Keep in mind the quality, Sir, when you go with width!

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Australian universities need to maintain their high reputation for quality in order to attract and retain buyers of Australian education-related products. Learners are becoming increasingly discerning in terms of what they are buying and why they should buy it. Thus, quality is a critical issue for Australian university programs in general as well as university foundation programs in particular. This paper describes the quality assurance process for the Monash University Foundation Year, a pre-tertiary pathway program for international students into Monash University Australia, Malaysia or Monash College Diploma 1 or Diploma 2 programs. The program is managed by a commercial arm of Monash University (Monash College Pty. Ltd.) and delivered by licensed providers offshore and in Australia. Quality assurance is seen as a means to improve and enhance the learning experience of students as well as a risk management strategy.

Background

Australian universities are increasingly relying on the revenue of full fee-paying international students to meet a large share of their operational costs. In 2005, for example, only 42% of the operating revenue came from Government grants (ABS 2007). A large share of the remaining revenue was contributed through student fees, including 15% through the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and 23% through other fees and charges which include monies from full fee-paying overseas students (ABS 2007). ABS figures indicate that some universities rely heavily on full fee-paying overseas students; for example, Central Queensland University, Macquarie University and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology received 46%, 27% and 25% respectively of their revenue from fee-paying overseas students (ABS 2007).

This heavy reliance on fee-paying international students to meet university operational costs brings with it a measure of vulnerability or risk which has been recognised by the Australian Government. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was established in 2000 and reports on the relative standards of the higher education system and its quality assurance processes, including their international standing. AUQA audits all on and offshore operations as part of its program of regular university audits (AUQA 2006: 3). In addition, the Government has also introduced other significant measures such as the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act and regulations, a legal framework governing the responsibility of education institutions towards overseas students and a Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS).

Australian universities are also vulnerable from increasing competition for international student market share from countries such as USA, UK and Singapore and now also from other Asian countries, for example, Malaysia and China. The Malaysian

Government Vision for 2020 seeks to transform Malaysia into the economic, political and educational hub of South East Asia. Measures like these seem to be working. For example, the *Australian Education International Newsletter* (AEI, Ed 008/2007) reported that fewer Swedish students now opt to study in English-speaking countries while interest in educational institutions in Asia and in particular China is increasing.

To attract and keep buyers of Australian education-related products, Australian universities need to maintain their high reputation for quality. Students have become increasingly more discerning in terms of what they are buying and why they should buy it. Students and their parents invest in an expectation which universities need to manage and fulfil. Hence the comment, 'Keep in mind the quality, Sir, when you go with width', needs to be heeded by Australian university programs as well as University Foundation Programs including the Monash University Foundation Year program (MUFY).

MUFY buyers invest in an expectation. Strong quality assurance measures ensure that the expectations are fulfilled and the program continues to grow. Marketing feedback suggests that buyers invest in:

- good results to get into Monash or other universities in Australia, Malaysia or overseas in general
- a good preparation for their future studies at Monash or other Australian or overseas universities
- employment.

In this paper, the quality assurance process for MUFY is outlined. Quality assurance is seen as a means to improve and enhance the learning experience of students as well as a risk management strategy. It collects feedback that allows judgements to be made relating to the degree of compliance against standards.

Monash University Foundation Year

Key features

The Monash University Foundation Year is a pre-tertiary pathway program for international students into Monash University Australia, Malaysia or Monash College Diploma 1 or Diploma 2 programs. The program is managed by a commercial arm of Monash University (Monash College P/L) and delivered by licensed providers offshore and in Australia, which are also commercial entities. The program needs to keep abreast of new insights into teaching practices and curriculum development for international students, university entry demands, marketplace demands and be flexible to transform its current structure into a new but still academically robust format. Soon the program will also need to comply with the Commonwealth Government minimum standards for on-shore pathway programs expected to be released in 2007/8.

History

One of the first pathway programs in Australia, the Monash University Foundation Year was first delivered in 1989 in Melbourne by a licensed provider with an enrolment of 200 students. Today, there are four licensed providers in Melbourne, Malaysia, Indonesia and Laos with an annual enrolment of approximately 1,500 students. About three-quarters of these students transition to Monash University.

Competition

Since the 1990s, most Australian universities have offered a pathway program. Overseas universities and institutions have also set up pathway programs. MUFY in Malaysia, for example, competes against:
- South Australian Matriculation
- Cambridge GCE A-Levels
- Canadian Matriculation Programme

- University of New South Wales Foundation Year
- Australian Matriculation (AUSMAT)
- Diploma type programs in Business, Engineering and Information Technology from both Australian and overseas universities
- International Baccalaureate Program (IB)

Provider competition

Each licensed MUFY provider markets the course, recruits students and delivers the Monash University Foundation Year curriculum. In this sense, each provider competes against each other in terms of student share. Monash College P/L has a responsibility to ensure that student expectations are well managed at each provider location, and this is managed through the MUFY quality assurance procedures.

