



4 February, 2010

Jason Coutts, Branch Manager
Equity, Performance and Indigenous Branch
Higher Education Group
Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
PO Box 9880
CANBERRA CITY ACT 2601
TeachingandLearning@deewr.gov.au

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations regarding an Indicator Framework for Higher Education Performance Funding.

CAUL

CAUL is comprised of the university librarians or library directors of all Australian universities. CAUL's mission is to support its members in the achievement of their objectives, especially the provision of access to, and training in the use of, scholarly information, leadership in the management of information and contribution to the university experience.

President: Cathrine Harboe-Ree, *University Librarian, Monash University*

LPO Box 8169
Australian National University
Canberra ACT 2601

Telephone +612 6125 2990
Fax +612 6248 8571

caul@caul.edu.au
<http://www.caul.edu.au/>

Introduction

All Australian University Librarians or Directors of Libraries are members of CAUL. Membership therefore reflects the diversity of the sector.

All CAUL members are involved in student learning. Responsibilities vary according to institutional structures, from full responsibility for learning skills development and library services to provision of library services and information skills teaching only. Forms of engagement with students range from one-on-one ad hoc assistance to structured classes and courses, some developed in association with faculty curriculum committees.

It is the general experience that learning and information skills classes are most successful when they are

- ▶ Scheduled within the regular timetable
- ▶ Directly relevant to the students' current study and
- ▶ Included in academic assessment

In the case of for-credit courses aligned with faculty programs, it has been shown that pre- and post- testing can objectively measure the benefits of learning skills programs¹. Without such testing, libraries rely on student satisfaction surveys and anecdotal evidence from academic staff to evaluate their programs.

In general, CAUL believes all the indicators in the four areas (Student Participation and Inclusion, Student Experience, Student Attainment and Quality of Learning Outcomes) are appropriate in the intended interim. CAUL supports efforts to develop more sophisticated indicators for the future.

CAUL offers the following further comments:

Section 8. Student Experience

CAUL understands that it is intended to use the indicators not only to measure performance by individual universities but also to identify best practice and thereby help raise standards nationally. We hypothesise that there is a correlation between early identification and remediation of learning difficulties and better outcomes in participation and attainment.

CAUL therefore supports the proposal for the development of a 'University Experience Survey' to be administered 'at the end of the first semester or the beginning of the second semester of their first year of university study' (p15).

¹ Monash University Library (2009) *Report of the Review of Learning Skills*

Section 9. Student Attainment

CAUL supports the proposal to develop a more robust indicator of completions based on the tracking facility provided by CHESSN.

As pointed out in the report by Long, Ferrier and Heagney², not all students who fail to complete a degree have wasted their time and public money. Such studies may still, by intention or otherwise, help them achieve their career goals and increase the participation of the general population in higher education. This may be especially true of students studying at coursework masters level, where many courses draw on the undergraduate curriculum. Information skills taught by CAUL libraries have life-long learning as one of their goals. The CHESSN facility may throw some light on any public benefit derived from such non-completers.

CAUL notes that library use is one of the measures in the AUSSE survey. Early results suggest a positive correlation between library use and student outcomes.

Section 10. Quality of learning outcomes

CAUL notes the reference to the GSA skills areas in relation to these indicators. CAUL submits that the information skills taught by library staff contribute to the four skills areas, specifically Critical Thinking (including judging the value of information) and Problem Solving (finding and using relevant information). Libraries have been re-designing their spaces to facilitate group work, including facilities for the preparation of reports and presentations (relevant to Interpersonal Understanding and Written Communication).

Finally, CAUL welcomes the Government's policy objective for Australia "to extend the reach and enhance the quality and performance of its higher education system.." (Discussion Paper p.3) and looks forward to playing its part in the implementation of the policy.

For further information or clarification:

Prof Ainslie Dewe,
Deputy CAUL President,
University Librarian,
La Trobe University
Tel: 03 9479 2920
Email: a.dewe@latrobe.edu.au

² Long, Michael, Ferrier, Fran & Heagney, Margaret (2006) *Stay, play or give it away? Students continuing, changing or leaving university study in their first year*, Monash University-ACER, Clayton