



Course Enhancement Conversations

Supporting Protocol (Revised)

Academic Quality Unit

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Introduction and Approach

Aligned to TEQSA's risk-based framework, USQ's Academic Performance Framework aims to monitor and improve the quality of the student experience. This protocol is intended to support school leaders with implementing the principles of the Academic Quality Framework within schools and faculties.

Course enhancement conversations are held regularly to ensure that course delivery is responsive to environmental context and student experience. The conversations, supported by course and survey reports, feature multiple lines of data to contextualise sentinel indicators of course performance. The conversation is an opportunity for sense-making to unpack priority areas for enhancement or support.

Conducting the Course Enhancement Conversations

Conversations with course teams are overseen by the Associate Heads, Learning, Teaching and Student Support within each school, supported by discipline coordinators or program leads.

Mid-Semester Conversations

Conversations commence the week following the close of the mid-semester student feedback survey (week 6) with the initial focus on identifying priority courses that require additional support. The mid-semester survey is open for fieldwork during weeks 4 and 5. Further information on the survey is available on the [Academic Quality website](#).

- Every course is required to undergo mid-semester course conversations and course teams are required to complete action plans and feedback to students through the survey tool.
- Course examiners and course moderators are responsible for undertaking the course conversations, including additional course team members, or supporting teams as appropriate.
- Courses with mid-semester student feedback mean scores between 0 (no responses) and 3.5 are to be supported by Associate Heads LTSS within each school.

End-Semester Conversations

The end-semester student feedback survey opens from Week 14 to Week 17. Updated end-semester reports, including mid-semester action plans and feedback to students, are available from the Academic Quality dashboards during Week 18.

Course teams are encouraged to meet after finalisation of the student feedback to review course and survey reports and update end-semester action plans.

End-Semester conversations for all courses that received a Mid-Semester student feedback score of 0 to 3.5. will be supported by the Associate Heads LTSS. Heads of Schools will oversee conversations that received a second feedback score of 0 to 3.5.

Action plans

Outcomes from course conversations are to be summarised in action plans to be submitted to the dashboards via the faculty centre. Feedback to students on proposed actions are to be submitted via the [course survey tool](#). A [template](#) is available for your use. The dashboard will record activity against courses after submission.

Action plans are an opportunity to reflect on the teaching practice and student engagement mechanisms used during the semester. Some questions to consider:

- How current is your course content? When did you last refresh your course?

- Is your StudyDesk easily accessible to students and is all the relevant information available to them and in the correct location?
- How appropriate is your assessment design to the cohort?
- What mechanisms are you using to trigger student engagement and what is the impact of these mechanisms?
- Do you require additional professional development to support the growth of your teaching career or can your reflections be used to support the development of early-career teachers in your school or discipline?
- What decisions or actions that were implemented during the semester had a positive impact on student outcomes and was evidence of this positive impact observed in the feedback or course data?

Action plans are also intended to document decisions and actions made during the semester for the awareness of school staff or future course teams. This documentation of course actions is a requirement of USQ's TEQSA reaccreditation.

Course and Survey Reports and Dashboards

The course and survey [dashboards](https://usqprd.sharepoint.com/sites/USQLearningAnalytics) in addition to supporting documentation are available at <https://usqprd.sharepoint.com/sites/USQLearningAnalytics>.

Course reports are accessible to all staff. Survey reports are identity linked to course examiners, course moderators and relevant line management or delegated access. Please contact AcademicQuality@usq.edu.au for access to survey reports (include written approval from the School Associate Head LTSS). Data queries or concerns are to be directed to Bl@usq.edu.au.

