

Response to the discussion paper for the 2009 learning and teaching performance fund

Griffith University welcomes this opportunity to comment on the process proposed for the 2009 learning and teaching performance fund.

Construct validity

The learning and teaching performance fund is allocated by a collection of disparate measures which do not seem to correlate strongly, unlike most of the measures used to allocate the institutional block research grants. The learning and teaching performance fund indicators therefore probably don't measure anything real, and certainly not teaching quality, when they are aggregated to one result such a band for a discipline group.

- 1 The Australian Government should demonstrate the construct validity of the measures which it uses to assess institutional performance and to allocate millions of dollars in the learning and teaching performance fund.**

Response rate

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee - Graduate Careers Council of Australia's (2001:4) code of practice for the public disclosure of data from the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's graduate destination survey, course experience questionnaire and postgraduate research experience questionnaire provides that any graduate destination survey or course experience questionnaire survey data with an overall institutional response rate below 50% should not be disclosed publicly. In its report to the sector on the learning and teaching performance fund 2008 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2007: 5) the expert panel recommended that minimum response rates be established as a participation requirement for future funding rounds.

But the Department's proposed arrangements for the 2009 learning and teaching performance fund establishes no minimum response rate for an institution's participation in the 2009 learning and teaching performance fund.

- 2 The 2009 learning and teaching performance fund should comply with the AVCC-GCCA's code of practice and the recommendation of the expert panel for the 2008 learning and teaching performance fund by not including an institution's results for a survey if its response rate is less than 50%.**

Minimum sample size

Griffith University welcomes the Department's proposal to remove from a discipline group any university which has fewer than 20 responses in any of the 7 indicators in the discipline group. However, this of course will not comply with the AVCC-GCCA's code of practice of requiring a minimum response rate of 50%. It is not entirely clear from the discussion paper's wording, but Griffith trusts that the Department's minimum sample size will comply with Graduate Careers Australia's(2007:51) policy of not considering data cells with fewer than 10 responses.

Margins of error

The AVCC-GCCA's (2001:5) code of practice says that 'Differences in CEQ scores which can be considered worthy of note are those that exceed one-third of the relevant standard deviation'. Yet many of the differences between institutions' scores in the learning and teaching performance fund have been very small indeed. For the 2008 fund the Department reported differences in adjusted percentages for performance indicators of 0.01% or 1 in 10,000. Some bands were separated by less than 1% or one twentieth of a standard deviation in summed scores and it is not clear that this reflects as substantial a difference in performance as the banding signals.

The Department (2004) reported bivariate regressions which showed that institutions explained only a mean of 1.91% of the variance of progress, attrition, course experience and graduate destination values. This at least raises the possibility that the Australian Government is allocating millions of dollars on insignificant differences between institutions. Such a possibility reduces confidence in public policy and in the learning and teaching performance fund in particular, and undermines efforts to improve learning and teaching.

3 The 2009 learning and teaching performance fund should:

- (a) publish margins of error for each indicator; and**
- (b) use only indicators which produce statistically significant results.**

Transparency

It was possible to replicate most of the Australian Government's bands for the 2008 fund by calculating ranks from the Department's adjusted percentages for each performance indicator. But there were some anomalies. For example, the Government included the University of the Sunshine Coast in band A2 in group 3 humanities, education although its adjusted percentages suggest it should be in band C. There was no explanation of this anomaly.

4 The 2009 learning and teaching performance fund should publish enough information to allow its grouping of institutions into bands and allocations can be replicated separately.

Other issues

In view of the lack of demonstrated construct validity, the failure to require a minimum response rate, the lack of demonstrated statistical significance of bands and the lack of transparency in bands and allocations, the 2009 learning and teaching performance fund should be allocated in a way that minimises the allocations between institutions. This is likely to be achieved by allocating half the fund for improvement. Allocating half of the fund for improvement would also encourage institutions below optimal levels of performance to invest strongly in improvements.

- 5 50% of the 2009 learning and teaching performance fund should be allocated for improvement.**
- 6 Improvements should be measured by absolute change as the discussion paper proposes.**
- 7 The Government should publish the reasons for any change it makes for special circumstances such as any recommended by the expert panel.**

Griffith is pleased to observe the gradual improvement in the learning and teaching performance fund since its introduction and looks forward to further improvements in the 2009 fund.

1 July 2008

References

Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee - Graduate Careers Council of Australia (AVCC-GCCA) (2001) *Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee - Graduate Careers Council of Australia code of practice for the public disclosure of data from the Graduate Careers Council of Australia's graduate destination survey, course experience questionnaire and postgraduate research experience questionnaire*, Canberra: AVCC, http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/documents/policies_programs/graduates/2003/COP_2001.pdf (accessed 29 June 2008).

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