



CAULLT

**COUNCIL OF AUSTRALASIAN UNIVERSITY
LEADERS IN LEARNING AND TEACHING**

CAULLT Final Grant report

Establishing Benchmarking Standards for Academic Development

July 2024

Lead institution: Macquarie University
Partner institution(s): Queensland University of Technology
University of New South Wales
University of Tasmania

Project leader and contact details:

Associate Professor Marina Harvey

marina.harvey@mq.edu.au

with

Professor Jillian Hamilton

Dr. Andrea Adam

Advancing



Academic Development

Project summary

Building on two previous CAULLT supported projects, and the Australasian Advancing Academic Development Good Practice Awards, the aim of this project was to establish evidence-based Benchmarking Standards for Australasian Academic Development. Drawing on a large data set (of 100 good practice exemplars collected over four years), a set of criteria, descriptors, and standards were developed to produce an Academic Development Good Practice Framework. The framework was tested and validated with stakeholders at a well-attended CAULLT webinar and is the subject of a forthcoming publication.

Project background

This project was the third in a series of CAULLT research projects. It builds on (Project 1)¹ *Investigating the Need for an Association for Academic Developers (ADs)* (2018)² and (Project 2) *Recognising Academic Development Good Practice* (2019). All three projects were related to the initiative of the Australasian Advancing Academic Development Good Practice Awards conducted by the project team in 2018, 2019 and 2021. Each project has considered different dimensions of the awards.

Research Problem

The earlier projects revealed gaps in understanding of what constitutes 'good' practice in Academic Development (AD) across the Australasian sector, with approximately 46% of nominees who submitted cases for Advancing Academic Development Good Practice Awards unable to articulate or evidence good practice. Opportunities for ADs to gain insights into good practices from across the sector, and to learn what good practices are, had been limited prior to the awards and attendant presentations by exemplary nominees. In addition, there had not been research conducted in Australasia to systematically identify and analyse good practice in AD, yet alone to establish evidence-based principles of good practice and professional standards.

In this research project we posed the proposition that, if ADs and leaders of learning and teaching are unaware of what constitutes good practice, there are potential risks for learning and teaching centres and their universities. ADs cannot benchmark their initiatives against criteria to justify that they are of a good standard, and leaders of learning and teaching face challenges in providing a strong rationale for investing resources into the initiatives they are advocating and leading.

¹ <https://www.caullt.edu.au/project/an-association-for-academic-developers/>

² <https://www.caullt.edu.au/project/recognising-academic-development-good-practice/>

Project Aim

The aim of the CAULLT supported research project, *Establishing Benchmarking Standards for Academic Development*, was to establish evidence-based Benchmarking Standards for Australasian Academic Development, based on extensive and authentic evidence of good practices from across the sector.

To address this need, we developed an Academic Development Good Practice Framework, consisting of four criteria and ten standards (each with descriptors).

Methodology

An integrated theoretical framework for the project directed the approach to the methodology. The adopted theories of distributed leadership (Harvey & Jones, 2022) and SOTL as theory (Chick, 2019) each have historical and established principles, or tenets, of action research. Hence, action research was chosen as the methodology for this project.

The iterative cycles of action research of Plan, Act, Evaluate and Reflect (Kemmis, McTahart & Nixon, 2014) provided the structure for the research process. The 100 nominations submitted for the three Advancing Academic Development events provided the foundational data, collected across the three projects. The nominations were approximately 300 words each, representing 40 Australasian universities. The next stage of deeper analysis tested the resulting criteria, standards, and descriptors against the 30 nominations of the finalists for the Advancing Academic Development Awards.

The action research cycles were undertaken over a period of four years and were comprised of:

- **Action Research Cycle 1. Determining criteria**
- **Action Research Cycle 2. Determining standards**
- **Action Research Cycle 3. Testing and validation**

Each cycle, with its specific research focus, required the selection of appropriate methods to analyse the data. Mixed methods were employed across the action research cycles. The methods used included a systematic literature review; attribute coding; content analysis; and a review of findings for representativeness (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2020). Details of each cycle are provided in the paper submitted for publication (Harvey, Hamilton & Adam, 2024). Across these multiple cycles of action research, we rigorously investigated the foundational concepts of good practice.

