Background

In the UWA Futures paper, the first proposal is:

“That the University conduct a full review of pedagogic purpose and practice in 2013, with the aim of introducing new pedagogies from the beginning of 2015. The review will consider among other factors:

- the effectiveness of different reaching styles;
- the preferences of students for different combinations of online and face-to-face learning;
- the technological and infrastructure requirements of different approaches to teaching and learning;
- the skills and capabilities required of teaching and support staff;
- the opportunities for national and international collaboration in the design and delivery of educational programs.”

It is proposed to address this proposal by establishing a UWA Education Futures Project which will aim to develop a vision for student learning and teaching at UWA, which will in turn guide developments in our educational offerings, and in other areas which impact on the delivery of our education.

In addressing this proposal, it is important to emphasize the context of the proposed project.

UWA has a proud history of providing excellent education, which continues today. We believe that there are many examples of “best practice” in teaching and learning at UWA, which will be identified and acknowledged by the project. (Evidence of UWA’s excellence in education is provided by our success in OLT, formerly ALTC, awards and citations.)

At the same time, as is typical in universities, we believe there is a great diversity in approaches to student learning and teaching (not all of which are justified by “discipline specificity”), with resulting variation in the resulting quality of our education, and the student experience.

Further, we are in a rapidly changing environment in the higher education sector internationally, driven by technology, competition, internationalisation, and changing student preferences, with many innovations impacting on the delivery of higher education. Consequently, “best practice” is evolving rapidly, and, as a leading university internationally, UWA needs to be abreast of and active in developments in learning and teaching.

So, while UWA is acknowledged as a leader in higher education, the UWA Education Futures project will enable us to identify and extend current best practices, and, more importantly, to develop a vision for future “best practice”, and to develop plans to build the capabilities and resources to realise this vision.
Terms of Reference

Prior to planning this project, it is necessary for the Terms of Reference for the project to be clearly articulated. To progress the specification of these Terms, I suggest the following draft Terms for discussion.

1. That the University develop a vision for student learning and teaching at a future time, say 2018, which is ambitious, yet able to conceived at this time, and also flexible to admit future developments that are not currently envisioned. To be inclusive of the range of disciplines taught at UWA, it is anticipated that the vision should address principles, for interpretation and implementation at a disciplinary level, rather than a detailed prescription. While any plans will be bounded by resource constraints, and some will argue that these should be addressed in the first instance, I believe strongly that we should seek to identify our preferred future state, and then seek to approach it most effectively with the resources that we can attract, rather than limiting our vision based on current models of resourcing and practice.

2. That the vision address the dimensions described above, including:
   • the size and structure of classes and cohorts;
   • the mix of online and face-to-face learning;
   • the mix of classroom and external activities (including, but not limited to, internships and exchanges) to develop identified graduate attributes;
   • the best fit between discipline, level of study (undergraduate, postgraduate coursework, and research training), learning goals and pedagogy;
   • the technological and infrastructure requirements;
   • the skills of teaching and support staff; and
   • models of collaboration in program design and delivery.

3. That the vision identify examples of “best practice” both currently at UWA and externally (including internationally).

4. That the areas be identified which will require substantial and identifiable intervention to transform the current offerings to the identified future state in the identified timeframe.

5. That a plan be developed, with clearly identified projects, priorities and funding requirements, to realize the five-year vision.

Membership

It is proposed that committees will be established to contribute to the project, and the development of the resulting vision and plans, with the University’s Teaching and Learning Committee providing oversight as the reference group for the Project. Membership may vary for different stages of the project (such as visioning versus planning).
It is proposed that the membership will be inclusive of broad representation from faculties and relevant departments at UWA. It is also anticipated that external perspectives will be sought and incorporated, particularly with regard to setting our future vision for education at UWA. These external perspectives are likely to be drawn from the inclusion of representatives of the school sector, and employer, government, and community groups.

**Timeframe**

It is proposed in the *UWA Futures* document, that the aim be “*introducing new pedagogies from the beginning of 2015*”.

With regards to the project, I believe we should aim to deliver an outcome comprising a vision and implementation plan by the end of the 2013. This would enable some new initiatives to be developed with a view to delivery in 2015. It is important, however, to distinguish this review and implementation plan from that which supported the introduction of *New Courses 2012*. In the latter case, a date needed to be defined at which UWA would switch over completely to a new set of courses.

In the case of the UWA Education Futures Project, the expectation is that we will identify some examples of leading practice that are already in place, plus a range of initiatives in support of our future vision for education at UWA, which will be phased in over the next few years. Hence, there will not be a definitive date at which we will switch from “old” to “new” approaches, but an ongoing journey of improvement and progress towards our vision of educational best practice.

I believe that the introduction of new initiatives arising from the project from the beginning of 2015 will be achievable, but these will only be steps of a plan, not a complete and sudden revamp of our current offerings.

**Next Steps**

For discussion and feedback.

Alec Cameron
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