Learning and Teaching Investment Fund 2011

Final Project Report

Submission date: 17 February 2012

Title of project: Towards a Tertiary Environment: GSSS&P Dual Sector Integration Project:

Strategic objective(s) addressed: to be work-relevant and industry-partnered

Project leader: David McElgunn

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99254063

Project team members:
- Jennifer Brooker
- Martyn Jones
- Anthony Graham
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- Irene Pagliarella
- Ian Thomas
- Chris Ziguras
- Sedat Mulayim
- Guosheng Chen
1. Executive summary (up to half a page)

Provide a summary that describes the project and what was achieved. This will appear on the RMIT website and the full final report will be linked to the summary.

The 2011 LTIF project was the next step in the development the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning (GSSS&P’s) progress towards a fully integrated tertiary School.

For many years GSSS&P had operated with a clear distinction between the sectors. In recent years however the School made a conscious effort to transform the operations and where possible, the activity into a fully integrated model where Vet and HE are managed under the one combined model. This project was the next step forward by finalising the integration of HE and VET staff into dual sector teams.

While the integration was achieved to some extent, full integration is not yet possible due to the varying funding, reporting and compliance models that still differentiate the sectors. The key outcomes to this point are that 3 of the 4 VET teams are now teamed with HE disciplines resulting in integrated dual sector tertiary teams.

The aim of the project was to unpack what a ‘tertiary environment’ meant for this School and what were the barriers and opportunities for programs, staff and students. The results of the project were significant for GSSS&P. The knowledge gained is highly relevant to other Schools and Colleges and can be a guide for others contemplating similar models.

The success, or failure, of integration is undoubtedly ‘culture’. This is made up of language, attitudes and relationships which determine how staff and teams interact with each other and how they relate their work with the broader objectives of the School. How these relationships and attitudes are developed and maintained is the key to encouraging integration of the sectors and while some people disagree with this pollination, it is the focus on individual motivation which ultimately brings about successful partnerships between the sectors. In any discussion held, the focal point must be on the student, the link that can bring all staff together. It is the focus on student outcomes that can be the driver to integrated models that enhance the experience of students, staff and the industries that our students ultimately end up in.

2. A list of outcomes

- Provide a brief overview of the project’s outcomes and impact.

List any scholarly output in the form of conference presentations or journal papers. This will appear on the RMIT website.

Following completion of the 2011 LTIF project there were a number of outcomes.
GSSS&P has been a successful tertiary School for many years with many examples of how the sectors have been able to work together to meet common objectives. With the convergence of the sectors, the four School VET teams have been drawn closer too their HE counterparts. As a result, the School now consists of three fully integrated dual sector teams. The exception is Community Services, which is too complex to merge with any one single HE discipline. Upon reflection the necessity to merge the teams is not necessary if the structures are in place to support the activities across sectors.

The project highlight was to investigate and determine what makes a successful tertiary team? This was debated over a number of participant sessions and interviews across other areas of the University.

While the GSS&P tertiary model is not like other examples in the University, a resistance to embrace dual sector teamwork was found in many other areas of the University. This can be attributed to many factors including individual School structures, School culture and individual personalities or leadership styles that do not support flexible models. In fact, ‘culture’ was highlighted as the single most important factor in the successful development of dual sector tertiary Schools. ‘Culture’ it seems, determines whether teams have the foundations upon which to build successful, engaging tertiary models. This is really underpinned by the relationships and attitudes of staff and how they use these attitudes and relationships to engage others across sectors. In many respects creating opportunities for staff to build relationships and understanding of each others work is critical in changing negative attitudes and strengthening possibilities of pollination across the sectors.

Language can also be a major barrier to progression as it assumes exclusivity in many conversations. We use language to distinguish between roles or identify something unique or specific yet the University has examples where TAFE language is used as a separator not distinguisher. For example, roles exist that identify TAFE staff as being Director of TAFE, Director of VET etc yet no such roles exist in Higher Education. The use of language can also be seen as a switch button which encourages people to switch ‘off’ or ‘on’ depending on what is being discussed. We do this in everyday life but in the context of VET and HE switching off and on impacts on the organisations ability to respond holistically to changing education policy. An example is that in some School’s where strategic discussions take place on TAFE, many HE staff assume it does not have anything to do with them. The same can be said TAFE staff when HE discussions take place. This is a limitation as it creates a separation between the sectors and prevents innovation and creativity in product design and opportunities to enhance the student experience. If the University is to progress as a tertiary provider it is important to consider how language impacts on our work, responsibilities and perceptions. Language identifiers that distinguish the sectors could be removed to support a more unified model where there is no distinction between sectors, only the level of qualification.

Probably a more important outcome as a result of the project is the significance on finding commonality in encouraging dual sector teamwork. The common link that threads all staff in the University is students and we discovered early in the project
that students were the focal point of all our conversations. Focus on students makes it a conversation for all.

Developing positive culture within teams can be difficult if barriers exist but by focussing on the positive outcomes for students team work becomes more realistic because it is more relevant to our activity. The outcomes for tertiary models should ensure that students receive an excellent learning experience and create maximum opportunity from their experiences. A program should either prepare the student for transitioning, either into further study through pathways or other tertiary opportunities or to transition into work. If we are able to shift focus from language or individual attitudes into student focused approaches the sector becomes irrelevant and true tertiary models can prevail.

