Scientia Education Investment Fund Grants Final Report

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Development and implementation of an education portfolio to evaluate excellence of teachers at UNSW

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Project Advisory Group:

Prof David Boud (Deakin University), an internationally recognised expert in assessment theory and practice, led the project Advisory Group. Other members of the advisory group were Professor Norm Vaughan (Mount Royal University), Professor Marcia Devlin (Federation University), Helena Gillespie (University of East Anglia) and Denise Chalmers (University of Western Australia). Norm Vaughan has published regarding blended learning and communities of inquiry, Marcia Devlin has published extensively about teaching excellence, while Helena Gillespie led a project supported by the UK Higher Education Academy in 2016 to measure teacher excellence at her institution. Denise Chalmers led an OLT-funded project to develop the Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards (AUTCAS).

1. Executive Summary

- Summarise the project, context, priorities addressed, outputs, key findings and recommendations (if relevant)

Research has traditionally been rewarded and recognised more than teaching at leading universities. One reason for this disparity is that measures of research excellence are widely used and accepted. In contrast, there are no generally accepted measures of teaching excellence.

In response to this challenge, Fellows of the UNSW Scientia Education Academy were awarded SEIF1 and SEIF2 grants to conduct a Delphi study to delineate the dimensions of effective teaching in higher education. Building on existing literature, the project group collaborated with national and international experts to develop consensus dimensions of effective teaching practice and associated criteria. The resulting dimensions differ from existing standards, including the UK Professional Standards Framework and the Australian University Teaching Criteria and Standards (AUTCAS), yet align well with those frameworks. The dimensions are: Teaching and supporting learning; Design and development of learning activities and assessment; Disciplinary expertise and professional development; and Educational leadership.

Standards of practice were subsequently developed for each dimension at each academic level, providing transparency regarding the evidence required by academics to demonstrate educational excellence. Following feedback from UNSW staff, the dimensions and associated criteria were refined, along with indicative practice standards, guidelines for collecting evidence and exemplars across a variety of disciplines.

The dimensions were operationalised in an online portfolio platform to enable academics to provide evidence of their educational achievements. Importantly, integration of ePortfolio pedagogy in this development process for academics helps to create a habit of mind. The platform, myEducation Portfolio, enables staff to collect artefacts, reflect upon their teaching practice and curate evidence of achievement in alignment with the dimensions and associated criteria. myEducation Portfolio will be incorporated into academic promotion processes at UNSW from 2020.

Recommendations:

1. It is strongly recommended that myEducation Portfolio becomes embedded in academic career development (myCareer), teaching awards and academic promotion processes at UNSW. This recommendation might be enabled by creation of an integrated online portal for staff to curate their achievements in education (including myEducation Portfolio, myExperience and summative peer review of teaching), research and social engagement, global impact and leadership.

2. It is strongly recommended that public display of portfolios is enabled to showcase educational excellence within UNSW and externally and to disseminate best practice.

3. It is recommended that the IT framework underpinning myEducation Portfolio be trialled at UNSW as a student-facing ePortfolio in a variety of disciplines.

2. Outcomes and impact

- Describe the major achievements of your project in relation to the outcomes and deliverables.
- Discuss project impact – how and to what extent has the project impacted students, staff, faculty institution, and higher education as relevant to the project.
- Include the strategic priorities addressed.
- Include the number of courses/programs/students likely to benefit from this project.

This project relates to the 2025 UNSW Strategy Theme A2: Academic Excellence - in particular, supporting and valuing teaching excellence. Appropriately measuring and rewarding teaching excellence will impact directly on SEIF grant priority #6, i.e. it will significantly enhance the student experience and student outcomes.

In summary, this project has delivered the following outcomes:

1. **Establishment of [myEducation Portfolio](#)**, an ePortfolio to enable staff at UNSW to demonstrate their educational achievements in relation to the dimensions of effective teaching practice in higher education.
2. Development of educational performance **standards, evidence guidelines and exemplars** for UNSW staff.
3. **Integration of the dimensions of the portfolio and evidence guidelines** with the education component of the UNSW Academic Expectations Framework.
4. Facilitation of an **integrated portal** to demonstrate educational excellence at UNSW, with the education portfolio enabling incorporation of outcomes of student surveys of teaching quality and peer review of educational practice.
5. Establishment of a **community of practice** that enables and supports academic staff in standard-based evaluation of educational excellence at UNSW.