Project findings

Based on the robust analysis of 100 good practice award nominations it was determined that there was a benefit to the sector to identify criteria to assess good academic development practices. This identification, application, research, and refinement of criteria determined four key criteria for good practice (Cycle 1). Good academic development:

1. practices are underpinned by the principles of good learning and teaching;
2. practices are innovative and/or distinctive;
3. impact can be evidenced, and
4. uses evaluation and reflection to quality assure and enhance practice.

The result of Cycle 2 was the determination of standards. Criteria 1 and 3 have three standards associated with them, and Criterion 2 has four standards associated with it. The validation process of Cycle 3 confirmed the fourth criterion and the final ordering of the criteria.

The four criteria for good academic development practice, along with their associated descriptors and standards, have been consolidated and presented as the new Academic Development Good Practice Framework.

Project deliverables

The project proposed to achieve three key deliverables:

1. **Development of a definition and national standards to support and enhance academic development practice. This will be presented to CAULLT (as Australasian leaders of learning and teaching) for endorsement.**



While the consolidation of a definition for academic development is still in progress, an Australasian Good Practice Standards Framework for Academic Development has been designed, developed and validated. A paper launching the standards framework has been submitted for publication in a peer reviewed journal (with acknowledgement of CAULLT funding).

2. **Systematic thematic analysis of good practice principles and practices disseminated through publications and a model based on idealised best practice (Schofield, 1998).**

At the time of this report two papers have been submitted for publication:



Harvey, M., Hamilton, J., & Adam, A. (2024) *What is good academic development? Introducing Australasian standards*. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

Hamilton, J., Adam, A., & Harvey, M. (2024). *Advancing academic development: A strategic, integrated model for recognition, professional development, and community-building*. [Manuscript R1 submitted for publication].

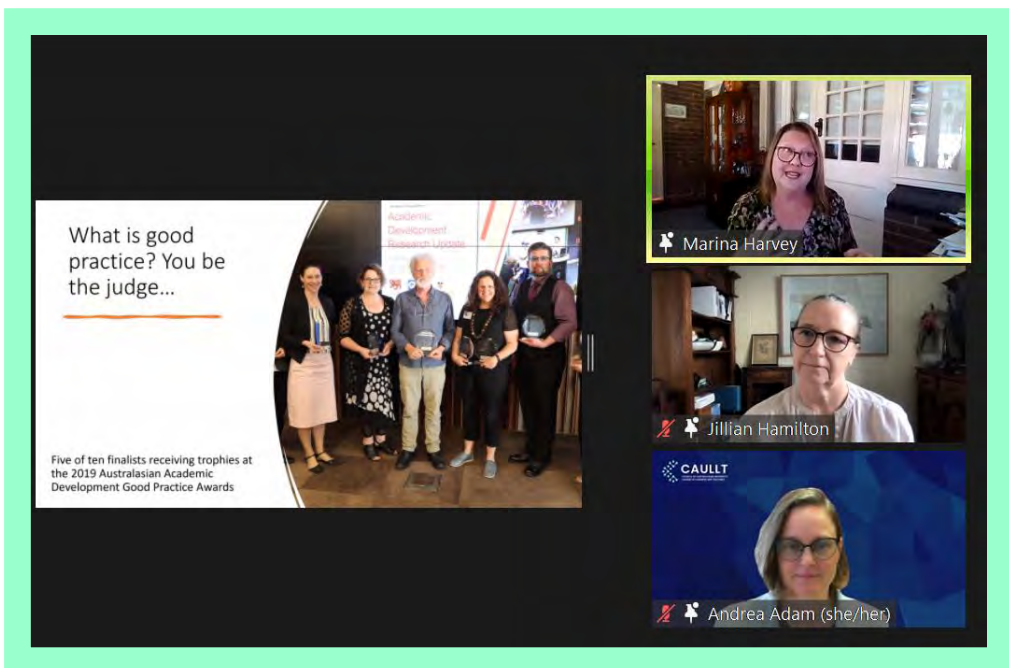
3. **A standards validation and dissemination workshop to establish good practice in AD at the levels of department, faculty and organisation. ADs and institutions will be able to self-assess the extent to which they fit that model (McKinnon, Walker & Davis, 2000).**

A workshop was conducted via an online webinar to validate and disseminate the framework.



