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Australian teaching and learning centres through the eyes of their Directors: characteristics, capacities and constraints

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This paper is based on research to identify common factors that contribute to the effective strategic leadership of teaching and learning centres. The second of three phases of data collection involved a survey of Directors of Australian teaching and learning centres. The data collected were quantitatively analysed using a range of descriptive, parametric and non-parametric techniques. Based on a response rate of 81.6 percent, we present a contemporary, comprehensive and representative quantitative snapshot of Australian teaching and learning centres, as seen through the eyes of their Directors. The time since last restructure, incumbency of the current Director and total Directorship experience of the current Centre Director all have mean values of ‘sometime in the previous one to three years’. Most Centres would consider their work in the areas of ‘recognition and reward’ and ‘professional development of staff’ as high impact functions, and they would be pleased with their efforts in the former area, and wish to perform better on the latter. The principal constraint identified by Centres was ‘lack of staff time’, both in the Faculties and in the Centre, to engage in teaching and learning improvement activities. Overall, Centres feel well included in relevant university committees and other activities.

Keywords: teaching and learning centres; survey of directors; academic development

Introduction

University centres for teaching and learning (Centres) take many forms, perform many functions and have complex roles (Taylor, 2005). Perhaps because they are viewed by the university executive as an organ for implementing strategic initiatives relating to teaching and learning quality improvement (Brew, 2007), Centres seem to be prone to restructuring in continuing attempts to ‘get it right’ (Gray & Radloff, 2006). Whatever the reasons, frequent and widespread Centre restructuring is reported internationally (Gosling, 2009a; Hart, Austen, Cochrane, Daniel, Thelander & Tweedale, 2005; Weimer, 2007). While the broad diversity of functions performed by Centres means that it is not possible to articulate a definitive set of criteria on
which to judge the ‘success’ of a Centre, there is no doubt that a key element for success is appropriate resources to undertake the functions delegated to the Centre (Gosling, 2008). In their quest for success Centres face a range of systematic constraints, including preconceived assumptions about their role and functions, the priority of research over teaching and learning, and the time pressures faced by all university staff (Havnes & Stensaker, 2006). The relationships between the Centre and other teaching and learning actors are important for the success of the Centre; with a key relationship being that between the Director and their manager (Gosling, 2008). Relationships managed by the Centre can be both extensive and ambiguous (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006), with Centres often “in the squeeze between the academic staff and the institutional leadership” (Havnes & Stensaker, 2006, p. 17). A key factor in both the reality and perception of Centre success is the visibility of the Centre and its achievements. Given that the activities of the Centre may be outside the day-to-day experience of many of the wider university community, it is important that Centres actively cultivate good communication of, and high visibility for, their actions and achievements (Gosling, 2008).

As teaching and learning leaders, Directors (or equivalent) of Centres play a central role in the development and impact of Centres. Directors come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006) and, in the past at least, were likely to remain in that role for some time (Hicks, 1997). One method for gauging the characteristics, capacities and constraints of Centres is through the surveying of Centre Directors. While examples of such surveys exist, primarily from Australia and the UK, comprehensive recent data are relatively scarce. A 2001 multi-stage interview project claimed approximately 20 percent coverage of heads of academic development in the UK, though the respondent group of 18 was
focussed on English Midlands universities (Blackmore & Blackwell, 2006; Blackmore, Wilson & Stainton, 2005). A 2006 survey claimed approximately 25 percent coverage of heads of educational development of UK universities (Gosling, 2009a), though the unknown implications of a self-selected 43 respondent sample on the data were acknowledged (Gosling, 2008). In an Australian context, a 2007 survey of Directors of academic development received responses from 23 of 38 universities, with most survey items being completed by 16 – 20 respondents, yielding an effective response rate of 42 – 53 percent (Gosling, 2009b).

This paper is based on research supported by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) as part of a study of Australian Teaching and Learning Centres to identify common factors that contribute to the effective strategic leadership of Centres to enhance long-term teaching and learning performance. The second of three phases of data collection involved a survey of Directors of Australian teaching and learning Centres. Based on a response rate of 81.6 percent, we present the findings here as a contemporary, comprehensive and representative quantitative snapshot of the characteristics, capacities and constraints of Australian teaching and learning centres as seen through the eyes of their Directors.

