

## **Report on Implementation of the Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites.**

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The online teaching environment has become such an integral part of tertiary teaching that quality standards are now a central element of that environment. UWS staff make extensive use of the online teaching environment, with 100% of taught units using the e-learning management system (known as vUWS or 'virtual UWS'). In 2009, the Teaching Development Unit (TDU) developed an *E-Learning Quality Framework* (Ireland, Correia & Griffin 2009) which provides criteria and standards for guidance in developing quality online sites. The framework provides guidance for both Basic and Advanced Standards.

In 2009 and 2010, TDU focused on implementing the Basic Standards across the whole institution. The Teaching Development Unit developed a booklet which introduces the Basic Standards and guides academic staff through an evaluative process of their own sites (Section 1: Self Review) and helps them to develop enhanced skills in both the technical and pedagogical aspects of online learning and teaching (Section 2: Development Strategies). The principles are based on scholarly literature as well as educational design and web accessibility principles. They have also been adapted to the UWS context. They are foundational in building well-designed online learning environments and it is expected that all sites will be based on the principles identified in these standards.

The publication is available from [http://tdu.uws.edu.au/qilt/downloads/Basic\\_Standards\\_for\\_Elearning\\_Sites.pdf](http://tdu.uws.edu.au/qilt/downloads/Basic_Standards_for_Elearning_Sites.pdf)

### **The Basic Standards**

The Basic Standards have been designed to be applicable to the diverse ways in which e-learning sites are used. They have also been designed to enable all designers to review and improve unit and hub sites, regardless of their familiarity with designing e-learning environments. The 21 criteria of the Basic Standards (see Table 1) are dispersed across four main standards.

The first section of the Basic Standards booklet contains a description of each Standard and related criteria. Each criterion is expanded with rationale and design principles that relate to achieving quality in the relevant area. A rating scale is also included so that designers can review their site against each criterion.

The second section consists of development strategies. This section contains a description of the Standards and Criteria, plus provides tips and references to resources that can assist designers to improve their sites in-line with the Basic Standards.

Table 1: The Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites and corresponding criteria

<b>1.Organisation and Appearance</b>	<b>2.Consistency and Compliance</b>	<b>3. Appropriate Use of Tools</b>	<b>4. Learner Resources and Supports</b>
<b>1.1</b> The homepage design if clear, simple and welcoming	<b>2.1</b> Information in the e-learning site is consistent with unit outline	<b>3.1</b> The tools added to the e-learning site have a clear purpose and rationale	<b>4.1</b> The relevance of scholarly resources is clearly presented to students
<b>1.2</b> The unit outline and learning guide can be located easily from the homepage	<b>2.2</b> All unit information on the site has been updated and is current	<b>3.2</b> Students receive instructions about how tools will be used	<b>4.2</b> Students are provided with information about what e-learning supports are available and where to find them
<b>1.3</b> Text on the e-learning site pages can be read easily	<b>2.3</b> Readings and other resources are appropriately linked to avoid copyright infringements	<b>3.3</b> Communication tools are monitored and netiquette standards enforced	<b>4.3</b> Students with disabilities have been informed about where to get support for accessibility issues
<b>1.4</b> The e-learning site design promotes ease of navigation	<b>2.4</b> Information on the site complies with privacy policy	<b>3.4</b> Expectations about use of communication tools are clear to students	<b>4.4</b> Links to learning supports are contained in the site
<b>1.5</b> Icon style is consistent throughout the site	<b>2.5</b> if e-learning templates are prescribed, they have been used		
<b>1.6</b> Icons represent the items to which they are linked			
<b>1.7</b> File sizes enable efficient downloads			
<b>1.8</b> File types and specific software requires for opening them are specified			

### Implementation strategies: not one size fits all

A whole of institution and multi-tiered approach to e-learning quality was taken at UWS to develop the Basic Standards for E-Learning Sites (Correia et al 2008; Rankine & Malfroy 2009). The range of implementation strategies aimed to address academic perceptions, attitudes, varying levels of proficiency and context specific factors. Generic workshops at a central point on campus were not considered suitable for a university with six campuses, such as UWS, so targeted and tailored implementation strategies were implemented.

The Teaching Development Unit commenced site reviews against the Basic Standards for E-Learning for each main teaching session (ie. Autumn, Spring). This was done to develop an understanding of where consistency was being met and where targeted intervention strategies to improve quality were required. Reports were generated for each School and meetings convened to discuss the results with the Head of

School. These meetings provided an opportunity to discuss targeted staff development strategies that the central unit could provide in partnership with the School to address areas of improvement, and to foster champions in the school who could be ongoing leaders of e-learning quality.

### **Indicators for measuring success**

The development of Basic Standards in E-Learning Sites was an institutional initiative that took more than a year of intensive staff development actions to implement across the University. Metrics were measured each semester to track consistency with Basic Standards criteria across schools, colleges and whole of institution.

Appendix 1 shows a year-long assessment of sites against the Basic Standards criteria. Significant areas of improvement occurred in the areas of organisation and appearance; consistency and compliance; and learner resources and supports. Specific criteria that started out as consistent across the institution (eg legibility of text and file sizes for efficient downloads), remained largely constant a year after the implementation of Basic Standards. However, the most substantial area of consistency occurred across the fourth standard; learner resources and supports. After the implementation of Basic Standards this standard is consistently over 80% across the University.

School-based reports are provided to Heads of Schools for localised planning and partnership projects have been formed between schools and the central academic development unit for specific e-learning innovation activities. Ongoing feedback from Heads of Schools indicates a sustained positive reaction from academics about e-learning quality and awareness of issues that impact on a quality e-learning site. There has been an increase in confidence and skill level of academic staff with further engagement across the institution in exploring effective e-learning strategies that result in improved student engagement and grades.

### **Conclusion**

The University of Western Sydney has taken a strategic whole-of-institution approach to embed quality in e-learning through a set of easy to use Basic Standards criteria that academic staff can use to self review their own sites. Through this self assessment process, the strengths and areas for improvement can be identified for targeted improvement actions at the central and local level. The regular audit of sites reveals an improvement in design and quality of sites.

### **References**

Correia, H., Malfroy, J., Griffin, T., Ireland J. & Rankine, L. (2008). Quality in the elandscape: A collegial and developmental approach. In *Hello! Where are you in the landscape of educational technology?* Proceedings ascilite Melbourne 2008.

<http://www.ascilite.org.au/conferences/melbourne08/procs/correia.pdf> (accessed 2 December 2010)

Ireland, J., Correia, H., Griffin, T (2009) Developing quality in e-learning: a framework in three parts. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 17 (3), p 145-150.

Rankine, L. & Malfroy, J., (2009) An institutional approach to embedding quality in e-learning: developing staff capacity at UWS. *Presented at Educause Australasia, 3-6 May 2009, Perth*

## Appendix 1: Tracking progress in Basic Standards implementation