Harvey, M., Hamilton, J., & Adam, A. (12th April, 2024). *What is good academic development? Workshopping Australasian standards*. CAULLT workshop.

The workshop attracted 100 registrations, and 67 participants. Following the webinar, feedback was assessed and used to iteratively refine the framework.



Screenshot of 12 April 2024 CAULLT webinar

For details refer to Appendix A and <https://www.caultt.edu.au/professionallearning/caullt-2024-webinar-series/what-is-good-practice-in-academic-development-workshopping-australasian-standards/>

Project evaluation

Lessons learnt

1. Scheduling regular team meetings ensured ongoing communication, project progress, and evaluation.
2. Integration of project activities with CAULLT's Professional Learning activities (notably the CAULLT webinar series and annual conferences) maximises project dissemination.

Challenges met

1. Each of the project team members had unexpected and extended medical leave which necessitated a rescheduling of some timeframes, however the schedule of regular meetings in the team calendar ensured that progress was maintained.
2. The project timeframe, coinciding with years of the Covid pandemic, prevented and delayed an in-person workshop. The result was a move to an online format (webinar) offered as a formal CAULLT professional development opportunity.

Recommendations

Through the series of three projects, it is has become evident that there is a strong need for recognition of, and professional development for, academic developers. The key recommendation emerging from the *Establishing Benchmarking Standards for Academic Development* project is therefore to:

1. Maintain an Australasian Advancing Academic Development event using the criteria and standards of the framework developed by this project (Harvey, Hamilton & Adam, 2024) and following the principles in the model developed by the *Recognizing and sharing good practice in Academic Development* project (Hamilton, Adam & Harvey, 2024). This includes sharing shortlisted good practices with the sector to provide a professional development opportunity.

The research team therefore fully endorses the decision by CAULLT to continue to offer Academic Development awards in 2024, and it encourages it to enable the sharing of shortlisted good practices with the sector.

Following the publication of the Academic Development Good Practice Framework in a peer-reviewed journal we recommend that:

2. Consideration be given to resourcing the production of an *Academic Development Good Practice Framework* resource guide by the project team to be hosted on the CAULLT website. Design and production of a guide is beyond the scope and outside the deliverables of the current project.

Benefits to CAULLT members

The Academic Development Good Practice Framework provides ADs with guidance for their emergent practice, including clear, comprehensive, and validated standards to benchmark their practice against, to inform the design of new initiatives, and to aspire to. The framework further provides university learning leaders with an evidence-base to not only strategically inform the design and delivery of AD initiatives, but to evaluate them against, and to substantiate claims about the quality of programs to their university executive. It has been established that benchmarking against established standards can provide academic developers and their managers with “a more investigative, research-informed process to add rigor to decision-making processes at the institutional level” (Booth, 2013). Hence, the framework can act as both an educational tool and evaluative tool for the sector.

The Establishing Benchmarking Standards for Academic Development project directly aligns with CAULLT’s goal to “Facilitate a rich and shared understanding of higher education learning and teaching in Australasia” by establishing rigorously developed standards, which are drawn from good practices across the sector, validated by ADs and learning leaders who are CAULLT members, and shared with the sector. Further, by providing these standards as a CAULLT initiative, this project provides a foundation to the goal to “Position CAULLT as a key contributor to the policy debate within the Australasian higher education sector”. Dissemination of project outcomes, and peer-reviewed publications, which acknowledge the support of CAULLT, serve to further promote the recognition and reputation of CAULLT.

Dissemination of outcomes and findings

Dissemination to date

Harvey, M., Hamilton, J., & Adam, A. (2024). *What is good academic development? Workshopping Australasian standards*. CAULLT webinar, 12th April, 2024 (Appendix A).

Harvey, M., Hamilton, J., & Adam, A. (2024) *What is good academic development? Introducing Australasian standards*. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

Hamilton, J., Adam, A., & Harvey, M. (2024). *Advancing academic development: A strategic, integrated model for recognition, professional development, and community-building*. [Manuscript submitted for publication].

