SCOPE OF RESPONSIBILITY OF THE FACULTIES AND THE BOARD OF COURSEWORK STUDIES IN RELATION TO THE REVIEW AND APPROVAL OF POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK COURSES

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<td>Ian Reid</td>
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Scope of Responsibility

of the Faculties and the Board of Coursework Studies

in relation to the review and approval of postgraduate coursework courses

Background

The Review of Course Structures report *Education for Tomorrow’s World* (2008) recommended (rec. 8) that “a Board of Coursework Studies be established with responsibility to receive and consider proposals from faculties for the introduction of (or significant changes to) first-cycle and second-cycle coursework units, majors and courses, and make recommendations to Academic Council on these and associated policy matters.”

Subsequently a paper entitled “Respective roles of the Board of Coursework Studies and proposed Interim Boards of Studies for new undergraduate degrees” set out a more detailed statement about the relationship between faculties and the University-level processes of curriculum development and approval. This paper was forwarded by the Future Framework Implementation Committee to Academic Council, which endorsed the proposals contained in it at its meeting of 6 May 2009.

The 2009 paper summarised as follows the intended structure for deliberations and decisions on course matters: “The Interim Boards of Studies will provide an avenue for faculty input and scrutiny in relation to undergraduate courses. Faculties will have more direct control over postgraduate (Cycle 2) courses, and will make submissions in respect of these courses to the Board of Coursework Studies.”

The present paper is an attempt to specify more precisely the scope of responsibility of both the Faculties and the Board of Coursework Studies (BCS) in relation to postgraduate coursework. What particular matters should come to BCS for its consideration? What matters can be left to the discretion of faculties?

Policy framework

The 2009 paper mentioned above explains in these terms the rationale for establishing BCS:

- The University must ensure that future courses have educational integrity within the new framework, meet quality assurance standards, and align with the University’s strategic directions.
- The University will require high-level policy advice, based on comprehensive data analysis and reports, relating to the design, operation and evaluation of undergraduate and postgraduate courses within the new framework.
- Specific proposals for many units, majors and courses will need close scrutiny at the policy and strategic level prior to submission to Academic Council in final form for legislative approval.

Accordingly the constitution of BCS specifies a two-fold role:

- to consider and make recommendations to Academic Council on policy matters relating to the structure and content of undergraduate and postgraduate coursework;
- to receive and consider proposals from faculties for the introduction of, and major changes to, coursework units, majors and courses, and make recommendations to Academic Council on these and associated policy matters.
Application of policy in practice

The foregoing statements indicate clearly that, as far as postgraduate coursework is concerned, BCS is responsible for providing advice to Academic Council on the following:

- Proposals for new courses.
- Proposals for new units.
- Proposals to change previously approved courses or units, where these changes are of a substantial nature.

But how much detail should be required?

It is clearly necessary that proposals for new postgraduate courses and associated units be submitted to BCS by faculties in accordance with current administrative procedures. The BCS must be able to ensure that University policy is consistently applied and that an authoritative data set can be established as a basis for all official information about courses.

However, it will often be unnecessary, and would be inappropriate, for BCS to attempt to evaluate academic content at the unit level for all new postgraduate units forming part of a course proposal (which can range from 12-75 new units). This is especially so for professionally accredited postgraduate courses in fields such as dentistry, law, engineering and medicine, where expert external agencies specify criteria and impose particular constraints on what is to be taught. The role of BCS should therefore focus on proposals at the course level and draw the attention of Academic Council to any apparent departures from UWA requirements in the structure and rules of the proposed course.

Similarly, where data is really needed (e.g. as a basis for ensuring good governance and for formulating consistent advice in the University handbook) it must certainly be supplied; but beyond that, BCS should endeavour to keep to a minimum the amount of information sought through the submission process and consequent scrutiny required.

In the case of changes to courses or units, the general principle should be that proposals that affect course structures or learning outcomes will need to be considered by BCS, but other changes can be administered at the faculty level.

While a considerable amount of detail is required for undergraduate courses and units because Cycle 1 degrees are necessarily cross-faculty in their scope, postgraduate courses and units seldom operate in that way and so a certain amount of discretionary control should reasonably be entrusted to the faculty in which the course is taught. In particular unit information, although required by BCS so that it can be centrally recorded for the purposes of publication in the University’s handbook and dissemination to other stakeholders, should be considered and approved by the Faculty in accordance with relevant University policies, and not individually scrutinised by the BCS.

In summary, the following statements of respective responsibilities of the faculties and BCS are provided by Academic Policy Services for clarification and as the recommended review and approval process for new postgraduate courses to be offered from 2014. These responsibilities and processes are represented in flow charts at Appendix A.

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1 During 2011 and 2012, for courses commencing from 2012 or 2013, greater scrutiny has taken place by the BCS (by way of its Standing Working Party – STWP) on unit proposals. However it is now deemed more appropriate for Faculties to be primarily responsible in this regard.
New postgraduate coursework proposals

Faculty responsibilities:
- Formulation and endorsement of postgraduate coursework course proposals and course rules, and referral to the Board of Coursework Studies (BCS).
- Consideration and approval of units associated with postgraduate coursework courses, and referral to BCS.
- Confirmation that new postgraduate coursework units approved by the Faculty Board adhere to relevant University policies and the new courses framework. (A helpful checklist is attached at Appendix B – this will be incorporated into the submission process.)