Commencing in July 2017, the project team consulted with higher education experts in Australia and overseas, using a Delphi process to determine the dimensions of teaching practice to be incorporated in a UNSW education portfolio. This Delphi process incorporated academics (n=65) from a variety of disciplines at UNSW, across Australia and internationally, to draw on a variety of perspectives in conceptions of educational excellence across disciplines, institutions and nations for incorporated into the design of the UNSW education portfolio (Abbas et al., 2016). The first round of the Delphi process identified 13 dimensions of effective teaching practice in higher education.

Respondents in the second round of the Delphi process (n=58) prioritised 8 of those dimensions for incorporation into an education portfolio. Already, a community of practice had been established by this process. Feedback from the project advisory group and education-focussed Communities of Practice (CoPs) at UNSW resulted in further refinement and consolidation into four dimensions, each with a number of associated criteria. Those dimensions and criteria were subsequently benchmarked against existing frameworks for evaluating effective teaching in higher education, including the UNSW Academic Expectations Framework.

In 2018, the project team scanned the environment for existing ePortfolio tools that might be employed to implement the above-mentioned dimensions and criteria in an education portfolio for

UNSW academic staff. No existing software met all the requirements for proposed portfolio, however Edufolio (see example portfolio at https://edufolios.org/georgiawells/) provided an interface that could be adapted for this purpose. The UNSW Engagement and Transformation team were subsequently engaged to develop a proof of concept (PoC) for the education portfolio. Members of the project team entered evidence against criteria to test usability and functionality of the PoC.

Following feedback on the education portfolio PoC from members of the project team and education-focussed CoPs, the business requirements for a full build of the portfolio were developed. An agile team within UNSW IT subsequently developed myEducation Portfolio for use by academic staff at UNSW.

Subsequently, the project lead put forward a proposal to the PVCE, DVCA and Provost to incorporate myEducation Portfolio into the academic promotion process at UNSW. DVCA has approved the incorporation of the ePortfolio into the promotion process from 2020 (initially on a voluntary basis). Additional funding from PVCE has been secured to make the necessary enhancements to the portfolio to facilitate this process. The proposed enhancements will be in place by end 2019.

The dimensions and associated criteria in myEducation Portfolio are as follows:

Design and development of learning activities and assessment

- Design-1: Develops curricula, resources and learning activities to achieve learning outcomes for a range of learners, with a focus on encouraging critical thinking, reflection and self-directed learning
- Design-2: Effectively engages students as partners in development of curricula, resources and learning activities
- Design-3: Designs and sequences assessment tasks appropriate to learning outcomes
- Design-4: Provides students with constructive, actionable feedback on assessments and analyses assessment results to inform teaching practice

Teaching and supporting student learning

- Teach-1: Effectively engages learners from different educational, cultural and language backgrounds, to promote active learning among all students
- Teach-2: Communicates effectively with students and uses technology effectively, to promote learning of disciplinary content and achievement of learning outcomes
- Teach-3: Creates inclusive, safe, and positive learning environments
- Teach-4: Uses evidence-informed teaching approaches based on outcomes from research

Disciplinary expertise and professional development

- Expertise-1: Demonstrates continuous improvement in knowledge of own subject/discipline and relevant pedagogy
- Expertise-2: Actively undertakes professional development and implements new strategies

- Expertise-3: Demonstrates commitment to improvement of teaching practices via reflection/self-evaluation and response to feedback
- Expertise-4: Engages in educational scholarship that informs own practice and that of other teachers

Educational leadership

- Leadership-1: Effectively addresses core values, demonstrating professional and ethical conduct
- Leadership-2: Promotes collaboration by creating and leading opportunities for colleagues to network and share experiences
- Leadership-3: Contributes to the growth of others and creates resources for the broader teaching and learning community
- Leadership-4: Demonstrates characteristics of an effective/good mentor

The potential benefits to UNSW of the development of an education portfolio to evaluate individual teaching quality include:

1. For all teaching staff: The standards, guidelines and exemplars will provide academic staff with a clear set of criteria against which to measure their educational endeavours, facilitating their reflective practice and enabling planning their portfolios for increasing excellence;

2. For UNSW leadership: Guidelines for evaluating education portfolios may be utilised in career development, applications for teaching awards and academic promotion, thereby providing clear rewards for staff who attain educational excellence;

3. For current and future students: This integrated measure to evaluate teaching will help to focus academic staff on educational excellence. This will be reflected in students' learning experience (measured by QILT surveys) and improved learning outcomes.

