

## **A framework for effective Quality Management of Community Engagement at UWS**

### **Overview**

The framework proposed below was developed in draft form at the Australian Universities Quality Forum in 2004. At this forum quality management for CE was identified as an area requiring improvement, sector-wide. It will be the focus of the AUQF 2005 in Sydney. Attending to the issue immediately will enable UWS to benefit fully from feedback at the 2005 Forum. This will, in turn, ensure that the University is well prepared for an expected emphasis on QM for Community Engagement by the time UWS is audited by AUQA in 2006.

The framework outlined below addresses the key areas of poor practice identified so far in managing the area strategically and with an eye to quality. It is necessary in order to ensure that key strategic intentions for the area are implemented effectively and consistently across a University and do not simply operate in pockets.

### **What is community engagement?**

A clear definition which is understood by all staff is an essential starting point. For example the definition used at UTS is:

*Any service provided by staff (or students) using the expertise for which they are employed (enrolled) at the University to benefit one of the communities served by the it. This can be paid or unpaid and is typically delivered through a partnership and ongoing reciprocal relationship between the University and the specific community or professional group concerned. It is intended to produce demonstrable benefit in the overall development and wellbeing of the communities served.*

### **Which communities are the focus of the university?**

A community can be defined as: a group of people sharing a common location, set of activities, purposes, interests or heritage.

Communities can, therefore, be geographical, cultural, linguistic, religious, generational, national, social, economic or professional. The University's alumni also included by many universities.

It is important for a University to identify and justify which one or mix of these communities and which specific subgroups within each selected community it is engaging with and why.

## **What types of community engagement are possible?**

There are wide range of options in this regard. Community engagement can be local, national or international and include any one or mix of the following:

### Engagement with Professional Communities

- Membership professional editorial boards, professional accreditation bodies, or directorships in relevant public and private instrumentalities;
- Providing advice to publishers;
- Acting as an expert witness, provision of expert advice on community issues to government, public organisations and the private sector;

### Research and Development

- Undertaking research around the needs of and in partnership with specific communities;
- Undertaking Consultancies with targeted communities the outcomes of which assist these communities and might generate further research opportunities;
- Engagement by students in service learning with specific communities. Service learning is usually undertaken for credit;
- Linking the full range of relevant resources of the University to assist a community project ( this can be local, national or international). In some Universities service learning is integrated with this – as is the case with the UTS Shopfront;
- Assisting voluntary community groups with one's skills (e.g. an accountancy lecturer doing the accounts for a scouting group)

### Knowledge dissemination & community debate

- Engaging in public debate, informed comment in the media;
- Running public seminars;
- Operating TV and Radio stations or Websites for the benefit of and often in partnership with targeted communities;

### Educational programs and support

- Providing enrichment activities for local schools using the University's intellectual, student and other resources;
- Undertaking short courses and CPE with targeted communities, the outcomes of which further program development and recruitment opportunities;
- Using practice-oriented learning in which community locations and groups are used as both a site or source for learning.

This would include the use by the University of practicum placements, various forms of work-based learning, using community locations as a site for running classes, use of successful graduates in the professional communities served by the University as a source of information to make assessment and the curriculum more relevant, adoption of problem based learning and use of real-world case studies and student or staff mentoring by members of targeted communities;

Involving the community in the University

- Appointing key leaders in targeted communities to adjunct positions in the University;
- The involvement of specific communities in the formation of the University's key strategic directions and policies;
- Running a range of creative activities and productions to which specific communities have access;

This is just a brief list and there are, no doubt, many other examples.

### **Who should be involved in a University's community engagement**

This can be any one or a mix of academic staff, general staff or students. Equally, if a two-way engagement strategy is adopted, members of targeted communities become involved in the University.

### **Managing the area strategically and in an integrated way**

Few universities have a strategic plan for the area (UWS is one of the exceptions). Those who do have a strategic plan often do not have mechanisms which integrate community engagement in any systematic and explicit way with learning, teaching, research or research training or have in place a clear strategy for ensuring effective and consistent implementation of their plan's objectives.

