impact on student learning outcomes:

- Assessment
- Diversity
- Engagement and Learning Community
- Institutional Climate and Systems

These are then broken down to reflect the different levels within an institution – Institution, Faculty/Department, and Individual. They also reflect the different types of performance indicators (input, process, output, outcomes) (see Figure 1).

The benchmark statements have been developed from the ‘Rewarding and Recognising Teaching’ component of the Institutional Climate and Systems dimension of the Framework, drawing specifically from the institution and department level indicators. Further benchmarks for other dimensions of the Framework are under development by other pilot universities, but may require an adjusted methodology.
2. The Benchmarks

The benchmarks are specifically designed to evaluate the value placed on learning and teaching by an institution through its reward and recognition structures and to provide a method to further enhance this value. Therefore, whilst some of the processes covered by the benchmarks are relevant to the way that research and service (community engagement) are valued by an institution, the statements do not make any comment on these facets of the academic career role, focusing solely on learning and teaching issues.

Benchmarks have been developed for evaluation at two different levels of the university – institution and department. Future development may also see statements developed at the individual teacher level where appropriate, however these have not been developed in the institutional climate and systems dimension at this stage.

The benchmarks are designed for evaluating qualitative process-based indicators, and are most powerful when used as a developmental tool (Chalmers, 2007). The benchmark statements are necessarily a qualitative tool, and whilst they allow comparisons to be made, any assessment of performance using the statements will require contextualisation and should be undertaken as part of a developmental process not a ranking system.

The institution level benchmarks provide indications of best practice for ‘whole of university’ policy and procedure, and are the main tool for universities to set developmental priorities and undertake benchmarking exercises. The departmental level benchmarks can be used to evaluate individual organisational units within an institution that have responsibility for teaching and learning. They could also be used by teaching staff, particularly in a university with a devolved structure. For universities with highly centralised organisational structures some of the benchmarks which have been designated departmental level may be appropriate to be evaluated at the institutional level. The departmental level benchmarks may also be used internally within a university to monitor performance as part of regular review cycles, alongside their developmental role.

3. The Criteria

Each benchmark statement is a description of ‘best practice’ based on an element of the TQI Framework. They are aspirational statements which universities can work toward. Within each benchmark statement a number of criteria have been defined which act both as tools for the
university to evaluate their practice within the area under review, and also as suggested actions for
development. So where it is identified that a particular area needs improvement to reach the
benchmark, the criteria suggest a way forward.

4. The Rubric
Each criterion is evaluated according to a rubric which defines four levels of performance. The
rubric is a way of assigning a level of performance to a qualitative indicator – it represents a
continuum of practice along a line from ‘no engagement’ to ‘best practice.’ The rubric can be
presented numerically or using a ‘Yes; Yes, but; No, but; No’ representation:

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Each level has been assigned a stage in the developmental cycle “Review, Develop, Implement,
Evaluate”, where the criterion is an action that universities can take to improve practice. This is
intended to assist universities in deciding how to respond to the assessment of their performance in a
particular area.

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<thead>
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<th>Level</th>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Evaluate</td>
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The inclusion of the developmental cycle is intended as a guide only; a university may have a
legitimate response to the benchmark statements which does not fit this type of cycle.

There is no expectation that a university will be aiming for level 4 for all of the criteria, or in each
benchmark. Each institution has different priorities, objectives and contextual realities. There are
some criteria that may not be relevant to an institution at all stages of their development cycles. It is
intended that levels are assigned in conjunction with an assessment of priorities (see below) and this
will determine what level is deemed to be acceptable in relation to performance for each university.

5. Using the benchmarks
The benchmarks are designed to be used in conjunction with other resources from the TQI
framework. It is recommended that institutions considering the use of the benchmarks for internal
review purposes ensure that they are familiar with the TQI framework as a whole, and are fully
committed to a process of review and development. The benchmark statements do not have value as
a ‘check list’ or ‘tick-box’ exercise, but should be considered as part of a qualitative process of
engagement with evaluative issues.

The main purpose of the benchmarks are as a self-assessment tool for institutions to identify
priorities for development and ways forward which are based in evidence. They may also be used
comparatively with other like institutions, and can be incorporated in to internal evaluative
mechanisms at the departmental and individual levels.

