CAULLT Grant Final Report

Investigating how leaders in L&T units across Australian regional universities employ SET to ensure fairness and optimise their L&T benefits

2023

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Project details

Title of project

Investigating how leaders in L&T units across Australian regional universities employ SET to ensure fairness and optimise their L&T benefits.

Ethics Approval Number: A221794

Amount of funding awarded $9665.50

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Project overview

Project Aims

This project aimed to explore the perceptions and experiences of learning and teaching leaders involved in the facilitation of SET in regional universities. This research has informed the development of a good practice guide, an academic output and a project report, which cumulatively detail the research process, findings, and make recommendations for the use of SET in universities.

The aims of this project aims are presented below and mapped to the project outputs.

Table 1: Project aims and outputs

Project Aims	Project Outputs
• Provide an analysis of how SET is valued and employed in regional universities in Australia • Identify and evaluate strategies employed to promote SET and mitigate bias in SET processes	Project Report
• Provide a conceptual framework of student feedback mechanisms to enrich quality teaching and promote student learning	Academic publication
• Share good practice on the utilisation of pre and post SET practices that support/reward quality L&T	Good Practice Guide

Phases and activities

The table below captures the research process and aligned activities across the project timeline.

Table 2: research activities and timeline

Activity	Aug-Oct	Nov-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jul	Aug-Oct	Responsible entity	Success/Impact Indicator
Recruit RA	x					Project team/project lead	Recruit appropriate personnel
Lit Review	x	x		x		RO	Lit review completed
Ethics application	x					RO	Ethics approved
Design and administer survey		x	x			RO	60%+ completion rate
Analyse survey data				x		RO	All data analysed
Focus groups (FG)			x	x		RO	Three focus groups facilitated
FG data analysis				x	x	RO	Focus group transcripts transcribed and analysed thematically
Write project report, good practice guide, academic output				x	x	Project team/project lead and RO	Completion of project report, good practice guide, academic output

Methodology and Methods:

An instrumental case study methodology was employed to investigate the value leaders of L&T and academics across regional universities attribute to SET; what other mechanisms they employ/endorse for capturing student experience of L&T; if and why measures are used to mitigate bias in the SET process, and to promote their completion; and if, how and why pre-/post-SET processes are used to support academic development. Instrumental case studies are particularly useful when 'how' and 'why' questions are being asked (Yin, 1982).

After obtaining ethical clearance (Ethics number: A221794), the research team invited directors and senior staff of L&T units across the Regional Universities Network to complete and distribute an online survey amongst their relevant staff. Open questions were designed to garner participants' understanding of the role of SET; the relationship between student evaluation and teaching quality; if, why, and how they lead/facilitate measures to optimise completion of SET, to mitigate bias in the SET process, and pre/post-SET processes implemented (and the effects thereof). Survey findings informed a focus group instrument designed to further explore these topics and others identified by survey participants. Three focus groups were facilitated, with 9 participants in total, from 5 regional universities.

Project outcomes

Data Findings

The team of researchers from across five regional universities developed and disseminated an online survey to determine how leaders of learning and teaching perceive the function, value, challenge, and opportunity of SET, and their experience of engaging with SET.

Detailed findings from the research will be published in a journal article, but in summary, survey and focus group results indicate that SET has the potential to support learning and teaching (L&T) improvement by understanding and addressing student perspectives and experiences. If addressed iteratively, alongside other measures, SET data can be used to facilitate continuous improvement and data-informed decision making.

There are, however, concerns about the rigor of SET, student bias, poor response rates, and polarising views expressed by students potentially due to students' poor feedback literacy, and an over-reliance on anonymous survey design and quantitative data.

Overall, the findings highlight the complexities and challenges associated with SET in the context of learning and teaching at universities, with an emphasis on the need for improvements in survey design, timing, and engagement to elicit meaningful and unbiased feedback. Finally, the data also underscored the need for a more holistic approach to evaluating the quality of education beyond traditional SET surveys. The Good Practice Guide that accompanies this Project Report provides detailed strategy for constructing an approach to engaging student feedback to support quality learning and teaching at universities.

