School of Fashion and Textiles

Learning and Teaching Investment Fund 2010
Final Project Report

Associate Degree - Fashion and Textile Merchandising

Strategic Objectives

The project objectives were aimed at allowing the school to achieve the following:

- Replacing the existing Advanced Diploma of Fashion and Textile Merchandising with the Associate Degree Fashion and Textile Merchandising.
- Development of an Associate Degree strategy within the DSC College
- Supporting existing VET teaching team to meet higher education program requirements in learning and teaching.
- Preparing Course Guide Part B
- Developing a stronger articulation into the Bachelor of Applied Science (Fashion Merchandising) program

Project Team Members

- Keith Cowlishaw (Project Sponsor)
- Christine Clark (Project Leader)
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1. Introduction

The Advanced Diploma in Fashion and Textile Merchandising in the School of Fashion and Textiles has grown significantly over the past four years from 80 students to 130 students. It is well supported and highly recognised by the Fashion and retail industry. In 2009 the school developed a strategy to reposition the Advanced Diploma as an elite paraprofessional qualification through an Associate degree. This was in response to other institutions entering the market and the growth in VRQA U/G programs being offered by TAFE colleges in Victoria.

2. Project Description and Rationale

The rationale for converting the existing Advanced Diploma Fashion Merchandising is one of positioning and development of a program offering that will allow the School to more effectively participate in the emerging national tertiary landscape.

Merchandising as a program has grown significantly over the past 5 years as the Textile Clothing and Fashion industry has been restructured into an industry sector where design is of paramount importance and the major players in the industry are Brand houses and, wholesalers and retailers. These companies require people who have an understanding of retail, supply chains, product management within a Textile and Fashion contextualisation. It is a dynamic evolving discipline that is moving beyond the structures of the training package and is an excellent model for the new Tertiary Landscape.

In order that the School has the capacity to reshape the program to respond to Industry requests a program structure is required which offers that flexibility. The financial considerations and the flexibility of delivery are the primary drivers for conversion to an Associate Degree.

The School of Fashion and Textiles has pioneered the 2:1 pathway whereby its Diploma /Advanced Diploma programs allow for two years credit and a direct pathway into the third year of the B. Applied Science undergraduate programs. The Diploma/Advanced Diploma programs within this structure have been developed for this pathway and can be criticised for over delivery, over assessment as they need to meet the articulation standards required for the two year credit. To some extent this pathway has been superseded by the University Associate Degree pathway whereby an Associate Degree as distinct from a Diploma/Advanced Diploma is the pathway for two years credit into an undergraduate program. Adoption of an Associate Degree structure would bring the school’s programs in to line with the University positioning of Associate Degrees.

TAFE productivity drivers require Diploma/Advanced Diploma programs to discontinue over delivery and bring assessment activities back to training package specification. These productivity drivers may jeopardise the credit arrangements in place for the articulation requirements of the B.App Sci programs. An Associate Degree will mitigate that risk. It is proposed the existing pedagogy will be retained, in its broadest sense. It is estimated 75% of the current program is theory based and a number of courses are delivered through lectures /tutorials.

Initial feedback from industry is that the Advanced Diploma is an excellent program meeting industry needs and whilst there is an understanding of the academic logic behind an Associate Degree the school needs to ensure it maintains the quality and relevance which has been achieved with the Advanced Diploma. The transition would need to be seen as a seamless change.

Whilst the project can use the existing Advanced Diploma of Fashion and Textiles Merchandising as a template for the Part A course guides there remains a body of work preparing the Part B course information. This work will need to ensure the courses are consistent with the AQF requirements for an Associate Degree and retain the strong e-learning and WIL components that have been built into the Advanced Diploma stream.
To reshape the Merchandising program to meet industry change and needs, the structure has to be flexible and the curriculum based Associate Degree allows such capacity. The rules and regulations within Training Packages can create constraints for learning and teaching methods, or delivery and assessment strategies. The Merchandising program has very successful work integrated projects which are supported by the fashion industry. As such, a curriculum based program can extend the boundaries and allow for more creative procedures and offer better outcomes.

This project is aimed at preparing for the conversion of the Advanced Diploma in Fashion and Textile Merchandising to the Associate Degree Fashion and Textile Merchandising consistent with AQF requirements.

This project has two main parts:

1. To explore the required pedagogy for the delivery of a new elite paraprofessional qualification—Associate Degree and critically assess the differences between the needs of a vocational program governed by a Training Package and the critical thinking within a higher education program.

2. To develop course guide Part B for the Associate Degree in Fashion and Textile Merchandising consistent with the pedagogy explored in part 1. The objective for each course is to strike the right balance of skills and capabilities.

The first part of this project required the fashion merchandising team to critically analyse their pedagogy against the objectives defined for the proposed Associate Degree in the program proposals approved by the University. This work was lead by the project leader Ms Chris Clark through a series of one on one and small group sessions. It was then followed by 2 full-day (16 and 17 June 2010) professional development and planning workshops for the teaching team. Associate Professor Barbara de la Harpe led a session on Higher education.
capabilities, critical thinking and, graduate attributes. Reading materials and selected papers on pedagogy including graduate attributes were disseminated to staff before the workshops which allowed the team to reflect on their own teaching prior to the workshops. Another workshop was led by the Program Director of Bachelor of Applied Science (Merchandising) in preparation for the new articulation agreement for the Associate Degree. This allowed the teaching team to better understand the nature of the HE pedagogy students would encounter in their final year.

