

University Teaching Criteria & Standards Framework

James Cook University Case Study Summary

17th September 2016

Project focus

The key area of focus for JCU was the development of criteria for promotion in the domain of learning and teaching. A strongly collaborative relationship between the human resource department and learning and teaching leadership group enabled constructive dialogue. While a reorganisation within HR and restructure of University during 2014 was a potential challenge, the project expanded scope to inform a comprehensive statement of academic expectations.

University Profile

JCU was established in 1970, and is now a multi-campus institution with main campuses in the cities of Cairns, Singapore and Townsville, with smaller study centres in Mount Isa, Thursday Island and Mackay. Students come from diverse backgrounds including over 5% Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The University offers courses in the Arts, Biomedical Sciences, Business, Creative Media, Dentistry, Education, Engineering, Healthcare Sciences, Information Technology, Law, Medicine, Nursing and Midwifery, Pharmacy, Planning, Psychological Science, Science, Social Work, Sustainability and Veterinary Science. In addition to a mandate to serve the region of North Queensland, the University has a particular mission to focus on the tropical regions of the globe.

Institutional context

Academic Promotion guidelines and related application forms were revised in 2013 prior to the endorsement of a new Enterprise Agreement (EA). Teaching and learning criteria were included in the 2013 revision, but the criteria were not aligned to the EA. JCU has actively supported promotion of academic staff based on learning and teaching but the basis for success in learning and teaching were unclear.

In 2013 teaching performance within the promotion process was described as: satisfactory, superior, outstanding. Applicants for promotion developed their own justifications for their claim of meeting the nominated criterion. Standards of performance were entirely absent.

Political imperative

JCU implemented a new JCU Enterprise Agreement (2014 – 2016) with new Work Profiles defining Teaching Specialist academic roles, alongside the traditional teaching-research academic and a new category of research intensive academic. The EA provided more clarity as to how teaching load would be considered within each work profile but required further articulation in relation to the quality of teaching to be expected. Alongside the new EA the University restructure during 2013-2014 created significant momentum for reform of promotion policy and procedures. The DVC-A role (introduced in JCU only in 2012) also created further impetus to acknowledge teaching

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achievements as did the introduction of a robust student evaluation of teaching survey instrument. Additionally, the EA required a revised performance management framework.

During 2014, support for reform of promotion processes was significant, but the very significant organisational change agenda marred the ability of key personnel to coordinate responses to the new work profiles in relation to promotion. Investment in IT infrastructure remains critical to enable user friendly technical capabilities that map teaching workload, monitor performance management processes

A new business intelligence system introduced in 2013 enabled increasingly sophisticated metrics (in particular teaching evaluation and student success data). The architecture for measurement of research performance and teaching performance remained fundamentally discrete systems with few staff expert in use of both teaching and learning related and research systems.

In 2013, the approach to assessing learning and teaching performance within the promotion process named 'satisfactory' as the minimum required teaching standard, but there was minimal articulation of the nature of such satisfactory performance.

Teaching criteria

In 2014, promotion criteria for teaching performance allowed individual academic staff to identify teaching as Satisfactory, Superior or Outstanding, with no standard descriptors for performance at any of these levels. During 2014 as part of the project, indicative domains of teaching performance were identified, paralleling those in the Australian Universities Teaching Criteria Project. Initially, a guide was developed to highlight performance standards for student learning, the student experience, curriculum development, professional learning, leadership and scholarship of learning and teaching. Standards of performance were drafted for satisfactory, superior and outstanding performance for each of these domains, but not for academic classification levels.

Approach to implementation

As the project developed, an organisational development focus emerged: with a priority to align recruitment, probation, performance management and promotion processes with consistent messages around expected teaching performance.

Evidence from teaching evaluations and peer reviews of teaching have been a requirement for promotion applications for a number of years. However, the relationship between the submission of these and standards of performance was unclear.

Over the course of the project the focus on promotion and specification of teaching criteria moved to alignment of criteria across all phases of employment lifecycle, commencing at recruitment, through Probation, PMP, promotion and in the converse – unsatisfactory performance.

Most recently, the University has employed, under the direction of the new HR Director, a training specialist who has a focus on organisational development. Continued collaboration between key staff within learning and teaching and HR should enable this alignment during 2015.

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The University's new student evaluation of teaching system (2013) enabled significantly improved benchmarking of student feedback. Staff are able to compare their feedback as compared to the mean performance in their discipline, class size, College and University. Peer review of teaching is required to be submitted as part of the evaluation process along with a statement in relation to student learning. The domains outlined above align with the [Four Q Model of Evaluation](#) that is now used systematically to support applicants for promotion.

Engagement with the revisions to the promotion process included a range of processes. A new application form was distributed along with designated resources. Briefing sessions with applicants were conducted by the Deputy Director HR, Raelene Eves. A designated workshop on building the evidence required within each learning and teaching domain was conducted by Teaching and Learning Development staff members, Dr Glenn Harrison and Professor Angela Hill. Deans and promotion panel members were also briefed.

Role of the AUTCAS framework

Participation in the AUTCAS project propelled the revision of the promotion criteria and led to the definition of performance standards, initially at satisfactory, superior and outstanding levels and later at the levels of academic classification (lecturer, senior lecturer, professor etc). In the 2016 promotion round there is now clear descriptors for teaching performance embedded in the promotion requirements. The promotion application process foregrounds the requirements for teaching performance that parallel the domains of the AUTCAS framework.

Achievements and emerging issues

During 2014 the Teaching and Learning Development Unit embarked on a comprehensive revision of promotion criteria supported by HR personnel. Promotion applicants are now required to prepare a detailed portfolio of evidence to support their claims for promotion in a range of domains:

- Student learning (including student success indicators)
- Student experience (as evidenced by survey data and other sources)
- Curriculum development including evidence of engagement with contemporary practice
- Professional learning (as a key indicator of reflection on practice including formal Peer Reviews of Teaching)
- Leadership in learning and teaching (including designated coordination roles)
- Scholarship and research in learning and teaching

The draft 2014 criteria for each domain were developed and in 2016 these have been further refined as a comprehensive set of academic expectations.

The key unanticipated outcomes of the project relate to the expanded focus from promotion criteria to an organisational development focus. Initial feedback from promotion panel members indicated significant engagement in the draft teaching criteria.

There remains a need to engage with broader stakeholders to confirm the approach to standards in each area of academic work. Ideally, the descriptors for 'satisfactory, superior and outstanding' would be replaced with clear expectations at each academic level and for each work profile.

A U S T R A L I A N

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This work is well underway with the development of a clear set of academic expectations at each academic classification standard now endorsed by the Vice-Chancellors' advisory committee. The work required now is to align the probation and performance development process with the promotion criteria.

For further information on this Case Study please contact:

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