Outcomes

The Good Practice Guide will be distributed to RUN university learning and teaching units through our project team members. It will also be available for download on the CAULLT website. Focus group participants all expressed an interest in receiving this project's findings, therefore, the Project Report and Good Practice Guide will also be provided to these participants.

It is envisaged that this project will provide a springboard to further research and investigation into SET improvements, and therefore its findings and outputs will continue to be disseminated as a part of future research projects. Focus group participants expressed an interest in participating in an applied research project where recommendations from this report could trialled. We intend to seek funding for a Phase 2 to leverage the outputs from this research project.

Research outcomes generated by this investigation into SET practices in regional universities provide an opportunity for CAULLT members to reflect on their current assumptions of SET and its uses, and build knowledge around the changing responses to SET from regional universities' student cohorts. This research has established that there is a need to adjust and adapt SET practices for stronger student engagement and to elicit more meaningful and useful SET data. Leveraging SET for continual improvement processes in Learning and Teaching is an opportunity for student centred course improvements, and therefore is likely to be of interest to CAULLT members. We also suggest that CAULLT members may be able to apply our learnings from the project by considering the recommendations made in the Good Practice Guide for their own universities.

Summary of project outcomes and deliverables/outputs

We are happy to present the key findings and/or lead a discussion on the use of SET within universities at a CAULLT webinar and/or the 2024 CAULLT conference, based on preferences of the CAULLT Executive.

The project team will further discuss dissemination opportunities, including conference and webinar presentations. We would kindly seek CAULLT member assistance in disseminating the Good Practice Guide to leaders of learning and teaching across all affiliate universities. The Chief Investigators will also invite discussion and/or presentation opportunities with leaders of learning and teaching across all affiliate universities.

Impact of the project to date

The project team has only recently analysed all project data, completed the literature review, written the Good Practice Guide, and drafted an academic paper. We have yet to disseminate our findings or recommendations. We welcome the opportunity to provide impact of project mid-year and then again at the end of year, 2024.

<u>NB:</u> *Attach any content that needs to be uploaded to the CAULLT website.*

Budget

The budget provided a salary for a Research Officer. Activities undertaken and hours expended are detailed below.

RO Activity	Hours expended
Lit Review	18
Ethics application	8
Design and administer survey	14
Analyse survey data/compile data reports	20
Focus group (FG): Design questions, organise and facilitate	20
Analyse focus group data/compile data reports	20
Support the development of a project report, good practice guide and academic output	40

Project Budget

- Personnel salaries: RA (level 6 step 1): 140 hours @ $63.90 (inc. oncosts) = $ 8946.00
- **Total = $8946.00**

In-kind contribution

- Minor operating expenses (printing; phone; computer software and maintenance): $5000
- In-kind contribution from combined institution(s): 2 academics (project leads) plus 7 project team members' salaries x 50 hours each @ (approx.). $100 p/h inc. oncosts) $55,000**. Total = $60,000**

Recommendations emerging or Key learnings

Results from the research inform the development of a Good Practice Guide and recommendations for using SET tools and other teaching and learning evaluation instruments in regional university contexts. Research outcomes allow the Council of Australasian University Leaders in Learning and Teaching (CAULLT) members to reflect on current assumptions of SET use within their institutional contexts and build knowledge around the changing responses in regional universities' student cohorts. This research established a need to adjust and adapt SET practices for robust, more informed student engagement and to elicit more meaningful and valuable SET data. Leveraging SET for continual improvement processes in Learning and Teaching is an opportunity for student-centred course improvements and, therefore, likely to be of interest to CAULLT members and general academic and faculty staff. We also suggest that CAULLT members may be able to apply the research learnings by considering the recommendations as part of the Good Practice Guide for their universities.

Project Leads Name	Associate Professor Gail Crimmins with Dr Sarah Casey
Signature	
Date	23/10/23