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Career Development Practice: Facilitating Work-integrated Learning in Higher Education

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Australian universities can no longer be seen as rarified educational institutions acting as society's repository and dispensary of higher knowledge and learning—indeed, were they ever? With the tide of global and national trends demanding universities better engage with the ever complex worlds-of-work, they are now prone to the vicissitudes of market forces, the vagaries of politics, the risk of securing and balancing private and public funding, the demands from employers for “employable” graduates and, of course, the needs and desires of their primary interest: students. Indeed, there is an increased focus on learning outside of the academy, and recognition that workplaces can be rich sources of opportunity. This challenges traditional notions of academic work and the university constituency, but presents valuable opportunities for university career development practice. The Australian Government's *Bradley Review* of Australian higher education in 2008 brought these issues and more into sharp focus; and the review frankly asked no less a question than: “What is the future of higher education in Australia?”.

It is amidst this complex and dynamic environment that university career development practitioners contribute to institutional missions to produce positive graduate outcomes. To that end, in this paper we focus upon the role of career development practice in higher education. Using the example of the connection of career development learning to the mainstream delivery of work-integrated learning as our case in point, we show how career development practitioners in Australian universities make a significant contribution to the advancement of the profession and to reinforcing its place as a legitimate educational partner in the provision of higher learning.

Reviewing the Sector

Following release of the report of the review of career development services in Australia conducted by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2002, the Australian Government's Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) recently investigated the career development services of tertiary educational institutions: universities, TAFE colleges, and registered training organisations. This review—at least for higher education institutions—was preceded by similar reviews conducted in the early 1990s. Those earlier reports flagged the current need for Career Services with calls for a greater investment in services by their host universities, along with recommendations on benchmark staffing levels. The most recent review indicated a subsequent growth in the number and size of Career Services within universities. It found that each Australian university has a Career Service (however named) operating as a distinct organisational unit, albeit with considerable variance in size, capacity, autonomy, and operational budget. An average Career Service would be minimally staffed by a manager along with staff responsible for career education, career information services, employment services, and administrative support. Whether there is an appropriate quantum of investment across the sector remains a moot point. As such, we hasten to highlight the variance in the sector: some Career Services consist of little more than one or two effective staff members, whereas others comprise units with over fifteen staff members, and some operate only via access to temporary contract staffing resources.

It is through the prism of resources that the delivery of professional career development services must be considered; for it goes to the question which besets every university Career Service: How to most effectively and efficiently deliver career development services to thousands of students whose population's diversity, with respect to socio-economic, demographic, educational, and development needs, make it impossible to

roll out a one-size-fits-all approach? In essence, the answer requires a strategic approach which is not only responsive to current trends in the sector, but which lays the groundwork for the innovative enhancement of career development services so as to ensure their relevance to design and teaching of future degree programs—core business indeed.

Teaching, Learning, and Employability

On matters of core business, in recent years the Australian Government has taken considerable interest in enhancing the quality—experience and outcomes—of teaching and learning in higher education. Its interest has been most obviously manifest in two major institutional reforms: DEEWR's establishment of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund (LTPF) and the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC). Both have contributed to the dynamic confluence of teaching, learning, and employability; which has ultimately drawn in university career development practitioners.

The Government has instrumentally directed universities' attention toward teaching and learning through the LTPF. Since 2006, a total of over \$220 million has been awarded in various amounts to universities for their individual institutional demonstration of commitment to quality in key areas of teaching and learning performance: including, for example, measures of student experience; retention; satisfaction with the development of generic skills; and employment rates of institutions' graduates. Of course, there may be variations to the LTPF measures in future years according to the Government's position and policy directions for higher education; but as a driver of universities' educational activities, its potency is unlikely to evaporate.

Concomitant with the institutional influence of the LTPF, the Australian Government's establishment of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council has been a considerable source of influence and reward for universities. Formerly known as the Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education, the ALTC provides a suite of

national awards, fellowships, and grants programs for the acknowledgement of outstanding teaching and learning practices, and to seed research and developmental programs that enhance those practices for the benefit of the sector. The ALTC grants, for example, the prestigious Prime Minister's Award for Australian University Teacher of the Year. The Council not only plays an important role in acknowledging excellence, but additionally in setting the national mark for what is deemed best practice in higher education. With respect to those measures of performance considered under the LTPF, the ALTC has independently aimed to enhance universities' capacity to deliver on improvements in key areas of outcome. For example, the ALTC has funded other national projects researching the application of e-portfolios and the development of graduate generic skills and attributes in students—which inherently contribute to graduate employability.

Concordant with the employability metrics of the LTPF, a number of reports have highlighted that employers of Australian graduates have been clear in their calls for graduates who are ready for the workforce; selecting for generic, employability skills in their recruitment processes; and touting work-integrated learning as a vehicle for student preparation for employment. Students, too, have highlighted their preferences for learning and teaching which is related to the world-of-work. The sector's peak body, Universities Australia, further endorsed the value of "work-ready" graduates with its release of a statement on a national internship scheme. With employers, students, and universities themselves turning to the development of curricular strategies to improve teaching, learning, and employability, it is appropriate that university Career Services take a leading role, especially given that they sit at the crossroads of the many pathways to student engagement, development and employment.

From an international perspective, Australian universities' Career Services and the conditions in which they operate tend to be similar to their counterparts in the United

Kingdom; however, the Career Services of the UK have enjoyed a longer period of high level recognition, brought about by various government-commissioned reviews and reports and a focus upon the strategic development and delivery of career development services. With a focus upon the employability of university graduates, career development in the UK has taken a leading role in teaching and learning by demonstrating the relevance of career development to student learning and outcomes.