4. For all academic staff: Development of theoretical and practical understanding, as well as application of the dimensions of educational excellence at UNSW;

5. For all academic staff: The Evaluation of Teaching and ePortfolio community of practice will be led by members of the project team and key stakeholders, who will disseminate information regarding myEducation Portfolio and will assist its implementation. The project team comprising Fellows of the Scientia Education Academy is uniquely positioned to embed new education initiatives at UNSW because SEA Fellows are attached to each of UNSW's Faculties;

6. Potential use of the flexible IT framework underpinning myEducation Portfolio to develop student-facing ePortfolios, which could enable integrated, longitudinal assessment of program learning outcomes;

7. Reputational benefit from enhanced education delivery and outcomes, positively impacting on prospective students' choice to study at UNSW.

3. Dissemination strategies and outputs

- Describe the dissemination activities and events that have been implemented and/or being planned in the future.
- Describe the outputs achieved until now and that are likely to occur as a result of this project.

Dissemination activities thus far include:

- A well-attended workshop for Education-Focussed academic staff during a 'Lunch and Learn' at UNSW Canberra in May 2019;
- Information regarding myEducation Portfolio has been distributed to members of Faculty Promotion Committees, commencing in June 2019 (ongoing);
- Establishment of an Education-Focussed Community of Practice on Evaluation of Teaching and ePortfolios in July 2019;
- A workshop for staff attending the Engineering Education Showcase in August 2019;
- A presentation for the CELEBS Education-Focussed Community of Practice in August 2019;
- An article submitted for publication in Campus Morning Mail in August 2019 (currently under review);
- Integration of the dimension of myEducation Portfolio with the UNSW Academic Expectations Framework in August 2019 (ongoing).

Future planned dissemination activities include:
- A Scientia Education Academy lecture on myEducation Portfolio, scheduled for September 2019;
- Presentations to Faculty Education Committees on myEducation Portfolio, scheduled to commence in September 2019;
- Broader communication to UNSW staff regarding myEducation Portfolio via Learning and Teaching newsletters, as well as a video featuring project members, scheduled for October 2019;
- A presentation to the UNSW Learning and Teaching Forum on myEducation Portfolio, scheduled for November 2019;
- A trial of the framework underpinning myEducation Portfolio as a student-facing ePortfolio is planned by the Faculty of Art and Design;
- Presentation to HERDSA and other national / international education conferences are planned to disseminate information about myEducation Portfolio to the higher education sector beyond UNSW;
- Publication of a peer-reviewed manuscript relating to the methods and outcomes of this project, expected to be submitted to an international journal of higher education for review in 2019.

4. Evaluation of project outcomes

- Describe the evaluation strategy (formative/summative), tools and actions.
- Include any results of data collection or analysis.
- Provide an evaluation report on the approach and outcomes.

Formative evaluation of the project has been provided by members the Project Advisory Board, as well as PVCE. Their guidance has helped to refine the dimensions of effective teaching in higher education. SEA Fellows and members of the Education-Focussed academic community at UNSW have also provided invaluable feedback on the proof of concept and production version of myEducation Portfolio.

The Delphi approach to developing consensus regarding the dimensions of effective teaching in higher education was very effective. In the first round of the study, the Delphi approach enabled the project team to engage 65 UNSW, national and international experts in higher education to delineate thirteen dimensions of effective teaching practice, which were subsequently prioritised by 58 of those experts in the second round of the study. That process enabled the project team to develop consensus on four dimensions, each with associated criteria.

There were delays in operationalising the identified dimensions of effective teaching in higher education in an ePortfolio due to the need for due diligence. These included evaluation of existing ePortfolio software, and when no existing platforms were deemed suitable, subsequent development of a design brief for development of an ePortfolio platform by UNSW IT. Further unavoidable delays for several months in 2018 resulted from unavailability of IT resources to commence development of the platform. However, once engaged, the IT development team functioned very efficiently and effectively, utilising agile project methodology.

Despite those delays, myEducation Portfolio was made available on its production platform in 2019. SEA Fellows, Education-Focussed academic staff and combined track academic staff at UNSW have contributed exemplars to demonstrate the types of evidence that staff in a variety of disciplines might be able to utilise in their portfolios. Those staff have also provided invaluable feedback which has refined the criteria for the ePortfolio and its usability. The project lead developed performance standards and evidence guidelines for each academic level, enabling myEducation Portfolio to be utilised for promotion purposes, as well as teaching awards and career development.

Overall, the project has been highly successful, meeting all its intended outcomes. myEducation Portfolio has the potential to further raise the profile of education at UNSW, as well as positively impacting on UNSW's national and international reputation for educational excellence.