The University of Western Australia

Course Structures Review
Themes and Emerging Issues from Submissions

Over 150 submissions have now been received on the Course Structures Review Discussion Paper, with over half of these being from staff and students. Numerous submissions were also received from alumni, and about twenty from external stakeholders including the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, CPA Australia, and the Department of Education and Training.

1. Issues Raised by Submissions

The submissions address a wide range of topics, reflecting the scope of the issues raised by the Discussion Paper. The issues that generated the most comment included:

- **Generic/transferable skills**

  A number of submissions, particularly those from external stakeholders, emphasised the need for students to acquire a range of generic/transferable skills as part of their tertiary learning experience. In some cases there was also an emphasis on these skills being integrated into course content rather than being taught as separate units, though others disagreed with that view. The skills identified as important included:
  - cultural competency (including understanding of Indigenous culture);
  - leadership;
  - oral and written communication skills;
  - critical thinking;
  - mathematical literacy;
  - ethics;
  - research skills;
  - teamwork; and
  - employability skills as listed in the Employability Skills Framework (communication, teamwork, problem solving, self management, planning and organising, learning, technology, initiative and enterprise).

- **Balance of ‘breadth’ and ‘depth’**

  Many submissions discussed the need to achieve a balance between breadth and depth of education. Most of the submissions received on this issue argued that greater breadth was needed, but there was a range of views on the means through which it should be achieved. Suggested options in the Discussion Paper included a general degree preceding a professional degree, a general first year, and requiring students to undertake units outside their home faculty. Submissions varied greatly in their approaches to these options.

- **Hallmark/distinctiveness of a UWA degree**

  A number of submissions made suggestions for changes that it was felt could become a ‘hallmark’ of a UWA degree, creating a tertiary experience distinct from that offered by other institutions.

  Suggestions included a significant international experience; a residential college experience; incorporation of research into undergraduate degrees; requiring students to undertake common material in first year; and the development of curriculum based on UWA Educational Principles or specified graduate attributes.

- **Course Delivery, Administration and Nomenclature**

  The Discussion Paper raised a range of issues relating to the efficiency and effectiveness of course delivery, existing course structures, nomenclature and aspects of administration. A number of submissions addressed the questions asked by the Paper in relation to these topics, and commented on several matters including:
  - complexity of current course structures;
2. Drafting of Issues and Options Paper

All submissions received are now being considered by the Review Steering Group. In addition, a number of Working Groups have been formed to examine specific issues of interest to the Review (Generalist/Specialist Education, Postgraduate Coursework, Teaching-Research Nexus, Honours, and Framework and Definition of Degrees).

Comments made in submissions, and outcomes of Working Group discussions, will be fed into the drafting of the Issues and Options paper, which is to be released in about September. The Issues and Options paper will set out a range of options for consideration, and consultation on the Paper will be conducted both within and beyond the University community. An Academic Board discussion on the Issues and Options paper will be held once the Paper is released, and Academic Board will also naturally play an important role in consideration of the recommendations of the Review.

3. Questions for Discussion

Further to the outline of submissions provided above, the following questions (drawn or adapted from the Discussion Paper and Key Issues and Background Paper) seem particularly pertinent for further discussion:

- What knowledge, skills or attributes should every UWA graduate have, and how should they be taught?
- What ‘generic’ skills are most important, and how should they be taught? Should they be assessed, and if so, how?
- What is the optimal balance between ‘breadth’ and ‘depth’, or between ‘specialist’ and ‘generalist’ education, in UWA’s course offerings?
- Should research activities by students be embedded in all UWA teaching and learning, including undergraduate studies, and (if so) how should this be done?
- What should be the ‘hallmark’ of a UWA degree?
- What should be the role of Honours at UWA?
- How best can UWA develop its postgraduate coursework offerings?
- How can UWA improve its administration and nomenclature with regard to matters such as inconsistent points values; course/unit approval processes; complexity of current course structures; and proliferation of named degrees?

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