Method
Drawing on the literature noted above and the analysis of the data from the initial phase of the research project (Challis, Holt & Palmer, 2009) the authors developed a draft survey instrument that sought responses from the Directors of Centres in the following categories:

- Centre and Director demographic/background information
- Centre functions
- Centre capacity and capability
- Centre constraints
- Centre key relationships
- Centre recognition and inclusion and
Using the wider members of the research project team and reference group, the survey instrument was reviewed and refined to improve face validity, and the online delivery process was piloted and refined. The final survey instrument is publicly available online at http://www.deakin.edu.au/itl/documents/altc-survey.pdf. As required by Deakin University human research ethics procedures, the survey was anonymous and voluntary. The data collected were quantitatively analysed using a range of descriptive, parametric and non-parametric techniques as presented below.

Results and discussion

Response rate and sample representativeness
Survey responses were received from 31 of the 38 Centres invited to participate; yielding an effective response rate of 81.6 percent. It was possible to anonymously allocate respondents to membership of the generally accepted Australian university classifications (Barrie, Ginns & Symons, 2008) – taking into account recent changes in the compositions of the Australian Technology Network and Innovative Research Universities groupings – to compare the proportions of respondents in groupings with the overall sector institutional proportions. This comparison is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of respondents by institutional grouping.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional grouping</th>
<th>No. of respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Technology Network (ATN)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group of Eight (Go8)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Innovative Research Universities (IRU)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Generation Universities (NGU)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-aligned / No grouping</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Only one grouping had an expected count less than 5, permitting on a chi-square test proportions ($\chi^2_4 = 0.459$, $p > 0.97$). This result suggests that there is no significant difference between the proportions of respondents in groupings compared to the overall sector institutional proportions. This finding combined with the high response rate gives good confidence that the respondent sample is representative of the wider sector in Australia.

**Centre age and staffing**

Respondents were asked to indicate when their Centre had last been restructured according to the options given in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. Time since last Centre restructure.](image)

It is observed that approximately 70 percent of respondent Centres are less than three years old, with another 13 percent about to be restructured imminently. These results echo those of a 2006 survey of UK educational development units where 61 percent of units were less than five years old (Gosling, 2008). Using the institutional groupings noted above and giving an increasing ordinal value to duration of the
Centre in its current configuration (including a value of ‘0’ for Centres imminently undergoing a restructure), Table 2 below indicates the mean ‘age’ (not literally in years) of Centres for each institutional grouping:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grouping</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ATN</td>
<td>1.40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go8</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRU</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.A.</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGU</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>1.58</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.09</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The mean Centre age is somewhere between 12 months and three years. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) comparison of means suggests that the overall difference between the means is significant ($F_{30} = 4.578, p < 0.007$). A post-hoc least significant difference test suggests that the significant pair-wise differences in mean Centre age were between the Go8 and IRU ($p < 0.003$), and the Go8 and NGU ($p < 0.0011$) pairs.

Respondents were asked to indicate the total number of Centre staff in different categories of employment according to the options given in Table 3. A value for ‘total Centre staff’ was inferred by summing all staff numbers reported. Table 3 reports basic descriptive statistics for each Centre staff category for all respondents combined.
Table 3. Descriptive statistics for reported Centre staff by employment category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Category</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full-time academic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5.35</td>
<td>4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time academic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>1.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time general</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>15.35</td>
<td>18.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time general</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>3.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special projects</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>3.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint-appointment with Faculties</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2.53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other staff</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.06</td>
<td>2.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total staff</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>30.81</td>
<td>22.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At least one respondent indicated ‘zero’ for each category of Centre staff. The mean response for full-time academic staff was five and a third. For full-time staff, general staff outnumber academic staff nearly three-to-one. ‘Special projects’ staff account for 10 percent of all Centre staff. As noted elsewhere, Centre staffing is complex and difficult draw general inferences from, given the wide variations in university sizes and Centre functions (Gosling, 2009a). Using the institutional groupings noted above, an ANOVA comparison of means suggests that there are no significant differences between the mean number of any survey category of Centre staff, including total Centre staff on the basis of institutional grouping ($F_{\text{max}}$: Special projects – $F_{30} = 1.619, p > 0.19$) ($F_{\text{min}}$: Part-time academic – $F_{30} = 0.334, p > 0.85$).