MUFY quality assurance

The importance of ensuring the quality of its programs is reflected in the Monash College P/L vision statement (Monash College P/L 2006, p.2), which reads as follows:

- In 2025 Monash College P/L will be a **high quality** educational institution developing and delivering educational and professional services.
- Monash College P/L will maintain its ability to **demonstrate educational quality** through high levels of success for its students in further study (for example, entry and performance at university level) and in employment and career development. **Students and clients will experience high quality education** through a range of flexible study options.
- Monash College P/L, already a Higher Education Provider (HEP) and Registered Training Organisation (RTO), will be a self-accrediting higher education provider.
- Monash College P/L will be profitable and sustainable with a structure that will allow it to meet new market demand.

- Monash College P/L educational services and activities will complement and align with those of Monash University.

The word **quality** has been highlighted in the above statement to indicate the importance of quality to the company and in the courses it develops, delivers and manages. MUFY is one of a number of income streams for Monash College P/L and MUFY works towards this vision.

Quality assurance procedures in place for the academic quality of MUFY

MUFY Board of Studies

A MUFY Board of Studies, with a Dean of the University as Chair, is the principal academic body of the MUFY Program. The Board also oversees the MUFY examination process. Figure 1 shows, from a system perspective, how the MUFY Board manages academic quality.

Figure1: MUFY systems model of how it manages its academic quality
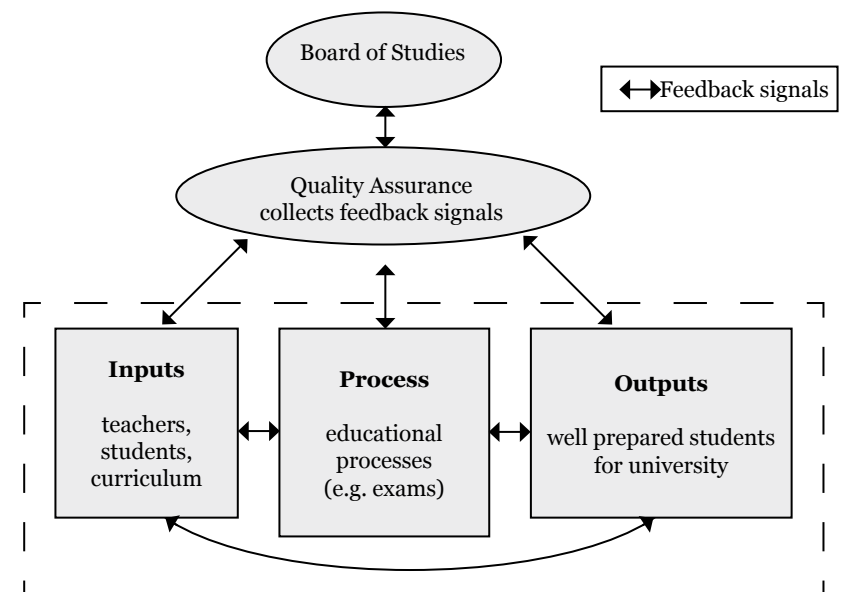
Essentially, the MUFY Board of Studies gathers feedback from the inputs, processes and outputs of the MUFY system through instruments such as the following:
- quality assurance audits at provider locations – annual and triennial
- Monash Experience Questionnaire (MEQ)
- First Year Student Experience of Graduates of MUFY
- marker reports for each subject
- examiner moderation reports for each subject
- pass rate data
- student performance at university data
- correlation coefficients between internal assessment and exam scores
- provider feedback in general.

The Board collects the information and recommends any further action necessary. These actions are implemented and monitored by the MUFY quality assurance team which reports back to the MUFY Board on the progress and results of the implementations made.

Below is a sample of the type of measures sought as feedback during the quality assurance audits.

Provider visits and quality audits

Annual provider visits double as audits. In addition, there are more formal triennial audits. The key areas audited are:
- admission requirements
- structure, content and delivery of the course
- assessment
- course evaluation
- human resources to support the course
- facilities
- marketing the course
- financial resources and contractual arrangements
  (Monash College P/L 2005, p. 3)

Each of the above category areas has a set of principles, specifications and list of evidence to be collected during the audit. This evidence is referenced against prescribed standards. A report on the degree of the compliance for each standard is submitted to the company and to the provider. Actions are implemented within the specified timeframe.

Examples of input, process and output measures which are audited or implemented for continuous improvement are presented below. A description of the full MUFY quality assurance process with principles, specifications and evidence for each area is documented in the MUFY quality assurance manual.

Some examples of how INPUT measures are audited

Student input measures

MUFY students study English plus three to four other subjects from a range of 13 subjects for approximately 12 months or 40 weeks.

Audit specifications relate to the Year 11 equivalency of entry, the level of English required, compliance with course regulations and academic policies. Documentation of teaching approaches, teaching materials, resources including access to computer and library resources, class size (1:25 or better) and classroom space are some examples of evidence that are sought.

