

Paper proposal for INQAAHE 2013 Conference in Taipei

<i>Paper/Presentation Title</i>	Using distributed learning as a measure to capture additional data on the quality of technology enhanced learning (TEL)
<i>Topic Covered in this Paper</i>	Subtheme 1. The QA of cross-border education: from quality providers to quality assured provision <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On-line provision and the challenge for QA mechanisms • Main issues to be addressed in evaluating CBHE offerings: focus on the programme contents, delivery methods and resources, the quality of the academic staff.
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<i>AV requirements</i>	Laptop and projector to show PowerPoint slides
<i>Abstract</i>	The Australasian Council on Open Distance and E-learning (ACODE) benchmarks were the first major attempt, in an Australasian context, to bring a consistent framework to the use of e-Learning at HEIs. Successful as these were, given the HEI need to interpret the benchmarks differently in accordance to institutional culture, they were not able to fully capture measures of quality of technology enhanced learning (TEL). Ongoing research is demonstrating that distributed leadership can prove to be an additional dimension in establishing quality measures pertinent to TEL activity at HEIs based on identification of role and boundary of activities within a university to help attest to internal efforts and support (fiscal, human, programmatic, and technical) driving the TEL offerings provided by universities.

Outline:

Introduction

Two critical areas that have developed as a result of globalization and the internationalization of university offerings are the quality control and quality assurance processes governing distance learning and e-learning in particular. The baseline requirement, according to the 2005 UNESCO-OECD *Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education*, is to ensure that the quality of programs delivered by universities is comparable whether provided in the home country or abroad. This also means that universities 'also take into account the cultural and linguistic sensitivities of the receiving country' (p. 15). National qualification frameworks and national protocols should both align to this requirement and do so overtly rather than by implication through most appropriate regulations and national standards; however, this is still not always the case. Sometimes it takes looking at different documents and protocols to look at the quality assurance provisions for e-learning.

The importance of the above UNESCO-OECD requirement and the challenge of finding clear and explicit language are exemplified in the following examples from Australia. Point 6.10 in Protocol B of the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Process* (2007), indicates that once a course purely offered through distance learning is accredited in one jurisdiction it is 'accepted as accredited in all other jurisdictions' (p. 7). However, while the *Australian Qualifications Framework* (AQF) (2011) indicates that the benefits of alignment to it are improving mutual trust, the recognition of qualifications between nations based on reliable and transparent information, etc., implies rather than publicly states that all e-learning offerings at all qualification levels meet the outcome criteria. Australia's Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency's (2011) *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards)* covers the omission of explicit reference to e-learning in the AQF though its Standard 7, Physical and electronic resources and infrastructure. Standards 7.2 through 7.4 specifically address the broad-based minimal expectations as as per *recommendation c* under guidelines for HEIs in the UNESCO-OECD Guidelines (2005, pp. 15-16). This is not unusual given Provezis' (2010) comment that accrediting bodies do not prefer to be too prescriptive, preferring to 'offer various resources to assist institutions in meeting their expectations' (p. 3) instead.

There's a gap in establishing a review framework for technology enhanced learning (TEL)

Experience from one of the co-authors suggests a lack of clear standards regarding the review of elearning or technology enhanced learning (TEL). His training for reviewing TEL programs was broad and lacked specifics. TEQSA Standard 7 is a more formal statement of expectations, but it is *de minimis* and therefore lacks the degree of prescriptiveness some would like for clear guidance. That guidance normally is taken up by professional associations, bureaus, or consortia deciding to figure out what to do.

The Australasian Council on Open Distance and E-learning (ACODE) benchmarks were the first major attempt, in an Australasian context, to bring a consistent framework to the use of e-Learning at HEIs. The aim is to provide measurable indicators toward TEL programs instead of making value judgments on various areas. Evaluation is a central characteristic of each of the eight ACODE benchmarks and it is there to ensure a quality cycle is in place within institutions and that this is present across all the elements of that quality cycle. Importantly, this is not limited to work within the institution, as evaluation also plays a very real role in mediating the many external factors at play around the effective deployment of institutional TEL environments.

The ACODE benchmarks, although an excellent tool, do not go quite far enough in capturing the impact of the external factors influencing TEL environments. Because TEL environments must be aligned with other elements within the institution, those governance elements impacting the institutional inputs and outputs of TEL have to directly become part of the evaluative framework. In a sense, they are part of the quality control feedback loop process in addition to being part of the quality assurance process (cf. Juran & Godfrey, 1999; Juran, 1999).

Identifying the governance elements within TEL

Governance structures need to be identified, aligned, and empowered (typically done by giving each stakeholder within the HEI a voice). However, governance around the TEL environments should not be any different to that of other systems within the institution (Figure 1).

