Performance-based funding of teaching excellence
The University of Sydney has led the way in Australia with its performance-based funding of excellence in learning and teaching.

This leading role was recognised nationally in 2006 by the Australian Universities Quality Agency when it awarded the inaugural Australian Higher Education Quality Award to Professor Paul Ramsden, formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), for his development of the Course Evaluation Questionnaire, which is used nationally as one input to the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, and his introduction of a Teaching Dividend at the University of Sydney. Professor Ramsden has since left the University of Sydney to take up the position of Chief Executive of the Higher Education Authority in the United Kingdom.

In 2006 the University undertook major reviews of several of the funding mechanisms involved in the performance-based funding of teaching. This includes reviews of the Scholarship Index, the Teaching Improvement Fund (TIF) and the Sesqui Teaching Equipment Scheme. These reviews reflected the general University focus on outcomes. Criteria for the Scholarship Index were updated while TIF and the Sesqui Teaching Equipment Scheme were amalgamated to form the Teaching Improvement and Equipment Scheme (TIES).

Performance-based funding continues to be a major incentive for the spread of teaching excellence with the distribution of $1.4 million to faculties through the Scholarship Index based on:

- staff with qualifications in University teaching
- staff with teaching awards
- staff actively researching and publishing in the area of University teaching, and
- staff presenting their research on University teaching at conferences.

Rewarding teaching excellence
Nationally, eight nominees from the University of Sydney won Carrick Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning. They were:

- Associate Professor Jennie Hodgson and Dr Jacqui Norris (Veterinary Science)
- Dr Kathleen O’Loughlin, Ms Frances Everingham and Dr Gary Lee (Health Sciences) and Mr Stuart Newman and Ms Maureen Ahern (Nursing and Midwifery)
- Dr Diane Collins (Sydney Conservatorium of Music)
- Dr Lesley Scanlon (Education and Social Work)
- Dr Amani Ahmed and Dr Rosina Mladenovic (Economics and Business) and Dr Tai Peseta (Institute for Teaching and Learning)
- Associate Professor Michelle Lincoln and Dr Sue McAllister (Health Sciences)
- Ms Hannah Forsyth, Dr Jenny-Ann Toribio, Professor Richard Whittington and Ms Meg Vost (Veterinary Science)
- Dr Stephen Robertson (Arts)

All of these teachers have been successful because they focus on the learner first, an approach which also won Dr Jennifer Milam (Arts) and Dr Leanne Piggott (Economics and Business) Quality Teaching Awards from the New South Wales Minister for Education and Training and the Australian College of Educators (ACE). ACE assessors awarded not only on the basis of excellence in curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment, but also evaluated student learning through onsite visits and meshing of staff and student feedback.

In 2006 the University of Sydney was awarded $6.29 million from the Federal Government Learning and Teaching Performance Fund, recognising its achievement in teaching and learning, particularly in the areas of humanities, arts and education, business and economics and law.
Research-enhanced learning

As Australia's leading research-intensive university, the University of Sydney is also a leader in incorporating research into student learning. In 2006 a new policy clarified the role of research-enhanced learning and teaching. This policy outlines an intellectual community and environment where research is integral to the content of programs of study, where inquiry-based learning is the norm and where staff and students are proactively engaged in research into university learning and teaching.

In line with this policy, the following University staff have joined with colleagues in successful Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education grants in 2006:

- Associate Professor Michelle Lincoln (Health Sciences): Benchmarking clinical learning in speech pathology to support assessment, discipline standards, teaching innovation and student learning
- Associate Professor Mark Freeman (Economics and Business): “Business as usual” – a collaborative and inclusive investigation of the existing resources, strengths, gaps and challenges to be addressed for sustainability in teaching and learning in Australian university business faculties
- Dr Peter McGee (Science): Creating a student-centred online learning environment for report writing in the sciences and engineering
- Associate Professor Mark Freeman: Embedding development of intercultural competence in business education, and

Student feedback through the Student Course Experience Questionnaire (SCEQ) showed that across the University, research-enhanced learning and teaching was one of the most improved areas of the student experience. This was seen in both undergraduate and postgraduate coursework student feedback during 2006.