Further workshops with the merchandising team were devoted to the development of learning and teaching strategy and assessment. Since the Associate Degree had more flexibility, teachers explored how they would make learning more interesting and creative and what assessment methods could be used. This work allowed the team to collaborate on holistic assessments methods.

The last phase of the project required the teaching team to review the Associate Degree concept and decide upon the delivery and assessment for the new program. This work took place through 2 full-day forums on teaching and learning and assessment in late November 2010. With this work completed the Course coordinators then prepared Course Guide Part B in conjunction with the DSC Learning and Teaching support group for submission.

3. Project Outcomes and impacts

The project allowed the School to achieve the following:

- Replacing the existing Advanced Diploma of Fashion and Textile Merchandising with the Associate Degree Fashion and Textile Merchandising.
- Aligning development of Associate Degree strategy within the University
- Supporting existing VET teaching team to meet higher education program requirements in learning and teaching.
- Preparing Course Guide Part B
- Gaining higher margin structure that will support articulation requirements

Replacing the existing Advanced Diploma of Fashion and Textile Merchandising with the Associate Degree Fashion and Textile Merchandising.

The development of the Associate Degree Fashion and Textile Merchandising was successful. The Merchandising teachers worked well as a team and they developed holistic assessments. In addition significant marketing activities were undertaken from July 2010. All parties involved with recruitment within Australia and overseas were informed of the new program and information was prepared for VTAC Guide. The Advanced Diploma will be discontinued in 2012 as commencing students in 2011 will be enrolled in the Associate degree.

Aligning development of Associate Degree strategy within the University

In 2007, RMIT introduced an Associate Degree strategy. The work undertaken through this project will further inform that strategy and enhance the tertiary programs offered by the VET sector at RMIT University.

Supporting existing VET teaching team to meet higher education program requirements in learning and teaching
Two full-days on planning and professional development were organised for the whole teaching team. The objectives were to identify the differences between a competency based program and a capability/graduate attributes based program. The focus was on graduate attributes and capabilities. Leading learning and teaching practitioners from within the university Associate Professor Barbara de la Harpe and the Program Director of Bachelor of Applied Science were included. The former focused on graduate attributes while the latter presented an overview of the Bachelor of Applied Science (Merchandising) program.

Preparation of Course Guide Part B

Kylie Budge, DSC Learning and Teaching consultant worked with the teaching team in developing Course Guide Part B. She provided them with feedback and advice on clarity, language and standard. All Course Guide Part A and Part B were completed.

Developing a stronger articulation into the Bachelor of Applied Science (Fashion Merchandising) program

The Associate Degree has been developed in consultation with the Bachelor of Applied Science (Fashion Merchandising) program which will ensure a stronger articulation and a better transition for students into the final year of the HE program.

4. Dissemination Strategies and Outputs

The outcomes of this project will be disseminated to relevant executives, academics and teaching staff within the School and across the University TAFE Executive and DSC College board. A summary of the project will be posted on the School website under teaching and learning.

The design and structure of this project will be available for use in the School for planned development of the Associate Degree Fashion Design and Technology. It will also be available to the wider community of RMIT via the website and the recent Associate Degree developed by the School of Media and Communication made use of the learning from this project.

5. Linkages

There are a number of Associate Degrees in RMIT. This project has been shared with other Schools within DSC and the Director TAFE has been fully briefed on the project.

6. Evaluation of project outcomes

The School will be implementing a program steering committee to review the development of the pedagogy within this program. This team will be chaired by the Head of School and members would include Associate Director TAFE DSC, Program Manager Fashion and Textile Merchandising, HE Discipline Leader Fashion and Textiles, Program Director (B. Applied Science Fashion and Textile Merchandising), DSC Learning and Teaching and Program Coordinators (Fashion and Textile Merchandising).

It is probably worthwhile noting that the program developed through this project was one of the top 10 HE high demand programs within the University and it also achieved its INTON target for the first time since the introduction of Fashion Merchandising within the school.
7. Executive Summary

This project was designed to facilitate the conversion of the Advanced Diploma in Fashion and Textile Merchandising to an Associate Degree Fashion and Textile Merchandising with the mission of meeting AQF requirements.

The rationale for replacing the existing Advanced Diploma in Fashion and Textile Merchandising is of strategic nature. It was to align the business strategy of the School of Fashion and Textiles with the business strategy of RMIT and develop a tertiary positioning for an RMIT VET program. The change would allow the School a more competitive positioning as well as participating effectively in the emerging national tertiary landscape.

For the Merchandising program to meet industry needs the program structure has to be flexible and the curriculum based Associate Degree allows such flexibility and overcome Training Packages constraints with respect of learning and teaching methods, delivery and, assessment strategies. The Merchandising program has successful work integrated projects which are supported by the fashion industry. As such, a curriculum based program would extend the boundaries and allow for more creative procedures and yield better outcomes.

The project objectives were:

- Replace the existing Advanced Diploma of Fashion and Textile Merchandising with the Associate Degree Fashion and Textile Merchandising.
- Aligning development of Associate Degree strategy within the University
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This project has two main parts:

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2. To develop course guide Part B for the Associate Degree in Fashion and Textile Merchandising consistent with the pedagogy explored in part 1. The objective for each course is to strike the right balance of skills and capabilities.

All the objectives of the project were achieved and the process and the project will be on the school website for dissemination. The program developed through this project was one of the top 10 HE high demand programs within the University and it also achieved its INTON target for the first time since the introduction of Fashion Merchandising within the school.

Keith Cowlishaw/Chris Clark

February 10 2011