Clearly, there are similar drivers in the Australian scene and there are laudable examples of practice fulfilling needs in this area. The Australian Government's review of university Career Services and our preliminary survey of the sector certainly revealed a significant number of exemplars in this sphere of career development practice. To further demonstrate Australian universities' career development practitioners' leadership in this international field of educational endeavour, in the next section of this paper we describe a national project which is contributing to meeting the challenge of positioning career development at the centre of student learning.

Career Development Learning and Work-integrated Learning

Under the imprimatur of the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (NAGCAS)—a Member Association of the Career Industry Council of Australia—a designated team of university Career Service personnel representing the interests of the entire sector (viz. Martin Smith [project leader], along with Sally Brooks, Peter McIlveen, Peter Torjul, and Joanne Tyler) were awarded an ALTC grant to scope the theoretical and practical relationships between career development learning and work-integrated learning in higher education. The project, *Career Development Learning: Maximising the Contribution of Work-integrated Learning (WIL) to the Student Experience*, focuses on the career development learning of Australian university students and graduates, and the provision of educational services and experiences that enhance and improve career development learning,

including effective post-university transitions. Within these parameters, work-integrated learning is taken to be an educational vehicle for the provision of experiences that can contribute to career development learning. In summary, the project includes:

- (a) scoping the relationship between career development learning and work-integrated learning in higher education;
- (b) analysing how the two can be integrated and synergised; and
- (c) producing learning resources to support career development practitioners, academics, and employers in the delivery of career development learning and work-integrated learning.

The core purpose of the project is to further develop work-integrated learning in the higher education sector. Career development practitioners delivering services in the vocational education and training sector would be familiar with many of the pedagogical principles and practices of work-integrated learning. There is, nevertheless, an extraordinary diversity of terminology underpinning the principles and practices: work-based learning, work-related learning, industry-related learning, work-based project, industry project, industry experience, work experience, co-operative education, practicum, sandwich course, internship, or placement. Whilst many university departments and disciplines have been engaged in this particular approach to learning for some time (e.g., medicine/surgery, teaching, engineering, laboratory technology, drama, and music), other disciplines are relatively new to work-integrated learning and may require considerable support in raising the approach to its optimal potential. Fortunately, a counterpart ALTC project being conducted by the Australian Collaborative Education Network will report upon a national scoping study into how work-integrated learning has been implemented in higher education. This project will provide a fertile base from which to grow work-integrated learning into university curricula.

With respect to curricular developments, the current project has taken the integration of career development learning into university curricula as the portal through which principles and practices may be understood and shared from different disciplinary backgrounds. Whilst there are examples of Career Services supporting the development of graduate attributes and employability by taking a traditional extra-curricular approach to service delivery an object of focus in this project is how Career Services have integrated and can better, integrate career development learning into various disciplinary curricula. From a university's perspective, this requires a view from the highest level monitoring the development of generic graduate attributes through all degree/disciplinary programs, down to the specific unit-level context in which career development is indirectly or directly taught and assessed in specific disciplinary terms. For example, the career competency of *self-awareness* in relation to the worlds-of-work can be conceived of as a generic attribute of all university graduates; and it can also be considered a discipline-specific attribute pertaining directly to an occupation for which a graduate has qualified. How can career development learning be addressed to both levels of a student's higher education experiences and outcomes? This project aims to answer that question, amongst others. With respect to the project's process, it has used an applied research framework consisting of:

- (a) preliminary focus groups of university career development practitioners;
- (b) a national and international questionnaire-based survey of career development practitioners, academic staff, and employers, seeking examples of their practices and how they link to career development;
- (c) focused interviews to glean case studies of practices;
- (d) a national symposium entailing focus groups and brainstorming of results drawn from the initial survey;

- (e) further focus groups with academic staff, employers and students, to refine concepts and practices drawn from previous research activities; and
- (f) a series of formal presentations and discussions with stakeholders through various conference workshops and forums.

Whilst the action research process (of the focus groups in particular) has itself engendered outcomes, through participants' reflection upon their own practices resulting in their generation of new approaches, the material bounty of the project will be shared through the production of resources and publications of value to the different stakeholders.

Given the complexity of blending career development theory and practice from the perspective of different stakeholders who use very different ideas and language for career development (e.g., students, employers, academics, career development practitioners, professional associations, and regulatory agencies), the project team has developed visual metaphors and models which provide a heuristic framework to understand career development learning. One metaphor, for example, describes career development learning as a two-way mirror—similar to the kind used for the observation of police interviews or clinical counselling interviews by individuals looking into one room from another through two-way glass. In this metaphorical sense, a student can use career development to reflect upon himself or herself, and can also use the mirror as a screen through which to view the employer and the world-of-work. The employer, likewise, can use career development to reflect upon the workplace and see the student through a screen of career development. Other visual models will be developed according to stakeholders' different conceptual needs. Employers, for example, may not conceive of work-integrated learning and career development in the same way as a student, an academic, or a career development practitioner; so it is important that there be a variety of conceptual aids to support all stakeholders toward a shared understanding. Other products include templates for the implementation of career

development learning in various course settings (e.g., learning agreements, manuals, and a glossary of terminology). These templates are accompanied by a set of principles for delivery, so as to ensure the optimal involvement of all stakeholders.

Conclusion

From the perspective of universities and their Career Services particularly, this project provides one direction on how career development learning can be effectively integrated into mainstream university business and, therefore, presents evidence toward an approach to the effective and economical delivery of services within institutional resource parameters. In an historical sense, this is the most significantly funded and specifically focused project ever conducted by a single member association of the Career Industry Council of Australia. NAGCAS's receiving a prestigious ALTC grant not only represents an achievement for the higher education arm of the career development profession, it represents acknowledgement of the potential of the profession to contribute to the nation's educational systems which operationalise the theories and practices of facilitating students' transitions into and through the worlds-of-work.

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