Availability of Course and Survey Dashboards to all staff

- **Academic Board approval for all staff access to all quantitative data (including survey data excluding student comments):** In 2019, Academic Board approved access to all approved corporate quantitative data within the survey, course (and further program) reports be made available to all academic staff.
- **Approval from USQ Privacy Officer:** Prior to approval by Academic Board, this access was also considered by the USQ Privacy Officer, and this access was deemed to be appropriate. For example, at The University of Queensland all quantitative survey data report on the website has been open to staff, students and community since 2014.
- **Password protection for survey reports (including student comments):** As students often name academic staff in comments, the survey reports are password protected to the course examiner and moderator together with line supervisors up to the Vice-Chancellor. Delegated access is available where appropriate. For example, in some school's line supervision is delegated from the Head of School to Discipline Leaders. The Academic Quality Unit can support individual practice at school level, so please let us know which staff need access.
- **Sem3-19 Pilot:** These access rights were implemented in the initial 5 school pilot in Semester 3, 2019 and academic staff found the access useful, particularly when completing Action Plans as they were shared with all academic staff which offered points of comparison.
- **Code of Conduct:** All staff operate under a code of conduct. Access to this data is important to support the academic and professional staff roles. Respect is required when using data.
- **Ethical consideration:** The USQ Academic Quality project adopted the Guidelines for ethical conductor of evaluations (2013) by the Australian Evaluation Society found at https://www.aes.asn.au/images/stories/files/membership/AES_Guidelines_web_v2.pdf.

Course Enhancement Conversation Protocol

Course Enhancement conversations run for 30 to 45 minutes. Begin the conversation with the [Course Reports](#) and use the [Survey reports](#) to provide context for student feedback scores.

Course reports

Is this the first offering of a new course? If so, the data will not provide much information and may be misleading. Focus groups may be a more appropriate method for obtaining student feedback.

Is the course or program in teach-out? The management and communication of courses or programs in teach-out needs to be carefully considered as students are at high risk for poor experiences.

When did the Course Examiner and Course Moderator obtain access to the course? Late allocation of course examiners or moderators in the faculty centre, particularly after semester start, will impact the student experience as course examiners and moderators will have delayed access to the StudyDesk.

Enrolment Trends

- Have enrolment been steady/declining/improving? What are the reasons at a course or program level for changing enrolments?
- Does the course have significant numbers of international students? This has implications around language proficiencies and extra resources that might need to be provided. International off-shore students may struggle with internet access and be influenced by time-zones which may result in difficulties submitting assignments or attending synchronous activities.
- Are there significant numbers (>30%) of students who might be perceived as coming from disadvantaged backgrounds, i.e. Low SES, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, English as an additional language? This informs approaches to teaching that considers these groups.
- Are there significant numbers of students identifying as having a disability? What concessions or additional resources are available for students in this category?
- Are there repeat students in the class? What is being done to help these students? Are there large numbers of repeat students each semester over time (more than 5 students)

Current Semester Students

- Are there any patterns in the current cohort prior penalty table, such as are students in particular programs showing high rates of failure relative to others? Are there students who are failing multiple times? What is being done to address this?
- In the current cohort previous passed study table, are students demonstrating appropriate enrolment patterns?
 - Are students completing prerequisites?
 - Are students enrolling in the course at an appropriate stage of their education, e.g., are first year students enrolling into a third year course or masters students in undergraduate courses? This may indicate that pre-requisites need to be included or maybe there is a problem at the program level that needs to be addressed.
 - Are students enrolling out of discipline? These students would be at particular risk of poor experiences. Are students able to find peers from their program in the online environment?
- If many students from unusual disciplines continuously appear: Are course examiners aware of all the programs (major / minor) that the course is core or selective for and where in the program the course is placed.
- The current cohort of programs provides information on the programs that students in the course are enrolled in. This should inform how the course is operated and who it is targeted at.

