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Higher Education Standards Panel Executive
GPO Box 1672
Melbourne VIC 3001

16 April 2013

To the Higher Education Standards Panel,

Call for Comment, Draft Standards for Course Design and Learning Outcomes

Thank you for providing Charles Sturt University (CSU) with the opportunity to comment on the draft standards for Course Design and Learning Outcomes.

Feedback on proposed format

- CSU supports the approach the Higher Education Standards Panel is taking to redrafting the HE Standards. The new approach provides a clearer and more integrated 'big-picture' of the specific area and the cognate grouping will improve disbursement (and consequently implementation) of the standards within our organisation.
- CSU also supports the inclusion of the Reference Points, including those for AQF, OLT Learning Outcome Statements, and Professional Accreditation Bodies. We would also recommend that Universities have the opportunity to include their own standards (e.g Graduate Attributes) within the Reference Points.
- In relation to the general format of the standards, Faculty has suggested that the inclusion of examples might help illustrate expected outcomes.

Feedback on Proposed Draft Standards for (1) Course Design; (2) Learning Outcomes.

- CSU broadly supports the proposed standards for Course Design and Learning Outcomes. As mentioned above, we recommend that examples be provided for some of the standards to make the requirements more explicit, for example, an example demonstrating the level of detail required for the "methods of assessment" content in publicly accessible documents (Course Design, point 3) would be helpful.
- Generally, we note that the Standards are qualitative in nature and question the level/amount of detail that will be required to demonstrate compliance with the Standards.
- In relation to the standards for Course Design (Coursework)

Item 3: Course design encompasses the rationale for the course of study, course structure, modes of delivery, learning outcomes, methods of assessment, entry requirements and pathways, programmed student workload, articulation arrangements, exit pathways, pathways to further study and any compulsory requirements for completion and that these features of all courses of study are documented and publically accessible in a current version.

We note that this standard appears to contain three requirements

- A standard that relates to what is included in course design
- A standard relating to the documentation of course features
- A standard relating to making documentation of course information publically accessible.

We felt that these were all appropriate standards; however, inclusion of these into a single standard would pose difficulties in demonstrating how this standard might be achieved. For example documentation of the large number of listed course features might require a complex mapping process, especially mapping course structure, modes of delivery and methods of assessment across multiple units of study (subjects). The outcome of such a mapping process may not result in a document that was best suited to being presented to the public in an accessible format. Alternatively provision of a course level document well suited to public access may not adequately demonstrate how learning outcomes are developed and assessed through a course.

- In relation to the standards for Learning Outcomes (Coursework)

Item 4: The relationship between the overall learning outcomes for each course of study and the learning outcomes for units that contribute to the course of study is demonstrable.

We note that the learning outcomes standards encompass relationship of learning outcomes to course design and assessment methods but do not make any reference to methods of teaching, delivery or learning. Modes of delivery are referenced in the standard 3 related to course design. We expected to see a standard which required evidence that the modes of teaching and learning or the pedagogical approaches used in a course will enable the learning outcomes to be progressively developed and achieved.

Item 8: Methods of assessment are consistent with the types of learning outcomes being assessed and are capable of validly and reliably confirming that specified learning outcomes are achieved.

Although we can see a reason for separating the concepts of method of assessment and grading, we felt that the distinction made in the standards doesn't adequately acknowledge the relationship between assessment design and grading when making claims about valid and reliable assessment outcomes.

Item 9: The grades awarded to students reflect the level of their attainment.

We found that this standard lacked clarity as to what would be evidence that this was being achieved. For example is this standard about assessment design and ensuring that the students receiving the grade have been assessed against the learning outcomes relevant to the learning outcomes at their stage of the course. Or is this standard about the criteria and standards set for each level of grade, for example having clear criteria for awarding grades at the standard of HD and marking approaches that ensure this is achieved. Given our comments against standard 8, we felt this standard might be amended to acknowledge that the valid achievement of a learning outcome also relates to the process of awarding grades, particularly pass/fail grades.

Item 10: The grading of students' achievement of learning outcomes for selected units within courses of study is referenced periodically (at least every 5 years) against the grading of students' achievement in comparable units or courses in other Australian institutions.

There could be consideration given to combining method of assessment and grading into a single standard in regard to referencing assessment outcomes against external reference points. Such referencing of a student's achievement would be reflective of both the assessment design used and the standard achieved.

Once again, I would like to thank you for providing CSU with the opportunity to comment on these Standards. I understand CSU will have the opportunity to make further comments as the review progresses. In particular there will be a need to assess the two standards documents provided in the context of the set of teaching standards. I also understand that the timeline for the review will provide sufficient time for institutions to implement the new standard once they have been finalised but before compliance is expected.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Garry Marchant
Deputy Vice Chancellor (Academic)