

Queen Mary Statement of Graduate Attributes

Summary

This paper outlines current progress towards development of a statement of Queen Mary Graduate Attributes and outlines the rationale for its development.

The paper presents the current policy context driving this initiative together with an explanation of the use of attributes statements in higher education for the purposes of curriculum enhancement and teaching innovation. The paper makes clear the benefits of developing and embedding a Queen Mary graduate attributes statement and outlines current progress towards achieving this goal.

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Institutional Context of Graduate Attributes

- [1] Queen Mary is committed to the development of a statement of Graduate Attributes and its implementation over the medium term (3-5 years). This initiative, led by the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning, has been endorsed by Principal's Steering Group and has been discussed recently by Student Affairs Committee (09.02.09) and Learning, Teaching and Assessment Committee (10.02.09).
- [2] Statements of graduate attributes aim to articulate the full development potential for a student and be reflective of the distinctive nature of the learning environment at an individual institution. Such statements also aim to be inspirational and comprehensible to all stakeholders by using clear and unambiguous language.
- [3] Statements of graduate attributes encompass aspects of behaviour, values, contributions to society as well as disciplinary skills and knowledge. In this respect they more adequately capture the full transformational potential of study at a higher education institution and their embedding institutionally more impacting on the student experience.
- [4] A small representative working group chaired by Professor E. S. Davenport (Institute of Dentistry) was convened and produced a draft statement. The draft statement (circulated with this paper) now forms the basis for an extended consultation across the College.

Background

- [5] The Queen Mary Leadership Foundation for Higher Education project 'Managing Teaching Performance' recently completed a comparative investigation across higher education institutions in the UK, Australia and Sweden. Although focusing on the measurement of teaching performance the research team identified a strong association between teaching excellence and high quality student learning for those Australian institutions that were able to clearly articulate a set of 'graduate attributes' (Shiach et al., 2008).
- [6] In Australia since 1998 universities have been required to specify their graduate attributes in their Quality Assurance and Improvement Plans submitted to the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- [7] The Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee through the Scottish Enhancement Themes initiative has proposed a new enhancement theme 'Graduates for the 21st Century'. This theme will seek to integrate the outcomes of previous work within the context of two overarching questions: what should be the attributes of a graduate from Scottish Higher Education in the 21st century and how can the achievement of these attributes best be supported? However, few UK universities have at this point put in place a comprehensive Graduate Attributes framework.
- [8] Other research indicates that a Graduate Attributes Framework can be an effective means of auditing, framing and enhancing curricula (Barrie 2007a) and a mechanism for linking teaching and research (Barrie 2007b).

- [9] In summary the implementation of an institution-wide Graduate Attributes Framework can impact significantly on the quality of the student learning experience. For this reason it is intended that graduate attributes will be incorporated into current Learning and Teaching policy and become a strategic objective in the next planning cycle (2009-2012).

Policy Context

- [10] Recent strategic reviews have focused attention on the extent to which higher education institutions and their academic programmes need to transform in order better to meet the changing educational needs of their key stakeholders.
- [11] Broadly there are common issues in relation to ethnic minority participation, student and institutional finance, the quality of the student experience, meeting the needs of diverse learners, overall participation rates and uptake of innovations in teaching, but there is also a shared view that higher education is not producing graduates with the requisite skills, knowledge and abilities required for the rapidly changing global economy.
- [12] In the US the Spellings Commission report 'A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of US Higher Education' found that 'unacceptable numbers of college graduates enter the workforce without the skills employers say they need in an economy in which, ... knowledge matters more than ever. (p X) (DE, 2006).
- [13] The final report of the 'Review of Australian Higher Education' identifies the need to produce 'graduates with the knowledge, skills and understandings for full participation in society' (p6) (DEEWR, 2008).
- [14] In the UK, the final report of the Leitch Review of Skills 'Prosperity for all in the Global Economy' indicated that 'wider employability skills should be embedded within training and qualifications' (p68) (HMT, 2006).
- [15] The UK Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills high level skills strategy document 'Higher Education at Work – High Skills: High Value' identifies the expectation that all universities treat student employability as a core part of their mission' and believes it 'reasonable to expect universities to take responsibility for how their students are prepared for the world of work' (p40) (DIUS, 2008).

Benefits

- [16] The above confirms that articulation of an institutional statement of graduate attributes can provide a stimulus for the enhancement of curriculum and development of teaching innovation. Additionally institutional use of a Graduate Attributes Framework can:
- a. Provide a powerful integrative mechanism to consolidate and progress the College's employability agenda;
 - b. Enable Queen Mary to represent the distinctiveness of the College learning environment and distinctive features of Queen Mary graduates in an explicit and positive way for the benefits of students and other stakeholders;
 - c. Facilitate College-wide curriculum enhancement in terms of students' learning that will enable them to contribute to society;

- d. Drive the embedding of electronic recording and review mechanisms for students' personal development planning (PDP);
- e. Anticipate introduction of the Higher Education Achievement Report currently being piloted at 18 institutions.

Project Purpose

- [17] The aim of the Graduate Attributes Project is to develop, test and embed an institutional framework of Graduate Attributes across Queen Mary, including Medicine and Dentistry.
- [18] A Queen Mary Graduate Attributes Framework will consist of a statement of the attributes that a Queen Mary graduate can expect to develop while studying at undergraduate level and provide guidance on implementation of the statement.
- [19] The statement will consist of a hierarchical set of overarching and underpinning graduate attributes. The overarching attributes will consist of at the most 3-5 attributes that identify the core and highest level of learning. The underpinning attributes will consist of 6-7 attributes that in combination lead to an individual understanding of the overarching attributes. The underpinning attributes allow for individual differences in disciplinary emphasis and approach.
- [20] In addition to the statement of Graduate Attributes, the framework will provide guidance on, for example, auditing of curricula, the development of innovative teaching practice and assessment, linking to student personal development planning and electronic portfolios, and facilitating student discussion about graduate attributes.

Current Status

- [21] The graduate attributes project is overseen by the Student Employability, Entrepreneurship and Career Management Advisory Board. This committee, chaired by the Vice-Principal for Teaching and Learning and reporting to the Learning and Teaching Assessment Committee includes membership of academic and non-academic staff and students.
- [22] The draft statement was produced as the outcome of three workshops undertaken by a small working party with academic representation at sector level.
- [23] The consultation phase will involve consideration of the draft statement by Faculty Boards (March, 2009), alumni, current students and employers and other interested parties (March – May, 2009).
- [24] The project aims to produce the final statement of graduate attributes for consideration by Academic Board in June 2009 together with a detailed plan for implementation.
- [25] Achievement of the full benefits of institutional implementation will require support from senior staff across the organisation and engagement of academic and support staff through a variety of practices. The availability of a curriculum development fund linked specifically to implementation of the graduate attributes framework within sectors and disciplines may be a necessary prerequisite to achieving these benefits.

Dr Graham Thomas and Dr Caroline Walker
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