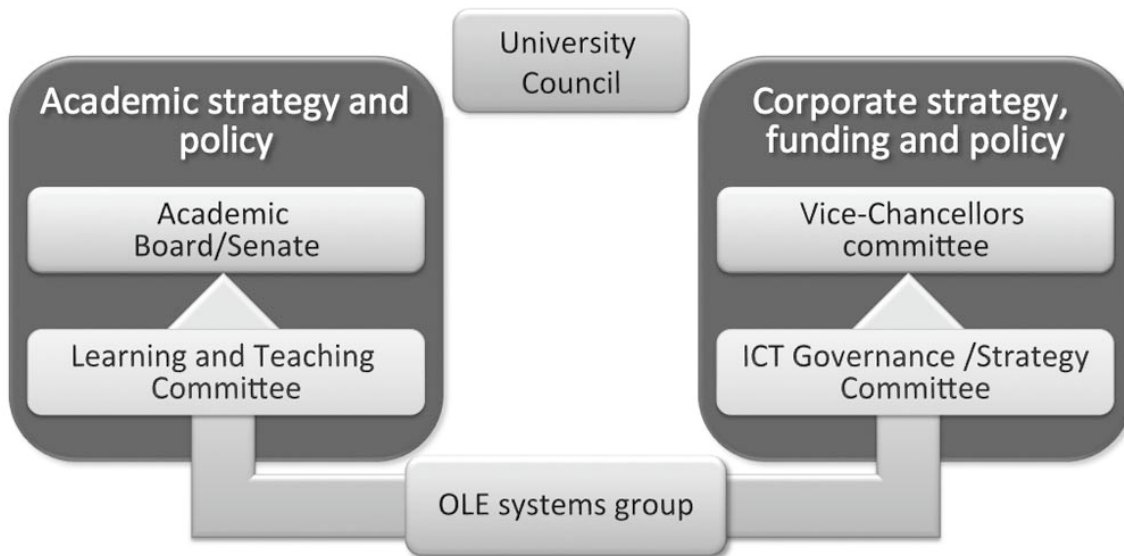


Figure 1. University committee structure related to on-line learning environments (OLEs)

Once the governance structures are embedded in practice, an HEI needs to be able to clearly define the status of all the technologies underpinning the TEL environments that are used by staff to support learning and teaching (or other areas) and that this is mediated by the OLE systems group (negotiated) for the institution. Figure 2 identifies four categories of technologies to assist HEIs develop a framework around their particular TEL environments and the types of support that will be needed as well as OLE systems identify their roles. It is in those roles where the evaluation parameters can be determined.

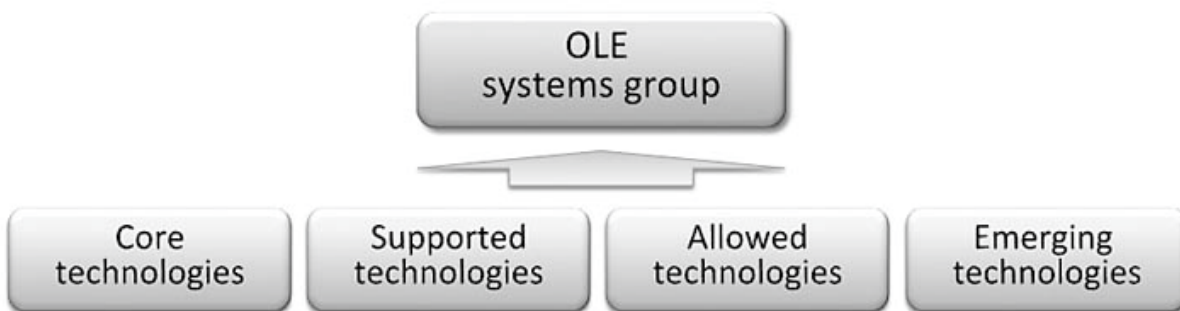


Figure 2. Categories of OLE technologies

Focus of Paper:

This paper focuses on the governance of the institution’s TEL environments, with the assumption that the principles outlined here may also be applied to other systems. Its emphasis is on the evaluation of distributed leadership surrounding TEL because it identifies the structure that oversees the business of mediating the TEL environments and how HEIs ensure and direct sufficient and appropriate resources (both human and fiscal) to support fully the work of the institution. Looking at these parameters also provides linkage to the university’s strategic plan and the underpinnings of improvement activity within TEL that goes on to meet strategic plan and its embedded quality assurance goals (Figure 3).



Figure 3. ICT planning cycle

Most university quality review frameworks already look at governance as part of their review process. What this paper suggests is to add an additional element to the governance section based on the way HEIs provide, manage, and support their TEL environments. Based on one of the co-author’s ongoing research, how distributed learning in regards to TEL adds additional data than benchmarks do not fully capture.

References

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