5.1. Self-Assessment
In all cases, universities will use the benchmark to undertake a self-assessment of policy and practice.
5.1.1. Rank each benchmark statement in order of priority for the institution. This ranking will reflect pre-existing priorities, but should nevertheless be based in evidence.

5.1.2. Rank each criterion within each benchmark in order of perceived importance to the university’s mission and objectives at this time.

5.1.3. Where a benchmark is not appropriate to the organisational structure or mission of the university, it should be ranked zero. [Where it is intended that the benchmarks be used comparatively with another institution decisions about which benchmarks should be evaluated will need to be made in consultation with the partner university(s)]

5.1.4. Assign each criterion a level of achievement according to the descriptors in the rubric. Record the evidence which has been used to reach the conclusions made, and include any relevant contextual information (e.g. policy documentation; reported output indicators etc.) – see next section

5.1.5. Undertake an analysis of the priorities identified in steps 1 and 2 against the level of achievement assigned in step 4 to determine where resources and development effort should be directed. Where the benchmark statements are being used comparatively it is at this stage that universities will compare their self-assessments (see below). The development cycle included in the rubric may be useful to assist in identifying the appropriate action to take, and other TQI resources may also be helpful in suggesting ways forward for those areas which the exercise has suggested need development.

5.2. Comparative Benchmarking

Where the statements are being used as part of a comparative benchmarking exercise the participating universities will compare their self-assessments.

This process should involve not only a comparison of the rankings assigned for each criterion to determine performance, but also an analysis of the evidence used to support those rankings (moderation), and a conversation in which the participants swap strategies and techniques that have been shown to be effective in working toward best practice.

The purpose of such an exercise is two-fold – firstly, for each university to ensure that their practice is appropriate and competitive (and where this is not the case to identify potential for improvement), and secondly, for universities to take advantage of each other’s strengths and engage in collaborative projects and programs for the enhancement of teaching quality.

Any benchmarking exercise should be underpinned by an agreement by the universities involved for complete disclosure and full and honest discussion of performance and achievement in order that the exercise can be used to enhance practice.

5.3. Internal evaluative systems

The benchmarks can be incorporated in to ongoing evaluative systems of the university as part of regular review cycles.

Where policy documentation is regularly reviewed the appropriate institutional level benchmark can be used as a reference against which policy content review occurs.

Where regular reviews are undertaken for Schools, faculties or courses, the departmental level benchmarks can be incorporated in to the terms of reference and/or used by the unit under review to provide evidence on performance.
5.4. Individual benchmarks

In the future, if benchmarks are developed at the individual teacher level in dimensions such as assessment, these statements could be used by teachers, teaching teams, or coordinators to evaluate their teaching practices and develop enhancements. These statements may work in conjunction with departmental level or institutional level benchmarks, but serve a different purpose in that they will be professional development tools for staff rather than tools for improving systems or policy across the university.

6. Evidence

All decisions relating to the ranking of a particular criterion within a particular level need to be supported by evidence which is collated as part of the self-assessment process. This section suggests some sources and types of evidence which may be relevant for each benchmark. This list is by no means exhaustive, and nor would all universities be expected to be able to draw on each of the types of evidence suggested – they are illustrative examples of the types of places to which an institution might look to provide evidence of the quality of their reward and recognition structures.

For criteria which require evidence of the alignment of policy with strategic / operational directions; evidence of particular content (e.g. clear criteria); or evidence of a particular type of program (e.g. induction) extracts from policy and procedural documentation may be sufficient as evidence – the level of performance will be determined by the percentage of policy documentation which meets the criteria, and by the content of that documentation.

