

Assessing Capacity Overview

Introduction

This document summarises the process followed for assigning capacity scores to institutional student engagement, success and retention practices. It was applied to the Model of SESR developed in the SESR Project.

Higher Education Levels of Organisation

Higher education institutions (HEIs) are variously organised into a hierarchical structure of components. However, often the same level of component in different institutions is given different names. In this discussion, the generic terms in Table 1 will be used.

Table 1 Generic terms for institutional levels of organisation

Level	Generic term	Description	Synonyms
1	Subject	A semester-long teaching activity	Unit, Course, Paper
2	Program	A collection of subjects leading to an award such as a Bachelor of Applied Science	Course
3	Department	A discipline-, curriculum- or professionally-based administrative unit	School
4	Faculty	An administrative cluster of Departments (or synonyms)	School
5	Institution	An administrative cluster of Faculties (or synonyms)	Central administration, University, Institute of Technology...
6	Tertiary Sector	The collection of post-secondary institutions	

Elements of Capacity

This is a discussion of indicators of the *capacity* of practices designed to engage students, which provides the basis for assessing the *maturity* or *institutional capability* in this area of operation.

The maturity of the practices associated with each dimension is assessed using a four-point *capacity* scale:

- Little or no capacity to produce the identified practice
- Some capacity to produce the identified practice
- Considerable capacity to produce the identified practice
- Complete or almost complete capacity to produce the identified practice

This complex process is detailed in Clarke, Nelson, Stoodley and Creagh (2013) but summarised in Nelson, Clarke, Stoodley and Creagh (2013). An updated summary is reproduced here.

- *No evidence*: In some instances no data has been collected about a practice, for a variety of reasons which may include:
 - The practice does not happen
 - The evidence for the practice is inaccessible
 - The practice has no concrete evidence to reveal that it happens
 - Participants did not understand the practice description
 - The evidence collection techniques were inadequate
 - Assessment of that practice is not conducted by choice
 - The practice is described so broadly that it is not possible to find evidence for it

- The key question when assessing capacity is: *How well* does the evidence support the existence of that practice as interpreted in that dimension?
 - The concept of *How well* incorporates both the *Reach* of the practice (*How much?*) and the *Alignment* between the observed evidence and the practice as described in the model (*How good?*).
 - The descriptors for *Reach* are:
 - In some subjects
 - In some programs/departments
 - In some faculties
 - Institution-wide
 - The descriptors for *Alignment* are:
 - Minimal
 - Moderate
 - Substantial
 - Comprehensive
 - *Alignment* includes:
 - Identification of the core concern – the core concern is accurately identified
 - Responsiveness to the core concern – the core concern is actually addressed
 - Substantiveness of response to the core concern – different facets of the core concern are accounted for and the response is more than simplistic
 - Note: It is not the impact or effectiveness or implementation of the practice that is being assessed but the *Reach* in the institution and *Alignment* to the model, indicated by the evidence.

Scoring

Capacity is assessed by examining the interaction between the *Reach* and *Alignment* attributes of the evidence, summarised in a matrix in Clarke, Nelson, Stoodley and Creagh (2013) and reproduced here for convenience as Figure 1.

		Capacity score			
		Little or no capacity	Some capacity	Considerable capacity	Complete or near-capacity
		Reach			
		In some subjects	In some programs/departments	In some faculties	Institution-wide
Alignment	Minimal	1	1	1	1
	Moderate	1	2	2	2
	Substantial	2	2	3	3
	Comprehensive	2	2	3	4

Figure 1 Assessment of capacity

Conclusion

The results of this process are not meant to serve as an exhaustive audit or score card for the institution, rather to prompt reflection on areas which require priority attention.