Board of Coursework Studies (via its Standing Working Party) responsibilities:
- Review in detail the course proposals and course rules.
- Review in detail a random sample of unit proposals across a range of levels (minimum of 10%) associated with the proposed new course (units associated with new postgraduate courses can range from 12 – 75 units).
- Refer any issues for clarification back to the Faculty.
- Refer endorsed postgraduate coursework proposals and associated coursework units to Academic Council for approval.

New awards will be referred by Academic Council to the Senate for approval.

Academic Policy Services will monitor and record outcomes from this approval process in its database (Course Approval Interim Database – CAID) and disseminate the final approved information to relevant stakeholders.

Changes to postgraduate coursework proposals

It is proposed that changes to existing postgraduate coursework courses be undertaken in a similar way to changes to undergraduate courses, as has been the process during 2012.

This process is guided by the University Policy on Changes to Units. A workbook with current information is provided to the faculties on an annual basis. Changes are either approved by the Faculty, the relevant Board of Studies or the Academic Council; an approval matrix aligned to the University Policy is provided to determine the level of approval. Approved change information is recorded in its database (CAID) by Academic Policy Services and relevant stakeholders (including Publications) are advised once the annual change process has been completed.

More information is available on the website at the new Academic Policy Services portal for UWA Curriculum Management

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2 The process is currently under review.
Appendix A

PROCESS FOR REVIEWING POSTGRADUATE COURSEWORK COURSE PROPOSALS BY THE STANDING WORKING PARTY (STWP) OF THE BOARD OF COURSEWORK STUDIES

1. Terms of Reference for the Standing Working Party

By R26/10 the Board of Coursework Studies endorsed the following Terms of Reference:

1. To formulate suitable criteria for assessing detailed proposals at stage two;
2. To review all concept plans and new coursework proposals and make appropriate recommendations to the Board of Coursework studies on the following:
   - Stage one concept plans
     - have provided sound reasoning for offering a new postgraduate coursework course within the future framework; and
     - have been reviewed for duplication of existing courses and for inter-faculty relations
   - Stage two proposals align with postgraduate coursework policies endorsed by Academic council and meet quality standards based on key critical criteria and the provision of relevant evidence.

2. Delegations of Quality Control for Postgraduate Coursework Course Proposals

For Course Proposals

- Senate
- Academic Council
- Board of Coursework Studies
- Standing Working Party
- Faculty Board

For Unit Proposals

- Academic Council
- Board of Coursework Studies
- Standing Working Party
- Faculty Board

Approval pathway

Endorsement pathway
3. Review and Approval Process:

Submission of a postgraduate coursework course proposal package comprises

Faculty Board endorsed:
- proposal for introduction of a new course; or
- proposal for a new specialisation to be introduced in an existing postgraduate course;
- proposal for an exit award

Faculty Board endorsed course rules

Faculty Board approved unit proposals and a coversheet (see Appendix B) confirming that the units comply with University structure and policies for Cycle 2 courses

A
Course proposal and course rules reviewed by STWP

B
(All Units)
Random sample of units chosen across a range of levels reviewed by STWP (minimum of 10%)

At the time of review by the STWP it is determined that if:

1. A and B are both satisfactory, then proposal is endorsed by the STWP and its recommendations are presented for consideration by the Board of Coursework Studies.
2. A is not endorsed but B is satisfactory, then faculty will be asked to address specific issues relating to A as part of the feedback process.
3. B results in queries from STWP but A is satisfactory then faculty will be asked to address specific issues relating to B.
4. both A and B are not endorsed, then entire proposal package including unit proposals be resubmitted by the Faculty. On resubmission of the entire course proposal package, the same review exercise (as above) occurs.
By R ___/ ___ (provide resolution number and minute extract), the Faculty Board resolved to approve the units in the attached list (Attachment 1) in accordance with University Policies and confirms that:

1. the approved units have been coded and named in accordance with the University Policy on Unit Codes;
2. the approved units have appropriate credit point value and student workload in accordance with the University Policy on Credit Point Value of Units;
3. the final results for the approved units at all levels will be produced as both percentage marks and letter grades in accordance with the University Policy on Grades and Marks for Undergraduate Units and Postgraduate Coursework Units or will be allocated an ungraded pass/fail only in accordance with the University Policy on Ungraded Passes and Ungraded Fails;
4. the approved units will be taught within a standard teaching period* or the approved units, if taught within non-standard teaching period, comply with the University Policy on Credit Point Value of Units;
5. the approved units will be assessed in accordance with the University Policy on Assessment and the University Policy on Assessment Mechanism Statements;
6. the learning outcomes of the approved units have been mapped to the learning outcomes of the proposed course; and
7. any duplication of unit content has been addressed in accordance with the University Policy on Duplication of Unit Content;

* A teaching period is a scheduled duration, within an academic year, in which a unit of study is offered and includes approved non-teaching study breaks, pre-examination study breaks and examination periods (Source: New Courses 2012 Glossary of Terms)
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<th>Graduate Diploma in Professional Education by Specialisation</th>
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*Proposal not attached because the existing units were approved as part of New Courses.

**Note:** A new unit proposal will need to be submitted for proposing a pre-2012 unit as part of a new course.

Unit codes should be finalised by Faculty before submission.