



UNIT REVIEW: improving quality, content and teaching in under performing units



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- Priority Focus and explanation of PATS variation

The focus was Quality Improvement. The Bachelor of Design (School of Design) was recently included in a newly formed Faculty of Health, Arts and Design, where underperforming units are being reviewed to improve curriculum. The method was to analyse and assess the content, teaching and delivery of underperforming units and, from this data, implement changes to improve future iterations of each unit.

Why

The variation is named PAUS (Peer Assisted Unit Scheme) and was introduced at the start of semester one, 2015. The name change takes the emphasis off the individual teacher and highlights that attention is on the unit. The PATS variation is designed address the quality improvement issues by collective analysis of a unit broken down into areas of teaching, content, delivery and assessment criteria, strengths and weaknesses. The results and ideas for improvement generated can be integrated from a course perspective to advance the level of performance in the weaker units and potentially further improve strong units. It is intended that embedding PAUS for a course will rectify problems and ensure improvements of all units in the degree and maintain higher standards of curriculum design and delivery across the Design school.

People

A team of teaching staff, including unit convenors and sessional staff.

Timeframe

Ongoing.

Scope: Course

Initially four units within the Bachelor of Design, then the broader School with potential for Faculty uptake.



- Key Outcomes

PATS variation – outputs and outcomes

The trialing of the PATS variation, PAUS, has seen an improvement to the learning and teaching culture across a diverse range of units identified as needing attention. We achieved this through leadership, collaboration and sharing of knowledge. The PAUS process encouraged staff to reflect on best practice, reviewing and seeking assistance from staff in other units. Like PATS, the PAUS system also employed mentoring but rather than one to one, included up to four staff in a partnership. The essential elements were planning, setting realistic goals and reviewing all aspects at regular intervals over the semester.

These strategies have resulted in significant upgrading of student attendance and teaching quality with potential for further improvement. There have been significant changes to the curriculum delivery in three units with the fourth being developed over second semester 2015 and into 2016.

These results may inform and influence all staff within the School of Design with potential to be implemented within the whole Faculty of Health, Arts and Design and the broader University community.

System level impacts

Within Swinburne University of Technology, this PATS variation aimed to have impact at IMPEL levels 1, 2, 3 and 4.

1. **Team members:** Lecturing staff and sessional staff teaching in the Bachelor of Design.
2. **Immediate students:** ensuring issues with unit content, delivery styles and methods plus assessment requirements have all been addressed benefits students learning experience and outcomes. Some changes were made for the first semester 2015 and others for semester two 2015 with continuing improvement plans in place for 2016.
3. **Spreading the word:** dissemination about the PAUS scheme to the Associate Dean, Learning and teaching and other staff in the design school. Institutional awareness is increased due to its inclusion in a comparative study of a number of Unit improvement trials underway in 2015.
4. **Narrow opportunistic adoption:** more units within the Bachelor of Design and within other degree programs in the School of Design will be part of PAUS in 2016.

- Learning

1. Barriers and opportunities

Time is a dominant factor hindering full participation, with limited opportunity for staff to meet together, compounded by different timetables. However most staff saw PAUS as positive, wanted improvements to occur and were willing to participate.

2. What worked well

PAUS was underpinned by planning that included all participating staff members to gain shared understanding about the units being targeted. Each unit convenor was asked to complete a form to provide the following information for discussion and decision:

1. What we need to do: how the unit is taught now.
2. What is or isn't working and how can we develop further / make improvements?
3. How can we incorporate other unit ideas and methods and what else can we do to help for unit improvement?

CASE STORY

4. Outcome Evaluation to measure outcomes: have we achieved what we planned to do to improve curriculum?

Co-operation by staff participating in the project was also an important factor in achieving good outcomes. Some of the ideas generated by the discussion based on the Unit Convenors' forms did not work in all units but overall the experience of generating ideas for improvement, trialling changes and evaluating outcomes was positive.

3. What didn't work well

Organising various parties with different teaching hours, as well as ability of staff to find time to engage in PAUS, meant finding common meeting times was very difficult. Some of the suggestions generated for unit improvement require more than one iteration of the unit to resolve issues.

5. What was learnt

PAUS is an effective mechanism for unit improvement that engages staff members in a collegial activity focused on unit improvement. The shift in focus from teacher to unit has a positive effect on staff engagement. Following the trial, PAUS will be broadened to help advance curriculum across the School of Design and the Faculty of Health Arts and Design. PAUS will be reviewed following the first semester of implementation with consideration of what can be done to further advance using this system for unit improvement.

6. National System Impact

IMPEL Level 2: Changes by team members leading to changes for students who are directly influenced.