Student Outcome Trends

- Are pre-census withdrawal rates high (<20%)? Are there any trends in the cohort? (Note low enrolments will skew this data.)
 - High withdrawal may suggest that students are overwhelmed, or the content does not make sense to them.
- Is the total progress rate satisfactory (80% is the government benchmark)?
 - This may need to be tempered by the year of study the course is typically taken in as a class normally undertaken in first year would be expected to have a lower progress rate than one taken in third year. Typically expect progress rates for third year courses to be about 90%.
 - Are there trends in the student cohort for Total Failed Students, i.e., are one group of students typically performing poorly relative to other groups? This might suggest some changes to accommodate these students.
 - Are progress rates highly variable from year to year?
- Do the course outcome trends suggest anything? Are students able to achieve HD's/A's? Are there too many HD's/A's suggesting that the students are not finding the coursework challenging or the assessment is not aligned with the Australian Qualifications Framework levels?
- Are there any trends in the failure data, e.g., are there a lot of FNS grades?
- Are there any students with incomplete grades that need to be supported to finish their studies?
 - For students that require an alternative exam, aim to offer alternative exams within four weeks of the original exam. Requiring students to wait till the next offering of the course may result in students waiting a full year to complete the course, which may have undergone changes to content or textbooks.

Course Trends

- Are assessment tasks appropriate?
 - The new assessment policy suggests that there should be no more than 5 assessment tasks (though a task may have multiple elements).
 - No task, especially exams, should be worth more than 50%.
 - Reconsider removing hurdles if not required for accreditation purposes.
 - Concerns about cheating can be overcome with a good assessment designed to document copyright.
- Are the assessment tasks spread during the semester?
 - **Early tasks in the first four weeks of the semester** before the census date allow students to determine if they can cope with the assessment requirements of the course.
 - Major tasks scheduled very late in the semester may overwhelm the student, particularly if the student has many assessments due at the same time.
- **Is this teaching team correct?** If this data is entered incorrectly into the faculty centre the data will reflect inaccurately on the reports.
- Is the teaching team stable, i.e., the same examiner/moderator for multiple years? Are there staffing concerns? Courses which have a great deal of flux in the teaching team, where there is no on-going champion for the course, the course examiner does not have discipline expertise in the content, or when there is a reliance on casual staff who do not receive sufficient support, tend to do poorly in student evaluations.

Student Feedback Scores

- The course report includes student feedback scores for the overall cohort as well as by program where enrolled students are greater than 5 as we are using Australian Bureau of Statistics standards for reporting. This gives insights into the experiences of students within different programs to determine if there are different trends in satisfaction over time.

Enrolment and Withdrawal Trends

- When does the cohort become stable?
- Are too many students allowed into the course after the census date which places these students at risk? Could students requiring late entry for visa purposes be directed to the OAC's [English Language](#) courses for a semester instead?
- Follow up on late enrolled students, particularly those carrying heavy loads as these students are at risk of poor progression.
- Review withdrawal patterns for trends.

Survey Report

The survey report unpacks student feedback scores at the mode and campus level, student comments and trends over time.

Check-in survey

- Are there sufficient students responding to give the survey meaning?
 - Feedback scores with fewer than 5 participants require careful consideration of context and course data to support interpretation. When identifying priority courses with insufficient respondents, at least one other supporting metric from the course report is required.
 - For low responses, are there additional measures that could be taken to improve student feedback participation? It is appreciated that in some courses students are very vocal while in others they do not typically let their opinions be known.
 - Are alternative methods more appropriate for obtaining feedback on the course or can the feedback be supplemented or expanded on using alternative methods?
- What is the distribution of student satisfaction?
 - Resist the temptation to compare scores with other courses within or across Schools. Focus on comparing the changes in the distribution of student feedback trends within the course you are discussing.
- The comments are matched to the satisfaction score, so you can see what students find appealing and what they might not be so enamoured of.
 - The positives can be highlighted and shared with the wider community as best practices in the action plan.
 - The more critical comments should be dealt with in the action plan.
 - Some comments may be disrespectful or possibly not constructive. These can be removed/ignored.
 - Colour coding of the survey scale was implemented in 2021 to prevent confusion around the directionality of the scale scores that previously occurred.
 - Offensive language screening has been implemented by the AQU. If you identify any abusive or inappropriate comments, please report them to AcademicQuality@usq.edu.au to request removal from the official record.
- When looking at the historical information, has the course previously scored low and has improved or vice versa? This may indicate that prior changes are having a positive or negative effect and should be highlighted/addressed.

If feedback scores are high and no student feedback is given that suggests areas for improvement, the action plan can focus on documenting the activities that are already underway by the course team.