For criteria which require evidence of the effectiveness of policy / procedure / practice other sources of evidence will be required, and this evidence will change depending on the criteria. Some examples of quantitative data which may be relevant for demonstrating the effectiveness of particular groups of policy / procedures are:

- Satisfaction data for staff; particularly those with a teaching focus
- Nos of staff appointed and/or promoted on the basis of teaching
- Participation and completion rates in professional development of teaching programs
- Nos of external teaching awards and teaching research grants
- Outputs for teaching research
- Trend data over time showing improvement in student evaluation data and other student success indicators (retention; progression etc.) following review or revision of a particular group of policies / procedures
- Validity testing (for student evaluation instruments)
- Improved student / peer evaluations of teaching following participation in a process designed to improve teaching quality (e.g. performance review; professional development workshop) either at an individual academic level, or at the departmental level where relevant

These suggested quantitative indicators are only one aspect of the way that effectiveness can be evidenced, particularly as many of them are crude indicators, and not all universities will be collecting the types of data suggested as relevant here. Universities may have other measures of the effectiveness of their policy / procedures in this area and these should of course be included.

Many policies will be subject to regular review or evaluation and these processes may also provide other evidence of their effectiveness which is relevant. Often during the development of a new
policy or procedure research and development is undertaken that may be able to provide evidence relating to the effectiveness of different approaches to policy / procedure in these areas (e.g. there may be research evidence that the results from a particular system of student evaluations are more likely to enhance learning and teaching quality – a university which can demonstrate that it is using this system can use this as proxy evidence of effectiveness). Lastly, adoption of a university’s approach to a particular policy area by other institutions in the sector may also be used as evidence of its effectiveness.

Some of the other criteria contained in the benchmarks may also lend themselves to being supported by evidence other than extracted policy documentation. In particular, criteria which refer to the support provided by the institution / department may be supported by satisfaction data, but also by funding input data (provision of resources). Criteria which refer to recognising diversity may also be able to be supported by disaggregated statistics relating to diversity characteristics.

7. Resources
The benchmarking tool currently consists of the following:

7.1. Benchmark statements ‘rewarding and recognising teaching’ – institutional level
Seven benchmark statements with associated criteria:

7.1.1. Appointment
7.1.2. Probation
7.1.3. Performance, Development and Review
7.1.4. Promotion
7.1.5. Professional development
7.1.6. Awards, Grants and Scholarships
7.1.7. Evaluations of Teaching

7.2. Benchmark statements ‘rewarding and recognising teaching’ – departmental level
Four benchmark statements with associated criteria:

7.2.1. Professional Development
7.2.2. Teacher Support
7.2.3. Awards, Grants and Scholarships
7.2.4. Evaluations of Teaching

7.3. Worksheets for ranking priorities
Two worksheets for use in ranking the priority order of the benchmark statements and each of their constituent criteria

8. Glossary
The benchmark statements developed by the University of Western Australia and Macquarie University have attempted to use language which is commonly understood and internally consistent. Given however that the statements are intended to be used across the Australian higher education sector, this glossary is included to ensure consistency of interpretation. Only those terms which have been identified as potentially subject to confusion have been included here.

Course –

Departmental – policy, procedures, guidelines specific to an organisational unit within the university which has responsibility for teaching and learning matters, or for teaching staff

Institution – university-wide, centrally determined policy, procedure or guideline
**Instrument** – the survey or interview methodology used to gather evaluative data.

**Peer Review of Teaching** – any process, formal or informal, whereby a staff member seeks feedback from a peer in relation to their teaching – can include formal peer observation and peer review of materials, but also informal teaching and learning communities of shared practice.

**Performance, Development and Review** – all and any policy, procedure or guideline relating to the regular or cyclical review of an individual academic staff member, either for the purpose of professional development, and/or for performance review / appraisal purposes. Does not include promotion processes.

**Probation** – the period between appointment and confirmation of ongoing status (or tenure) for a new staff member.

**Program** –

**Strategic and Operational Objectives** – this term is used broadly to refer to the university’s mission, values and objectives usually as they are interpreted through a strategic and/or operational planning document (but not necessarily), or other management or planning document at either the institution or section level. In some cases strategic objectives for particular policy areas may need to be implied from general university mission statements, in others detailed information about the strategic direction of the university in relation to a particular policy area may be available.

**Student evaluations of teaching** – any survey instrument or other evaluative technique (e.g. focus groups) where the views of students are sought in relation to their learning experience. This includes both teacher and course evaluations

**Study Leave** – Any type of leave which provides a period of release from regular duties for the primary purpose of research and/or scholarly work (which may or may not include teaching related scholarship). This type of leave is also known as: sabbatical, outside study program; professional experience program etc.