**Directorship characteristics**

Respondents were asked to indicate the status of their Directorship according to the options given in Figure 2.
More than a quarter of all Centres have an Acting/Interim Director – the ubiquity of ‘interim’ and ‘acting’ management observed in higher education (McWilliam, Bridgstock, Lawson, Evans & Taylor, 2008) clearly extends to the leadership of Centres.

Respondents were asked to indicate the duration of their Directorship of the Centre in its current configuration according to the options given in Figure 3.
Nearly one half of respondents have been in their position for less than one year, and three quarters for less than three years – the latter result closely mirroring the reported time since Centre restructuring noted above. Giving an increasing ordinal value to reported duration of Directorship, the mean observed value is 2.03 (not literally in years) with a standard deviation of 1.33 and a range of 1 to 5. The mean duration of Directorship of the Centre is somewhere between one and three years. Using the institutional groupings noted above an ANOVA comparison of means suggests that there is no significant differences between the means on the basis of institutional grouping ($F_{30} = 0.122, \ p > 0.97$).

Respondents were asked to indicate the total duration of their experiences in a Centre Directorship role according to the options given in Figure 4.

![Figure 4. Total experience in a Directorship role.](image)

More than one third of respondents chose N/A (not applicable), presumably meaning that they have not had any prior experience in a Directorship role. Combining the first two items suggests that half of all Centre Directors have had less than one year of experience. More than one quarter report more than five years experience. Giving an
increasing ordinal value to Directorship experience, the mean total experience in a Centre Director role is 2.68 (not literally in years) with a standard deviation of 1.66 and a range of 1 to 5. The mean duration of experience in a Directorship role is somewhere between one and three years. A 1996 survey of Directors of Australian academic development units concluded that “This is not a role for itinerants” (Hicks, 1997, p. 61), however the situation appears to have changed for many by 2008. Using the institutional groupings noted above an ANOVA comparison of means suggests that there are no significant differences between the means on the basis of institutional grouping ($F_{30} = 1.258, p > 0.31$).

Centre functions
Respondents were asked to consider a range of 36 Centre Functions (identified below), to rate the Importance of each Function to their Centre (using a response scale of N/A, Not important, Somewhat important, Important, Very important) and to also rate their Satisfaction with the Centre’s performance on each Function (using a response scale of N/A, Not satisfied, Partially satisfied, Satisfied, Very satisfied). Not all of the identified Functions apply to all Centres. Where a respondent indicated a Satisfaction rating for a Centre Function other than ‘N/A’ this was taken to indicate that a particular Function did apply to the operations of that Centre. Figure 5 indicates the percentage of Centres reporting a Function.
Figure 5. Indication of percentage of Centres reporting a Function.

**Reputation and external drivers**
1) Preparing for the Australian Universities Quality Assurance (AUQA) audit and supporting implementation of recommendations
2) Improving your University’s Learning and Teaching Performance Funding (LTPF) performance
3) Improving your University’s Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) performance
4) Improving your University’s Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) performance
5) Supporting staff engagement with ALTC (formerly Carrick) award, grant and fellowship opportunities
6) Research into teaching and learning management/policy

**Plans and policies**
7) Developing teaching and learning plans and policies
8) Implementing teaching and learning plans and policies

**Professional development of staff**
9) Providing professional learning for casual teaching staff
10) Providing professional learning for new continuing teaching staff
11) Providing professional learning for ongoing teaching staff
12) Providing professional learning for Faculty (or equivalent) teaching/learning leadership

**Improving courses and units**
13) Engaging in curriculum renewal
14) Improving the quality of individual units
15) Improving student evaluation of courses, units and teaching

**Supporting students’ learning**
16) Delivering academic skills services to students
17) Providing bridging/transition/orientation programs for students
18) Supporting student peer learning/mentoring schemes

