Setting National Boundaries for Graduate Learning Outcomes: current practice and considered consequences for Australian universities

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Curriculum renewal and assurance of graduate learning outcomes

Everybody is….

Developing 'new' statements of 'outcomes'
Renewing curriculum …..(to achieve such outcomes?)
Demonstrating achievements .....( measuring compliance?)
1. Drivers for boundary setting around graduate learning outcomes in the Australian context

2. Key findings from AAGLO and the challenges and consequences arising from assurance of graduate learning outcomes

3. Discussion
National Project: University of Sydney, University of Queensland, RMIT

› What are the assessment tasks in a range of disciplines that generate convincing evidence of achievement of graduate learning outcomes?

› What are the assurance process trusted by disciplines in relation to those assessment tasks and judgements?

Situational analysis, literature review, expert reference group, institutional visits, interviews with 48 academics 28 universities in 7 disciplines

Australia: Outcomes-led (regulation driven) curriculum renewal and assurance of graduate learning outcomes (AQF TEQSA TPI)

- Reputation and competition
- Shrinking resources
- Increasing accountability and regulation

Internationally: AHELO, Tuning, Lumina, QAA, VSA, VALUE rubrics etc

1. A new ‘interest’ in university learning - through the lens of curriculum outcomes rather than teaching inputs
2. A new ‘interest’ in direct measures of learning outcomes and assessment
1. Coherent assessment of program level graduate learning outcomes requires an institutional and discipline statement of outcomes - but what that statement is matters.

› Traditional or contemporary conceptions of knowledge?

› Cognitive, affective, psychomotor = traditional
› Content knowledge plus generic skills = traditional
› Graduate attributes, capabilities, dispositions and stances = contemporary

Some of the ways we are articulating GLOs are taking us backwards to outdated old fashioned expectations of the goals of higher education – not forwards to the contemporary outcomes and purposes we espouse.
2. What we assess and how we assess it - shapes curriculum and teaching as much as it does learning

› Assessment prioritizes some GLO and ignores others

› Communication skills - Privileged
› Cognitive skills – privileged
› Information literacy - Privileged
› Research and inquiry – (less) Privileged
› Ethical social professional understandings - neglected
› Personal intellectual autonomy - neglected

Consequences:
3. Features of effective assessment practices identified by respondents

› interconnected multi-component
› authentic, relevant
› standards-based with effective communication of criteria
› involve multiple decision makers – including students

› With effective assurance processes around the quality of these tasks and the judgments made
ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES

4. Variety of assessment quality assurance strategies

› Quality of task: Pre-implementation (policies, curriculum approval processes for new and revised tasks)
  Post-implementation (evaluation by students, examiners, peers, curriculum audit & review)

› Quality of judgment: Pre-judgement - (calibration)
  Post-judgement – (consensus moderation)

› Confidence?
Combination of effective task and assurance was less common than it could be
Evidence of ‘assurance’ engaging staff and leading to ‘enhancement’ was rare

› Barriers?
Paper 1: The AAGLO project and the international standards agenda

Consequence: We are spending a lot of money reinventing the wheel and repeating the same mistakes but disciplines are coming together around ‘learning’

Paper 2: Assurance of graduate learning outcomes through external review

Consequence: We have an opportunity to extend ‘peer review’ (in a useful way) to influence curriculum and teaching at an institutional / whole degree scale

Paper 3: Challenges of assessing Graduate Learning Outcomes in work-based contexts

Consequence: The boundaries between work and education persist and work is still underutilised as an assessment ground by universities

Paper 4: Standardised testing of graduate Learning Outcomes in Higher Education

Consequence: The illusion that standardised generic skills tests usefully define boundaries causes more harm than good

Paper 5: Approaches to the assurance of assessment quality

Consequence: These need to be embedded in academic practice in ways that meaningfully engage staff and students.
Paper 6: Assessment policy issues in the effective assessment and assurance of GLOs

Consequence: Our well-intentioned policy decisions may have a limiting impact on assessment practice

Paper 7: Whole-of-programme approaches to assessment (coming soon)

Consequence: Fragmented approaches to curriculum and assessment provide neither a coherent learning experience for students nor credible evidence of GLOs

Paper 8: The student perspective on assurance of outcomes (coming soon)
How and what we assess really matters……..

There are positive consequences of the current interest in assurance of graduate learning outcomes but it brings with it some challenges and risks.

It is one thing to have the right curriculum goals (learning outcomes) in place…..and it is another thing to have credible assessment evidence of the achievement of those goals by graduates – but the real question remains ‘how does a university curriculum, teaching and assessment develop those outcomes’?

Challenge: How do we subvert the bureaucracy of ‘audits’ to ensure assurance of graduate learning outcomes engages staff and students meaningfully with renewal of the learning experiences?
Thank you!

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