Evidence that the key directions for community engagement are integrated with those for learning and teaching and research is important in order to develop an integrated and mutually reinforcing approach across all of the University's core activities. Demonstrable links to the University's Internationalisation Plan (where this exists) is also necessary. Finally, consistency of approach and application of key strategic directions is important.

A useful model against which UWS can benchmark its strategic plan and its implementation is the QUT Community Service Plan 2003-7 and its roll-out strategy.

### **Accountability**

There needs to be clear accountability for the implementation of key strategic directions and quality management of the area by a senior member of staff. This requires the establishment of clear annual performance targets for this member of the executive and regular reviews of performance for the area, against data from an explicit tracking and improvement system (below). It is equally important to establish the individuals who are locally accountable for initiating, coordinating, tracking and improving the area. Many Universities do not have this set of accountabilities or they are left ill-defined.

Some Universities have central units responsible for coordinating the area. When this is the case they need to be held accountable for their services against clear tracking data that shows they are adding value to, supporting and consolidating local developments. One mechanism used in some Universities is to have them report to a

carefully selected steering committee of key academic leaders – for example, Deans or A/Deans.

### **Tracking and improving CE**

A dearth of easily quantifiable tracking measures have been identified for the area. Quantitative measures that are used by some universities include benchmarked trends in:

- \* The results of community satisfaction surveys (these can be run with staff and target communities)
- \* number of column inches of positive vs negative media coverage per annum
- \* CPE income/profit
- \* Publication rates for the area in benchmarked journals;
- \* Citation rates for University submissions to key committees and reports focusing on community development; recommendations taken up in these reports;
- \* SPIRT grants won x spread across Colleges and Divisions
- \* the amount of CE activity x type
- \* Community usage rates of University facilities x type of community group and activity
- \* Participation rates by the community in University-mounted cultural and other activities
- \* Recognition rates for campus provosts in their local community
- \* the number of staff receiving an ‘outstanding’ assessment for the area in promotion rounds
- \* outcomes of AUQA audits on the area – balance and nature of commendations vs recommendations
- \* number of students and staff choosing to do sabbaticals in target communities and/or involved in study abroad programs
- \* number of students involved in industry/community placements or the equivalent
- \* number of alumni involved in/contributing to the University’s activities
- \* number of staff holding official positions in key target community groups/organisations

It is possible to analyse qualitative data provided in feedback surveys, focus groups and other systems using recent IT-enabled analytical tools like *CEQuery* and *Leximancer*.

Once the key tracking measures for the area have been decided and given priority, what is then necessary is to determine how best to gather in a comprehensive set of data on them. Options here include:

- Establishing evidence of effective community engagement as part of the University’s promotion criteria and then only allowing data entered on the University’s community engagement data base to be used to justify promotion claims in the area. This data base would be online, staff pin accessed and would not only include a description of the activity but evidence of its effectiveness and the name of a community member to verify this claim
- Using the community engagement data base as a basis for reward funding to units, divisions, schools or colleges each year for excellence in the area

At the same time it is necessary to gather in user satisfaction data on the area and to use the results, in conjunction with the community engagement data base, to identify key areas for quality improvement and to action these promptly and effectively. Here being part of a national or international HE community engagement network using similar tracking systems can be used to identify improvement solutions for underperforming areas. This form of benchmarking for improvement is regarded most favourably in AUQA audits.

Building in adequate recognition and rewards to assure consistent action in the area. This is critical and has been alluded to above. Staff will not get involved in the area unless they see that it is being appropriately led by a senior staff member, that it is built into the core university funding and reward systems, that it is rewarded through promotion opportunities, that key groups get funding rewards for excellent performance and that those who want to improve their performance have access to workable improvement solutions.

### **Recommendation**

It is recommended that UWS address the above issues at a corporate level as part of the roll-out of its strategic plan and development of an overall quality assurance and improvement system for the area. Doing this will not only enhance implementation of the plan it will ensure that the University is adequately prepared for the 2006 AUQA audit of the area.

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