**Innovation, evidence and scholarship in teaching and learning**
19) Mobilising data and evidence to improve teaching and learning
20) Undertaking the scholarship of teaching and learning
21) Promoting productive relationships between research and teaching
22) Dealing with special institution-wide issues, e.g. the first year experience, work-integrated learning, wholly online units, group assignments, internationalising the curriculum, graduate attributes, etc.
23) Supporting innovation in curriculum and pedagogy
24) Providing pilot/greenhouse for new technology/innovation

**Dissemination**
25) Bringing in good practices from across the sector
26) Sharing internal good practices across the University
27) Developing communities of learning amongst staff
28) Supporting staff peer evaluation and mentoring to improve teaching

**Technology leadership and management**
29) Demonstrating leadership in implementing educational technologies
30) Implementing and supporting educational technologies
31) Ensuring reliable operation of e-learning technology systems and applications
32) Ensuring reliable operation of lecture theatre technologies
33) Ensuring reliable delivery of learning resources either online and/or offline

**Recognition and reward**
34) Supporting schemes which recognise and reward excellent teaching within the institution

**Human resource management of staff**
35) Developing academic workload models supportive of teaching and learning commitments and directions
36) Contributing to recruiting and selecting capable academic teachers to the organisation.

A method for visualising and interpreting importance-satisfaction data is the importance-satisfaction grid (IS grid) (Aigbedo & Parameswaran, 2004) where the importance rating converted to an increasing ordinal value is plotted on the vertical axis and the satisfaction rating converted to an increasing ordinal value is plotted on the horizontal axis. The grid is divided into quadrants using the grand mean values for all importance ratings as a vertical divider and the grand mean of all satisfaction ratings as a horizontal divider. The ‘normal’ interpretation of the quadrants is customarily as follows:

- **Quadrant D:** low importance and low satisfaction – low priority items
- **Quadrant C:** low importance and high satisfaction – possibly doing more than necessary on these items
- **Quadrant B:** high importance and high satisfaction – keep up the good work! and
- **Quadrant A:** high importance and low satisfaction – concentrate improvement efforts on these items.
However, in this case, it is not ‘customers’ performing the rating exercise; here it is a self-assessment of Satisfaction and Importance of Centre Functions. In this case, a more appropriate interpretation of the grid quadrants might be:

- Quadrant D: low importance and low satisfaction – items considered a low priority by the Centre
- Quadrant C: low importance and high satisfaction – not important but doing a good job, be careful of being too self-satisfied
- Quadrant B: high importance and high satisfaction – keep up the good work! and
- Quadrant A: high importance and low satisfaction – where the Centre would like to prioritise improvement efforts.

Figure 6 is an IS grid that presents the mean Importance and Satisfaction ratings for the Centre Functions survey data.

![Figure 6. Mean Importance and Satisfaction ratings for Centre Functions.](image-url)
Without trying to make overly literal inferences from the IS grid data, the position of items furthest from the intersection of the grand mean lines and nearest a diagonal line between the grand mean lines are those that most represent the characteristics of the IS grid quadrants noted above. A measure of the statistical significance of these results is given by the mean 90 percent confidence intervals for the Importance and Satisfaction ratings. The mean 90 percent confidence interval for the Importance ratings is +/- 0.28 and for the Satisfaction ratings is +/- 0.30. Here, a number of Function clusters are observed (noted in the diagram above). Based on the IS grid data and using the quadrant order D-C-B-A we conclude that, relatively speaking, Centres:

- give a low priority to engaging Centres in institutional human resource management issues (35/36)
- don’t generally see it as a Centre responsibility to promote the teaching/research nexus (21)
- are happy with Centre contribution to student support, but don’t view this a important work for the Centre (16/17/18)
- feel that the Centre is doing a good job at promoting engagement with ALTC (5)
- feel that the Centre is doing a good job supporting reward of good teaching (34)
- feel that the Centre is doing a good job supporting new academic staff (10)
- would like to a better job at professional development for casual and continuing staff (9/11) and
- would like to a better job at development for teaching and learning leaders (12).

