A research plan for evaluating a faculty project to achieve systemic change in the teaching culture

Iain Doherty
Learning Technology Unit
Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
University of Auckland

Our paper outlines an initiative to achieve systemic change in the teaching culture of a faculty through providing staff with teaching supports and resources embedded within the University's reward and recognition processes. We explain why this initiative is important, describe our evaluation plan, outline the evaluation challenges and describe what we did to meet those challenges.

Keywords: strategic, teaching, continuing, professional, development, evaluation.

Introduction

In early 2009 the Associate Dean Education at the Faculty Medical and Health Sciences (FMHS) University of Auckland initiated a project to achieve systemic change in the teaching culture of the Faculty through providing staff with Continuing Professional Development (CPD) resources firmly embedded within the University's reward and recognition processes. The importance of the project lay in delivering on a Faculty strategic priority to provide staff with appropriate supports and resources in order to realize the strategic goal of achieving excellence in teaching.

We conjectured that providing staff with appropriate resources and supports would lead to changes in review and recognition processes – promotion rounds and annual reviews – and that these changes would eventually result in changes to teaching practices and enhanced student learning. With this in mind, the project deliverables were specified as: a teaching performance rubric to guide staff in developing their teaching in line with University performance expectations; a set of on online CPD modules covering all aspects of teaching and supervision within the Faculty; and an ePortfolio to allow academics to maintain records of their teaching performance for formative and summative purposes.

The development processes for the performance rubric, CPD modules and the ePortfolio have been described in detail elsewhere (Doherty, 2010a, 2010b; Doherty & Barrow, 2010a, 2010b) and the modules and rubric are available online for interested readers (http://www.fmhshub.auckland.ac.nz). The purpose of this paper is to describe our proposed evaluation plan, to outline the evaluation challenges and to describe what we did to meet those challenges.

Evaluation

Our first evaluation will be a process-based evaluation (what works, what does not work, what are the strengths of the resources, what are the weaknesses of the resources) geared towards fully understanding the utility of the project deliverables in the context of the University's promotion processes. We are carrying out a process-based evaluation because we need to know that the deliverables are working in a way that will produce the desired results. Evaluations will be carried out for three groups: academics with teaching responsbilities; academic managers who guide and support

academic staff who are applying for promotion; and Staffing Committee members responsible for making recommendations concerning promotion applications.

The evaluation instrument for the online CPD modules will measure: academics' reactions to the online professional development modules (experience and satisfaction); the perceived usefulness of the online professional development modules for academics seeking to develop their understanding of teaching and learning theory and practice; and the impact of the modules on academics' teaching practice and on student learning. Specific questions range across design and usability of the modules, changes made to teaching as a result of professional development, extent of engagement with the research base of the modules, extent of additional research and intention to engage in ongoing professional development.

The three instruments for the performance rubric evaluate: academics' experience of / academics' use of the teaching framework when applying for promotion; academic managers' experience of / use of the teaching framework when advising and guiding staff applying for promotion; Staffing Committee experience of / use of the teaching framework when making judgements about promotion applications; and staff perceptions regarding the importance of teaching activities in the promotion process. Specific questions for all three groups range across the usefulness of the rubric for making judgements about teaching performance, the specific relevance of the performance areas / indicators and the extent to which the framework is perceived to contribute to the legitimacy of teaching in the performance round.

The three instruments for the online ePortfolio measure: academics' experience of / use of of the ePortfolio in preparing an application for teaching for promotion; academic managers' experience of / use of ePortoflio when advising and guiding staff applying for promotion; and Staffing Committee experience of / use of the teaching ePortoflio when making recommendations about promotion applications. Specific questions for all three groups range across the value of a structured portfolio for developing and evidencing teaching and the extent to which the ePortfolio contributes to the legitimacy of teaching in the performance round.

Challenges

The primary purpose of the evaluation was specified as arriving at an understanding of the utility of the project deliverables in the promotion process. With this in mind we had to design a process-based evaluation that would measure the impact of this project on a number of different levels. Creating appropriate measurement instruments required the input of an evaluation expert. The challenge was compounded by the fact that we need to carry out other forms of evaluation including: an outcomes-based evaluation to measure the impact of the project on teaching and learning; and a goal-based evaluation to provide a final measurement of whether we achieved the stated project aim of bringing about a change in the teaching culture of the Faculty.

Each form of evaluation is important for different reasons. For example, process evaluation can help researchers to understand how and why a program is working (or not working). Outcome-based evaluation can provide information on whether the program ultimately translates into benefits for academic teachers and students. Goal based evaluation can measure whether the project achieves its stated aims. However, resources (time, funds, expertise) are finite and so, in the first instance, we have focused our efforts on goal based evaluation and included some questions for each of the evaluation groups that relate to process evaluation and outcome-based evaluation. We have more work to do to complete the project evaluation plan and we are looking at evaluation resources from the Australian Teaching and Learning Council (ALTC) (http://www.altc.edu.au/extras/altc-gsep/index.html).

References

Doherty, I. (2010a). *Aiming for Systemic Change through a Continuing Professional Development Initiative.* Paper presented at the ascilite 2010 Conference, Sydney, Australia.
Doherty, I. (2010b). A Learning Design for Engaging Academics with Online Professional Development Modules. *Journal of Learning Design.*
Doherty, I., & Barrow, M. (2010a). *Continuing Professional Development to Improve Teaching and Learning.* Paper presented at the HERDSA 2010 Conference.
Doherty, I., & Barrow, M. (2010b). *Educating Educators in the Constructive Use of Technologies for Teaching and Learning.* Paper presented at the Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference (SITE) 2010, San Diego, CA.

Author contact details:
Iain Doherty
Learning Technology Unit
Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences
University of Auckland
i.doherty@auckland.ac.nz