Teacher input measures

The minimum qualification of teachers is a degree in the relevant discipline and teacher qualifications. To continuously enhance and improve the MUFY course, MUFY holds an annual professional development day for on and offshore teachers of MUFY subjects in Melbourne. Input on the day is provided by the MUFY subject examiners who oversee the curriculum and set the formal exams. In addition, experts in a field of teaching and learning also provide input. In 2006, for example, the Monash Experience Questionnaire

indicated that students would like to be more engaged through greater use of Information Communication Technology (ICT). A session during the professional development day was allocated for this.

Examples of PROCESS measures

The process measures provide an indication of how well students are being prepared for their university experience. Students are also asked to provide feedback on their perception of the course through the Monash Experience Questionnaire.

Monash Experience Questionnaire

Every two years the Monash Experience Questionnaire (MEQ) is administered at MUFY provider locations. The MEQ gathers information about how the student perceives their learning experience at the campus. The items are ranked on a Likert scale from 1 to 5.

The two lowest ranked items in 2005 were:
- 'I am generally satisfied with the online classroom environment' (3.59 out of 5)
- 'My course is flexible' (3.62 out of 5)

The two most highly ranked items in 2005 were:
- 'I believe I will be able to use the skills I am learning in my future studies at Monash' (4.02 out of 5)
- 'The teaching staff motivate me to do my best work' (4.00 out of 5)

The MEQ information is used and discussed with teachers and managers at provider locations during the annual quality assurance visits and action for enhancements are identified and followed up during subsequent quality assurance visits. In response to the lowest ranked items for example, one provider has introduced a commercial on-line platform to enhance its on-line learning environment, while

a second provider has developed its own customised on-line platform with similar functionality as commercial platforms.

Exams and curriculum

The exams and curriculum are monitored for fairness and currency. Academics of Monash University are the examiners and moderators of MUFY exams and oversee the review of the curriculum once every four years. Examiners have oversight of the formal MUFY exams held twice a year and moderate ten percent of the provider marked exam papers. Moderation reports are written and tabled at the MUFY Board of Studies.

Correlation coefficients between internal and external assessment scores for each subject and for each provider for each exam period are also calculated. This provides useful data for teachers to gauge how well aligned the internal assessment tasks are to the exam outcomes.

Examples of OUTPUT measures

The output measures gauge how well the program prepared students for university. A number of statistical measures are used to track MUFY students at Monash University. These include tracking their grade point average scores and how many units graduate MUFY students have passed to the number of units they have taken. MUFY also tracks the transition into Monash University and into each faculty. These statistics are compared with local and other international students in each faculty and reported to the Dean in each faculty.

In 2007, a MUFY First Year Student Experience Questionnaire will be administered with the aim of gauging graduate MUFY student feedback about how well MUFY has prepared students for their first year university course. A trial study in 2006 gathered preliminary data. A sample of student responses of how they perceive that the

MUFY experience assisted their learning at university is presented below:

> The friendly, patient and dedicated teachers coached us to be independent, helped us to get used to the Australian teaching style and expectations, and provided extra support both personal as well as academic.

> The oral presentations we gave helped us to gain our self-confidence in speaking in front of groups.

> The learning tasks helped us to think critically, write and read critically and conduct research.

> The small groups helped us to bond and build friends, to get along with different people and to meet people who would study the same subjects at university.

> The MUFY syllabus aligns to first year university. The university topics just go into more depth. This continuity gave us a strong foundation and confidence at university.

Students also gave constructive feedback about how the course could be enhanced and a sample of responses is presented below – 'how could the MUFY course be improved to assist you further in your learning at university?'

> The MUFY experience is very much like school and this does not help us when we get to university where we have to be independent. We are too overly dependent on teachers and have compulsory classes when we should be having lectures and tutorials where we can practise the skills of listening and note-taking.

> Currently MUFY is too test focused and the university is assignment driven.

> There should be more emphasis on team-work and more exercises for research preparation and emphasis on skills for problem-solving.

The data will be useful during the next MUFY curriculum renewal process.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a sample of the quality assurance indicators used to ensure MUFY continues to be a strong product for licensed providers, the company and for the university. MUFY needs to ensure it continues to provide a source of revenue and the driver for this is a quality pathway program which prepares students well for the university learning experience.

MUFY's growing student intake (1,500 in 2006) and the students' university results indicate that both quality and width are working well together and, in this respect, MUFY 'keeps in mind quality as it goes with width, Sir', but we need to keep enhancing and improving the product to meet market demands.

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Intersection of training and podcasting in adult education

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Podcasting is becoming more and more common as a method of delivery at universities and for training purposes. The concept to set up podcasting is simple, and the costs vary. The advantages of podcasting are enormous. Podcasting is especially effective for adult education programs.

In recent years, there has been an explosion in the use of technology in virtually every walk of life. Today, almost universally, college courses use email and computing technology. Due to its rapidly changing nature, the cosmos of computing technology is often considered enigmatic. This is because, while it creates possibilities