A small number of respondents noted the difficulty in providing an overall assessment of their Functions in a particular category, noting that a broad array of separate individual projects can fall under one Function. An analogous sentiment is echoed below regarding Centre relationships where respondents note that trying to categorise the nature of their relationship with a particular organisational position is difficult, as it can vary widely between the range of incumbents in that role. While only about one third of Centres report direct contact with students, it is of note that those that do
identify this Function don’t see it as particularly important. It is observed that, even though the scholarly rhetoric of learner-centeredness has developed in sophistication, direct consideration of students is often surprisingly absent from such work (Trigwell & Shale, 2004). Presumably, a fundamental aim of Centres is to improve teaching and learning as experienced by students, yet for most Centres, the avenues for influencing the student experience appear to be only indirect.

**Indicators of success**
Respondents were asked to consider a range of 10 broad areas of Centre Function (identified below), to rate the Capacity (in terms of resources and opportunities) of their Centre to achieve success (using a response scale of N/A, Low, Medium, High, Very high) and to also rate the Capability (in terms of staffing expertise) of their Centre to achieve success (using a response scale of N/A, Low, Medium, High, Very high). Figure 7 is an IS grid that presents the mean Capacity and Capability ratings for the Centre Indicators of Success survey data.
1) Reputation and external drivers
2) Plans and policies
3) Professional development of staff
4) Improving courses and units
5) Supporting student learning
6) Innovation, evidence and scholarship
7) Dissemination
8) Technology leadership and management
9) Recognition and reward
10) Human resource management of staff.

Very little ‘off-diagonal’ rating is observed from the B quadrant (relatively high Capacity and Capability) down to the D quadrant (relatively low Capacity and Capability). This indicates that Centres see a reasonable alignment between their Capacity and Capability, with Capability (staff expertise) always rated slightly higher than Capacity (resources and opportunities). Additionally, the general ordering of
Function areas from top right down to bottom left provides an indication of the relative ranking of where Centres view themselves as having an organisational impact. The mean 90 percent confidence interval for the Capacity ratings is +/- 0.24 and for the Capability ratings is +/- 0.27. Parallels are observed with the Centre Functions IS data; ‘Recognition and reward’ and ‘Professional development of staff’ are seen as high-impact Functions, while ‘Human resource management of staff’ is seen as a low-impact Function.

**Constraints**

Respondents were asked to consider a range of potential Constraints (identified below by survey question number) on allowing Centres to achieve their objectives within the next two years and to rate the significance of each Constraint (using a response scale of N/A, Low, Medium, High, Very high). Based on assigning an increasing ordinal value to each significance rating, Table 4 below gives the mean significance rating for each Constraint, ranked in order of mean rating.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constraint</th>
<th>Min.</th>
<th>Max.</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Faculty staff time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Centre staff time</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Incorrect perception of Centre</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.53</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Centre resources</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Priority of research over teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.43</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only Faculties improve teaching</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependency on other areas</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>0.91</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4) Insufficient staff time in faculties to engage with Centre activities/initiatives
3) Insufficient staff time in Centre to be effective in all the required areas
5) Incorrect or outdated general perceptions of the role and Function of the Centre
2) Insufficient resources to have a significant impact
6) Institutional priority given to research over teaching and learning activities
10) Perception that only Faculty (or equivalent) staff can improve teaching and learning
9) Dependency of support on other institutional areas to achieve outcomes
7) Inadequate sense of a shared direction/purpose for the Centre
1) Short-term thinking on achieving lasting and significant outcomes/changes
8) Lack of availability of teaching and learning data required for effective Centre operations.

The mean 90 percent confidence interval for the Constraint ratings is +/- 0.31.