Integrated learning

In 2006 a review was undertaken of the University’s use of information and communications technologies (ICT) for learning and teaching. The review acknowledged that e-learning was now integral and recommended that the effective use of ICT in learning and teaching was dependent on academic leadership and excellent working relationships between academic planning and infrastructure planning.

As a result of the review, nomenclature changed from ‘e-learning’ to ‘integrated learning’ and an Integrated Learning Strategy was developed with academic and Information and Communications Technology staff input. This strategy integrates planning for both virtual and physical learning spaces, and aims to increase wireless access and to develop an academic workload model that recognises time investment in both face-to-face and e-learning.

Excellence in the area of integrated learning was recognised when Dr Katrina Bosward, Dr Mark Krockenberger, Mr Gerard Marcus and Mr Federico Costa from the University’s Faculty of Veterinary Science won the 2006 Pearson Education UniServe Science Teaching Award for their Integrated Case-based Applied Pathology (ICAP) course in Semester Five of the Veterinary Science undergraduate curriculum. This annual award is designed to recognise and reward teachers who make an outstanding contribution to student learning through innovative and integrated use of information and communication technologies in university science teaching.

In June 2006 the University launched the WriteSite, an online initiative which uses animation, colourful multiple choice and drag-and-drop sequences to improve students’ academic writing skills. The WriteSite is designed to reduce the time academics need to spend teaching writing by providing a marking key linked to common academic writing problems. Staff can use the key to direct students to clear examples supported by practice activities.
Planning for and spreading good practice in learning and teaching

A new University Learning and Teaching Plan was adopted, after a rigorous consultative process, by the Academic Board in 2006. The plan has five goals:

• ensure the distinctiveness of the Sydney graduate
• support quality and innovative teaching
• promote internationalisation, cultural diversity and equity
• embed research-enhanced learning and teaching, and
• enhance learning in an information rich environment.

Each goal has key performance indicators and targets, making it clear that the University expects to further improve performance in all aspects of learning and teaching. The focus on performance management aligns with government priorities and gives a strong evidence base upon which to build and enhance the quality and outcomes of student learning.


One of the methods the University is using to spread good practice in learning and teaching is through regular, focussed staff forums. In 2006 two were held, one on best practice in assessment and student feedback and the other on curriculum reform and renewal.

The programs included invited guest speakers and best practice examples from the University of Sydney with plenty of opportunity for staff to discuss and share through breakout groups. Papers from these forums can be found online at www.usyd.edu.au/learning/quality/seminars.shtml.

The Institute for Teaching and Learning (ITL) provides a major means of spreading good practice, both through its training programs for University teachers and through its strategic working groups. In 2006 the ITL continued to support teaching excellence in four main areas. More than 100,000 questionnaires were returned from students with their assessment of their learning experience. These were processed, analysed and disseminated by ITL staff as part of the University’s continuing quality enhancement process.

Cross-faculty working groups continued in five strategic areas (research-enhanced teaching and learning; evaluation and quality assurance; information and communication technology; generic graduate attributes; and internationalisation, global citizenship and inclusiveness). A sixth group began to address issues of postgraduate coursework pedagogies in the latter part of the year.

The Institute’s three-day introduction to university teaching accommodated over 200 academic staff in four sessions held throughout the year, including international participants, and the Graduate Certificate in Educational Studies (Higher Education) was fully subscribed, with 35 participants.

Science award for innovative teachers

Traditional theoretical methods of teaching are being replaced in the University’s Faculty of Veterinary Science by more practical case-based courses.

One of the new courses, Integrated Case-based Applied Pathology (ICAP), has won the 2006 Pearson Education UniServe Science Teaching Award.

Dr Katrina Bosward, Dr Mark Krokenberger, Gerard Marcus and Federico Costa created the course which is delivered in Semester Five of the Veterinary Science undergraduate curriculum.

A key feature is its use of real veterinary cases, which aim to help students understand the role of pathology in the diagnostic process. Students are encouraged to engage with cases in an investigative and evidence-based way, like professional veterinary surgeons (see photo below). The course also incorporates e-learning, using a web-based system to deliver online learning.

The $2000 award is a joint initiative of UniServe Science and Pearson Education Australia. It is designed to recognise and reward teachers who make an outstanding contribution to student learning through innovative and integrated use of information and communication technologies in university science teaching.