PROPOSED FACULTY OF EDUCATION AND SOCIAL WORK UNIT OF STUDY EVALUATION (USE) PROCEDURE MODIFICATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

While the Division of Learning and Teaching and the Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee have previously devoted considerable time and energy on the Faculty’s Unit of Study Evaluation (USE) policy, miscommunication and lack of knowledge about USE policy still prevails amongst Faculty staff.

This report is intended as an internal discussion document for the Faculty of Education and Social Work. It serves as a summary of current University and Faculty USE policy and highlights areas of Faculty USE practice that require improvement.

2. UNIVERSITY APPROACH TO THE UNIT OF STUDY EVALUATION (USE) SYSTEM

2.1 Rationale Underpinning the Unit of Study Evaluation (USE) System

The Unit of Study Evaluation (USE) system was established by the University to provide Unit of Study (UoS) coordinators seeking to assess the effectiveness of UoS with evaluative data to assist in planning and implementing teaching and learning improvements. Accordingly, the primary outputs of the USE system are intended to be:

1. Documentation of the quality of UoS and an indication of how UoS effectively contribute to the overall quality of students’ learning experiences in a degree; and
2. Recommendations by UoS coordinators - in the form of documented strategies - that will maintain, or further improve, the teaching and learning quality of individual units.

Prior to the Faculty restructure in 2004, commonly UoS staff provided written reports to their Head of School. This practice appears to have come to an end, however, with the dissolution of the three schools. At present, some UoS coordinators provide verbal feedback on the quality of their units to Program Directors, but formal documentation is rarely supplied.
2.2 Outline of University USE Requirements

At University level, the policy requirements for USE evaluation are:

1. UoS will be evaluated at least once every three years at faculty level.
2. Heads of departments or faculty unit coordinators will forward summaries of USE results to deans for information and action if needed. Deans will refer non-confidential information on the evaluations to Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees and to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) for advice and comment. Unit of study evaluations may be used to inform the University’s internal quality audit process, including the annual faculty reviews conducted by Academic Board.
3. The standard survey form devised by the Institute for Teaching and Learning or another faculty-approved form may evaluate units of study. Coordinators, heads and deans must provide a summary of the results of the most recent student evaluation of units on a unit of study website or in handouts. This summary will refer to actions taken in response to student comments.

3. FACULTY APPROACH TO THE UNIT OF STUDY EVALUATION (USE) SYSTEM

3.1 Current USE Policy in the Faculty of Education and Social Work

The Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee developed our current USE system, which was adopted by Faculty for use in 2006. This included the development of survey items 8 – 11 for the current three-year cycle, a schedule of when each UoS would be evaluated within the three-year cycle, and a series of reporting mechanisms. At this time it was also agreed that special attention be given to those units receiving either <3.5 or >15% disagreement; or >4.5 for ‘overall satisfaction’ (USE question 12).

A number of actions were duly proposed. These included letters of commendation from the Dean and Associate Dean (L&T) for excellent UoS; an offer of support for UoS with low ‘overall satisfaction’ scores; and an area on the L&T website where students could read postings from the UoS coordinator about the ways the UoS had been developed in response to student feedback.

3.2 Current USE Practice in the Faculty of Education and Social Work

3.2.1 Adherence to University/Faculty USE policy

Current Faculty USE practice complies with Faculty policy in the following ways:

1. Associate Dean (L&T) manages the biannual USE bulk order.
2. Staff are invited to request an earlier USE where appropriate.
3. Dean and Associate Dean (L&T) receive resulting numerical data from ITL.

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2 The report writers found little evidence of such reports within our Faculty.
4 These included:
   1. The Dean and Associate Dean (L&T) to receive numerical data from ITL.
   2. Associate Dean (L&T) to provide a USE report to Faculty L&T Committee
   3. UoS coordinator to synthesise feedback received from ITL (including own reflection, grades, etc) and write summary and recommendations. A copy of this report to be sent to the Program Director and Associate Dean (L&T).
5 In line with other Faculties (Pharmacy for example), the report writers advise broadening our Faculty’s USE analysis: our current focus on question 12 distorts results. Instead, we propose that units with three or more areas of <50% agreement be considered to require further inquiry; and units demonstrating 10 or more areas with >70% student agreement be considered to be commendable.
4. Associate Dean (L&T) reports on USE to Faculty Learning and Teaching Committee for discussion.
5. UoS coordinators whose UoS were deemed excellent by students receive a letter of commendation from the Dean.
6. Support is offered by the Dean and Associate Dean (L&T) to those UoS Coordinators whose UoS received <3.5 or >15% disagreement for question 12.

3.2.2 Non-compliance with University/Faculty USE policy
Current general USE practice in our Faculty fails to comply with University and/or Faculty USE policy in the following ways:
1. Some senior staff (inadvertently, perhaps) propagate the message that the USE measures the individual as opposed to the UoS.
2. The mandatory documented strategies cited above are sadly lacking.
3. The mandatory UoS evaluative synopsis to be delivered to students via website and/or course handouts are rarely provided.