Harvey, M., Hamilton, J., & Adam, A. (2021). *Establishing Benchmarking Standards for Academic Development*. Paper presentation at the 2021 Leading Higher Education: Near and Far Horizons, CAULLT conference, 29 October, Online.

2021 Global Academic Development Good Practice Awards. Wednesday 3rd November, 2021. Online. See archived call for submissions at:
https://www.advancingacademicdevelopment.net/_files/ugd/7b3f5e_fe87df2d12374456828484e839c636f5.pdf

2018, 2019, 2021 Global Academic Development Good Practice Award presentations: Advancing academic Development website: <https://www.advancingacademicdevelopment.net/>

Planned future dissemination

Two additional papers are in draft: one focussing on a definition for academic development, and one on the results and findings of our initial survey about the professional development needs of academic developers from the perspective of academic developers and their managers.

Adam, A., Harvey, M., & Hamilton J. (2024). *Developing academic developers: Developer and manager perspectives on the professional learning of Australian Academic Developers*. [Manuscript in preparation]. PLaNT, University of Tasmania.

Budget

Itemised list of expenditure compared to original budget

Item	Original		Final
Research Assistance/ editing @ 60 hours (HEW 5, step2)	\$2,997.49		\$2,997.49
Benchmarking standards validation workshop Materials, catering	\$644.00	Renewal of WIX site @ USD462.00 https://www.advancingacademicdevelopment.net/ as a repository of good practice nominations	\$644.00
Travel for NZ representative	\$1,250.00	Travel 2 team members to Sydney to workshop standards	\$1,250.00
	\$4,891.49		\$4,891.49
In-kind support	\$15,476	Level E x 18 days @\$849.81 QUT	
	\$10,480	Level C x 18 days @\$585.22 UTAS	
	\$27,000	HE consultant x 18 days@ \$1,500	
In-kind support total	\$52,956		

Certification

I certify that this is an accurate representation of the progress of this project.

Name of project leader: Dr. Marina Harvey

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "M. Harvey". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial "M".

Date 19/07/2024

References

- Booth, S. (2013). Utilising benchmarking to inform decision-making at the institutional level: a research-informed process. *Journal of Institutional Research*, 18(1), 1-12. ISSN 1443-2110
- Chick, N. L. (2019). Theory and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: Inquiry and practice with intention. In M. Mallon, L. Hays, C. Bradley, R. Huisman, & Jackie Belanger (Eds.), *The grounded instruction librarian: Participating in the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* (pp. 55-64). ALA.
https://scholarship.rollins.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1325&context=as_facpub
- Harvey, M., & Jones, S. (2022). Challenge accepted: Women claiming leadership in higher education learning and teaching. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 19(1), 68-91.
<https://doi.org/10.53761/1.19.1.05>
- Kemmis, S., McTaggart, R., & Nixon, R. (2014). *The action research planner. Doing critical participatory action research*. Springer.
- Miles, M.B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2020). *Qualitative data analysis. A methods sourcebook. Edition 4*. Sage.

Appendix A

CAULLT workshop. 12 April, 2024

What is good practice in academic development? Workshopping Australasian standards

Academic development activities have now been researched for decades, but what has not yet been clearly established are the standards that define good practice in this field. Drawing on the outcomes of a systematic series of CAULLT funded initiatives, which have focussed on advancing academic development, we will share our research on establishing criteria and associated standards for assessing good practice in academic development.

This workshop will enable academic developers and institutional leaders to contribute to the validation of the new standards. It will be of particular value to academic developers who are creating innovative initiatives for their institutions and to institutional leaders who are involved in quality assurance and enhancement processes. Upon validation the standards will become available to enable the benchmarking of institutional academic development practices, to evidence the value of existing and proposed initiatives, and to inform robust decision-making around prioritising and resourcing academic development initiatives.

Participants in the workshop will:

- Gain insights into the action research process employed to determine what is good academic development practice;
- Engage in an activity on assessing good practice examples;
- Discuss the complexities of determining good practice;
- Critique and contribute to the validation of the criteria and standards of good academic development, and
- Identify how the standards can be applied to their institution and practice.

Facilitators:

Associate Professor Marina Harvey, Macquarie University

Professor Jillian Hamilton, Queensland University of Technology

Dr Andrea Adam, University of Tasmania
