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Dear Ms Baly

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the discussion paper on the future directions of the learning and teaching performance fund.

Griffith University welcomes the increased attention being given to learning and teaching in higher education and supports proposals to improve the sector's performance. However, the success of such a program depends on the sector having confidence in the measures used to assess learning and teaching performance, which is clearly not evident yet. The learning and teaching performance fund is credible only if the method used to allocate it is within the limits of the measures used to assess performance. Again, this was obviously not true for the allocation of the fund for 2006.

The first priority, then, should be to improve the measures the Government uses to assess learning and teaching performance and the method it uses to allocate the fund so that the sector has confidence in them. Secondly, a program that is realistically available to only a minority of institutions will not attract the broad and strong participation of all institutions. The fund should therefore be allocated in a way that encourages wide participation in the fund to improve learning and teaching. Griffith supports the position put by Innovative Research Universities Australia of which it is a member that the Government should refine its current program rather than invent something altogether new. The Australian Government should therefore not add any indicator or requirement that does not contribute to these priorities until they have been met.

Stage 1, response rates, graduate skills assessment

The Australian Government should set a minimum response rate for the course experience questionnaire and the graduate destination survey. The Government should exclude scores from surveys that do not meet the minimum. It should also make achieving the minimum response rate a condition of stage 1 of the fund and allocate some funds to institutions that meet the conditions of stage 1.

There are major problems with using the graduate skills assessment for the learning and teaching performance fund which should not be introduced until the Department has solved the problems with the indicators it is currently using.

Fields of education

Learning and teaching performance should be assessed within field of education because it reflects the design of some of the instruments used in assessing performance such as the course experience questionnaire (Wilson et al, 1996: 4) and because it is a better use of the other measures. Assessing institutions' learning and teaching performance by field of education is more consistent with the research quality framework which is being designed to assess institutions' research performance within field of research, rather than institutional performance in research overall.

There are difficulties with some institutions having small numbers of graduates and thus responses in some fields of education, but these are no greater than the difficulties that the Department creates by attempting to generate institution-wide results from instruments that were not designed for this purpose. If institutions achieve the minimum recommended response rate of 50% in each field of education 200 domestic graduates should produce enough responses to produce reliable results. Table 1 shows that three-quarters or more table A institutions have 200 or more domestic graduates in 3 fields, and almost two-thirds of institutions have 200 or more domestic graduates in 4 fields.

TABLE 1: NUMBER AND PROPORTION OF TABLE A INSTITUTIONS WITH 200 OR MORE DOMESTIC GRADUATES IN EACH BROAD FIELD OF EDUCATION, 2003

Broad field of education	Table A institutions	
	Number	%
Management and commerce	34	87%
Education	32	82%
Society and culture	32	82%
Health	30	77%
Natural and physical sciences	24	62%
Information technology	19	49%
Engineering and related technologies	16	41%

Source: DEST (2005) Students 2004 [full year]: selected higher education statistics, appendix 2.11 award course completions for domestic students by State, institution and broad field of education, 2003

Table 2 shows that almost all table A institutions have at least 3 fields with 200 or more domestic graduates. The exceptions are the Australian Maritime College which is amalgamating with the University of Tasmania, the University of the Sunshine Coast which should be allowed to develop before being subjected to learning and teaching performance fund assessment, and Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University, for which special arrangements may be made.

TABLE 2: NUMBER OF FIELDS WITH 200 OR MORE DOMESTIC GRADUATES AT EACH TABLE A INSTITUTION, 2003

No. of fields	Institutions
10	Melbourne
9	QUT, RMIT, Sydney, UTS
8	Curtin, Monash, UNSW

No. of fields	Institutions
7	Charles Sturt, Deakin, Griffith, Macquarie, Newcastle, Tasmania, UniSA, UWS
6	Edith Cowan, Victoria, UWA, Wollongong
5	Adelaide, Flinders, James Cook, La Trobe, Southern Cross, Swinburne
4	CQU, Murdoch, USQ
3	ACU, ANU, Ballarat, Canberra, UNE
2	Charles Darwin
1	Maritime College
0	Batchelor, Sunshine Coast

Source: DEST (2005) Students 2004 [full year]: selected higher education statistics, appendix 2.11 award course completions for domestic students by State, institution and broad field of education, 2003

Confidence intervals and banding

It is misleading for the Australian Government to publish scores without also publishing confidence levels. This will show that very little separates most institutions. The Australian Government should therefore report results by broad bands. Since the method used for assessing learning and teaching performance does not discriminate well between institutions there should be a much flatter distribution of learning and teaching performance fund between each band.

Correction for regional employment conditions; graduate starting salaries

The Department adjusts each institution's graduate destination survey fulltime employment rate by the total unemployment rate for each institution's region, but the correct adjustment is not the region's total employment rate but the region's graduates or professionals' employment rate. Some regions' professionals' employment rate may be heavily influenced by just one or two institutions in the region, for which additional corrections would have to be made. Adding graduates' starting salaries would compound the difficulties. The Australian Government should not add to these problems until it has solved the problems with the indicators it is currently using.

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Reference

Wilson, K L, Lizzio, A & Ramsden P (1996) 'The use and validation of the Course Experience Questionnaire', *Occasional papers No.6*, Griffith Institute for Higher Education, Brisbane.