3.2.3 Explanation for staff failure to comply with University/Faculty USE policy
Below are possible explanations for our Faculty’s non-compliance with University/Faculty USE policy. Each numbered bullet refers to the observation with the equivalent numbered bullet above.
1. Some staff may be unaware of the philosophy underpinning the USE. Arguably their lack of knowledge is partly fuelled by management decisions at the very highest level. For example, current Faculty policy for letters of commendation to be sent from the Dean and Associate Dean (L&T) to UoS coordinators whose USE were considered excellent by students seems ill advised. This process fails to make any distinction between the structure and content of the UoS and the teaching skill of the staff member – indeed the letter’s focus on the ‘good teaching scale’ appears to make a direct correlation between the staff members’ teaching prowess and the students’ positive evaluation.
2. Some staff are genuinely unaware of Faculty USE policy and, therefore, University and/or Faculty reporting requirements.
3. While an area of the Faculty’s UoS proposal form, plus Standard Unit of Study Manager and Organiser (SUMO) template, is devoted to providing an evaluative synopsis for students, this section remains non-mandatory for staff to complete.

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4 At a recent Meeting of Learning and Teaching Committee of Faculty (Thursday 3 April 2008), it was stated that Program Directors were receiving inadequate feedback information from their UoS Coordinators.
7 When the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) raised Faculty USE policy at a recent Program Directors Meeting (17 April) none present demonstrated knowledge of current policy or, indeed, practice.
8 Bullet number 10.
9 Feedback and Notes – Student Evaluation (Section 7)
4. PROPOSED NEW REPORTING SYSTEM

4.1 What follows is an overview of the new reporting system proposed, plus support documentation.
Proposed Faculty USE reporting structure

Central order system – schedule of USE (3 year cycle)

1a: Emails USE report and returns survey forms
1b: cc., numerical report semester summary and spreadsheets

UoS coordinator synthesises feedback and writes summary and recommendations using the Faculty’s UoS Coordinator USE Report template. UoS coordinator forwards a copy of this report to Program Director and Associate Dean (L&T).

Dean
Associate Dean (L&T)
Project Manager (L&T) analyses USE data on behalf of Dean and Associate Dean (L&T) in preparation for USE interviews: units with three or more areas of <50% agreement to be considered to require further inquiry; units with 10 or more areas of >70% agreement to be considered commendable.

Associate Dean (L&T) and individual program directors (or their delegate) meet to discuss UoS Coordinator USE Reports*, plus any areas of concern arising from Project Manager’s (L&T) analysis, and determine possible support and recommendations.

Program Director (or their delegate) and UoS Coordinator meet to discuss recommendations, arrange support, and determine course of action using Faculty’s USE Action Summary Report template.

Program Director (or their delegate) forwards USE Action Summary Report to Associate Dean (L&T) for review and approval.

Associate Dean approves USE Action Summary Report and schedules re-evaluation of under-performing units the following year.

* Initially, the implementation will focus on those units requiring further inquiry only.
In accordance with University policy, this report is intended to provide a simple means for UoS coordinators to document a concise summary of the results of their USE, as well as proposed actions arising from it. Please type your responses in the boxes below each heading (around 5 lines per box), resizing as necessary.

Description

Please provide a brief description of the unit including: learning aims and intended learning outcomes; a description of the teaching and learning processes; relevant contextual factors, such as class size, resource issues, and the elective/compulsory nature of this unit.

Key student issues

Summarise both the key data reported in the student ratings and the main issues raised by the students in their comments. Please both include strengths and weaknesses in this section. (Please note, this information may be duplicated in Section 7 [Student Evaluation] of the SUMO template.)
Self review issues

Document your reflections on teaching as well as insights into the effectiveness and efficiency of teaching and learning processes. This might include reflections on the impact of the introduction of new teaching techniques, or report of issues identified through systematic self-reflection, using methods such as teaching journals and critical incident statements.

Recommendations

Note the recommendations arising from your evaluation (no more than 5) in bullet form, and identify strategies to be implemented to either maintain existing strengths or address weaknesses in order to improve the quality of the unit of study. These recommendations should be clearly linked to the finding of the evaluation and should provide a basis for comparison in subsequent evaluation cycles.

Thank you

Thank you for taking time to complete this report. Please email a copy to your Program Director and the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching).

Your Program Director (or their delegate) will contact you shortly to arrange an appointment to discuss the contents of this report in detail.

Report prepared by:

Signature: ____________________________________________

Unit of Study Coordinator

Date: _______________________________________________
This report is intended to provide a simple means for UoS coordinators and their program directors (or delegate) to document between 3 and 5 actions arising from USE meetings. Please employ this template as a structure for your meeting. Type your responses in the boxes below each heading (around 5 lines per box), resizing as necessary.

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**Thank you**

Thank you for taking time to complete this report. Please email a copy of this report to the Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching) for their review and approval.

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**Report compiled by:**

Signature: __________________________ Date: __________________________

*Unit of Study Coordinator*

Signature: __________________________ Date: __________________________

*Program Director (or their delegate)*

**Report approved by:**

Signature: __________________________ Date: __________________________

*Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching)*