Time for both Faculty and Centre staff to effectively engage in teaching and learning improvement activities is the top priority. The issue of ‘insufficient time’ is related to other Constraints, including ‘insufficient resources’ and ‘priority’ of research over teaching. Additional time might be ‘created’ with additional staff resources and a re-prioritising of activities. However, in an environment of squeezed budgets and rising expectations of research output, and where the pressures of resources and research are already identified as constraints, the creation of additional time will require creative thinking. It is not surprising, given the significant amount of restructuring of Centres reported above, that Centres might experience problems with the wider university population having outdated/incorrect conceptions of the Centre’s Function and purpose. Using the institutional groupings noted above an ANOVA comparison of means suggests that there are no significant differences between the mean rating of any survey Constraint item on the basis of institutional grouping ($F_{\text{max}}$: Only Faculties
improve teaching – $F_{28} = 1.633, p > 0.19$) ($F_{29}$: Priority of research over teaching – $F_{29} = 0.273, p > 0.89$).

**Key relationships**

Respondents were asked to consider the relationship between their Centre and nine key university stakeholder positions (identified below), to rate the Importance of that relationship in achieving Centre objectives (using a response scale of N/A, Not important, Somewhat important, Important, Very important) and to also rate their Satisfaction with the effectiveness of that relationship (using a response scale of N/A, Not satisfied, Partially satisfied, Satisfied, Very satisfied). Figure 8 is an IS grid that presents the mean Importance and Satisfaction ratings for the Centre Relationships survey data.
The mean 90 percent confidence interval for the Importance ratings is +/- 0.24 and for the Satisfaction ratings is +/- 0.25. The ‘winner’ in both Importance and Satisfaction is the relationship between the Centre and the DVC(A), followed by the Associate Deans (T&L). The central importance of the relationship between the Centre and the DVC(A) is also noted in the UK context (Gosling, 2008). Faculty Educational Technology staff are viewed as having relatively little connection/relevance to the Centre. The position of Chair of Academic Board appears to be considered friendly but comparatively unimportant to the Centre (relatively low Importance coupled with relatively high Satisfaction). A small number of respondents noted that relationships between the Centre and particular individual key institutional stakeholder positions vary widely in nature – from the constructive to the virtually non-existent. The crucial importance, highly variable quality and sometimes ambivalent nature, of relationships between Centres and their stakeholders has been observed elsewhere (Gray & Radloff, 2006).

Centre recognition and inclusion
Respondents were asked to indicate, on a numbered continuum (‘1’ representing ‘Never consulted/included’ and ‘20’ representing ‘Always consulted/included’) the degree to which Centre staff are routinely included in all relevant committees and
activities concerned with teaching and learning in their University. Based on assigning an increasing ordinal value to each continuum point, Figure 9 shows the distribution of ratings reported.

![Figure 9. Distribution of reported ratings of Centre recognition and inclusion.](image)

The mean scale rating was 17.6 with a standard deviation of 2.21. Respondents felt that Centres were generally well included in relevant university committees and other activities. Centre Directors who indicated a high continuum score for the ‘Centre recognition and inclusion’ item also indicated a higher Satisfaction with the Centre’s relationship with the Chair of Academic Board ($r = +0.48, p < 0.007$). This suggests that a good working relationship with the Chair of Academic Board may be indicative of a high profile for the Centre in the broader academic life of the university. Using the institutional groupings noted above an ANOVA comparison of means suggests that there is no significant differences between the mean scale ratings on the basis of institutional grouping ($F_{29} = 1.247, p > 0.31$).
Conclusions
A common theme emerging from a number of survey items is the turbulent environment faced by many Centres – the time since last restructure, incumbency of the current Director and total Directorship experience of the current Centre Director all have mean values of ‘more than one year but less than three years’. As instruments of the teaching and learning strategy of the university executive, the purposes and leadership of Centres continue to be regularly re-fashioned. Most Centres would consider their work in the areas of ‘recognition and reward’ and ‘professional development of staff’ as high impact functions, and they would be pleased with their efforts in the former area and wish to perform better on the latter. The principal constraint identified by Centres was ‘lack of staff time’, both in the Faculties and in the Centre, to engage in teaching and learning improvement activities. Overall, Centres feel well included in relevant university committees and other activities. While Australian teaching and learning Centres are a diverse group, we note that virtually no significant differences in mean survey ratings are observed between any of the institutional groupings. The results presented here provide evidence-based information for sector benchmarking and policy design. On-going work in this research project is using focus groups of key Centre stakeholders at ten Australian universities to identify practical strategies for tackling both constraints and desired areas of improvement.

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