Revision of the Academic Board Policy: The Generic Attributes of Graduates of the University of Sydney

This is a briefing paper for the Teaching and Learning Committee of Academic Board. The University’s Graduate Attributes Working Group seeks approval of the attached policy and endorsement of the proposed implementation process.

Background:

The University established an institutional teaching and learning project focussing on generic graduate attributes in 2002. The aim of the project was to review the existing statement of Generic Attributes of Graduates of the University of Sydney and the implementation of this policy, with a view to enhancing the achievement of relevant attributes. Full details of the University of Sydney Graduate Attributes Project are available at http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/GraduateAttributes/

The University’s approach to the review of its Generic Graduate Attributes policy is unlike that of many Australian Universities in being research informed. The conceptual model upon which the revised policy has been based was identified through educational research conducted at the University of Sydney. This model has received international peer review through conference and journal publications and is currently being considered as the basis for similar policy review and implementation initiatives at international universities such as Oxford.

In keeping with this conceptual model, the revised central policy statement specifies attributes at two levels. The first level specifies implicit, broad, overarching graduate outcomes which reflect the research intensive nature of the University, its scholarly values in relation to research-led teaching, and the place of its graduates in a global society. The second level of the revised policy encompasses the more explicit disciplinary contextualisation of these attributes. In addition to the revised university policy statement, all faculties have now developed their own interpretive statements at this level based on the institutional statement (see http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/GraduateAttributes/interpretations.htm).

Revision Process:

The development of the revised university policy and the faculty interpretations has been a collaborative undertaking by members of the University’s academic community. This collaboration has been facilitated in part through the establishment of a Working Group. The group comprises a Deans’ nominee’s from each faculty, representatives from relevant University Centers such as the Library, Careers and the Learning Centre, The PVC - T&L and the previous Chair of Academic Board. The Working Group is coordinated by the ITL. A full list of the Working Group members and records of meetings is available at http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/GraduateAttributes/workgroup.htm.

As part of the revision process, the Project has sought extensive consultation, both on the faculty statements through disciplinary and professional networks identified by the faculties, and on the central statement through peak national higher education and government bodies. The aim of the consultation process has been to ensure the relevance of the University’s statement of generic attributes to the staff and students of the University, the future employers of our graduates and to society at large.

Policy Approval:

All faculties have now developed interpreted statements of attributes for use. With the exception of two faculties, all faculties have also now completed their internal (staff and students) and external (employer groups & professional bodies) consultation based on these faculty statements. Where appropriate the statements have now been revised as a result of this feedback and the relevant faculty committees have ratified the faculty statements for use. The university policy statement provides the common framework underpinning all faculty statements and ensures institutional coherence to the faculty specific statements.
This faculty based consultation process has also provided additional feedback on the university policy statement. In addition to this consultation, key peak government and employer groups have been approached for feedback on the university policy statement. This feedback has been very positive.

Following the completion of the faculty level consultation and development phase the Project Working Group would now like to present the revised university policy statement of the Generic Attributes of Graduates of the University of Sydney (attached) to the Teaching and Learning Committee of Academic Board for approval of the policy.

Implementation:

The Working Group also seeks the Committee’s endorsement of the proposed implementation process. The consultative process by which the central and faculty level graduate attributes statements have been developed has provided broad ownership of the revised policy, and marks the first stage of the implementation plan. In 2004 the Working Group members initiated a self-assessment audit to map the teaching and learning of the revised faculty statements of graduate attributes in the undergraduate curricula of each faculty http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/GraduateAttributes/selfAssessment.cfm. This self-assessment extended the consultation on the new faculty statements of graduate attributes to the individual unit of study coordinators within each faculty. It also assisted in identifying the first round of strategic research and development initiatives within each faculty http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/GraduateAttributes/projects.htm. These collaborative research and development initiatives build on the many existing generic attributes projects already underway across the University. These new initiatives will support the curriculum development required for the implementation of the revised policy and will be supported and coordinated through the Working Group to ensure that the products of these efforts are applicable across the institution.

The implementation of the revised attributes is also directly supported by the ITL’s projects in areas such as Research Led Teaching, the First Year Experience, and Diversity and Internationalisation, as well as through other University initiatives such as the revised assessment policy.

In second semester 2004 the Project will also embark on an initial audit of the students’ experiences of the teaching and learning of generic attributes in their units of study using the University’s existing Unit of Study Evaluation (USE) system. This, along with planned revisions to the University’s policy on the Management and Evaluation of coursework teaching, (in relation to requirements for Unit of Study Outlines etc), will contribute to the development of a comprehensive quality assurance strategy to support, recognise and assure the teaching of the revised generic attributes in 2005/6. As with other aspects of teaching, these quality assurance processes will be monitored through the incorporation of a focus on the revised attributes in the existing process of Academic Board Reviews of faculties.

In summary, the Graduate Attributes Working Group seeks approval of the attached policy and endorsement of the proposed implementation process.

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August 2004