3. Project outcomes and impacts

- List and discuss the outcomes the project was designed to achieve and the outcomes the project has achieved, including any literature review and evidence of the impact the project has had on students.
- Describe briefly any issues that may have prevented you achieving all the original outcomes stated in the application.
- Describe any disciplinary and interdisciplinary linkages that have emerged as a result of the project.

The following is a list of the intended outcomes. Included is a brief summary of whether this was achieved and if not the reasons and barriers to achieving this.

- Four fully integrated Tertiary teams by 1 January 2012 – This outcome was achieved in part with three of the four VET teams in the School now merged into single dual sector teams. The exception was Community Services. While it was possible to merge this team, there was contention over which HE team it was best suited to merge with. While the other three VET teams are discipline specific, Community Services is not and consists of multiple disciplines (e.g. aged care, disability, youth work, Community Education etc). It was troublesome to determine how a multidiscipline group could be merged with any single discipline as the linkages and overlap are present multiple HE disciplines. The size of this team (15) also made it prohibitive for slotting it into a HE grouping.
- Host an RMIT Tertiary Environment Forum to bring together all Colleges in the University to discuss, report-on and debate the tertiary landscape at RMIT University.- This was a very successful outcome with the School hosting a University wide one-day forum in September 2011. This brought together academics, teachers and leaders from across the University who contributed to the discussions on what ‘tertiary’ means to them. Professor Dale Murphy from Swinburne and Associate Professor Peter Mathews from the University of Ballarat presented on their Dual Sector Cohesion Project
- The project aims for an inclusive model where the opportunities for VET and HE programs and teams come together – The convergence of tertiary teams resulting from the project highlighted that progress needs to be subtle and not forced upon participants. The outcome is that the School
will progress its tertiary future by identifying champions and areas of best practice to work with to progress the model. Forced change and seeping policy shifts will likely damage progress but there is enough good will and positive culture to support special projects that further develop this space. By focussing on individual projects progress will be initially small but as success widens others will see the benefits of these models and eventually come onboard.

4. Dissemination strategies and outputs

- List materials or outcomes that will be made available to the university or groups of stakeholders within the university or sector and provide information about where any project material is available
- Describe the ways in which the project’s outcomes have been or will be shared across the university, the sector and/or nationally and internationally. For guidance refer to the ALTC Dissemination Framework (url: http://www.altc.edu.au/print/resource%2Ddissemination%2Dframework%2Daltc%2D2008 )

The project culminated in the University forum held on the 23rd of September 2011. The purpose of the forum was to present to the university community what GSSS&P were doing to progress dual sector integration and report on the projects key outcomes.

The day attracted 74 participants with representatives from each of the Colleges. Professor Dale Murphy from Swinburne University and Associate Professor Peter Matthews from the University of Ballarat came to talk about their Federally funded Dual Sector Cohesion Project and highlighted the need for dual sector Universities to make more use of their dual sector status.

The forum was an excellent way to inform others of the School’s progress and we have since been approached by other School’s to talk further about the project, its objectives and outcomes.

The end of the LTIF funding is by no means the end of the project. The School continues to progress its integration. The project highlighted new initiatives the School is working on in 2012 including the development of online programs with clear pathways into Higher Education and the development of pathways from vocational graduate qualifications to post graduate awards. The School’s integration is an ongoing process and has some year to go before it’s complete
5. Evaluation of project outcomes

- Provide evaluation outcomes including evidence of the impact of the project and the value it will bring to the university and/or the sector. For guidance refer to the ALTC Evaluation Framework (url: http://www.altc.edu.au/extras/altc-gsep/index.html)

The evaluation of the project was to answer one key question: how do we encourage and progress dual sector integration? This was not only from a School perspective but the University more broadly.

The School Tertiary forum on 23rd September attracted over 70 participants from the University but most of these were not from our own School. In fact only a handful of GSSS&P staff attended. While this was disappointing, School leadership staff were already involved in the monthly participant meetings and felt they already had an understanding of the project. The best outcome was that other Colleges and Schools attended, highlighting that the project had widespread interest in the University. While the School’s tertiary model is not unique, it is one of a kind in this University and continues to lead the way in integrating the sectors. This has the potential to have great impact on how the University views its tertiary future. In some way GSSS&P is paving the way for others to follow. But rather than make their own mistakes along the way the GSSS&P model can be a guide for others contemplating similar steps.

The impact is also proven in the new initiatives that will continue into 2012. An additional LTIF grant application was successful to create pathways for vocational graduate qualifications into post graduate awards. This is a significant project as it broadens the integration into student experience, not just School structure, policy and management issues. As the project determined the emphasis of integration needs to focus on students this 2012 project allows the School to take the next step into directly impacting on students.

6. Budget report

- What was the amount of funds approved?
- What was the final amount of funds acquitted? Please attach a financial statement.

All financial claims related to your project must be processed against your internal order number before the end of 2011. Claims cannot be accepted in the New Year 2012. Unexpended funds will be retained by the university and unclaimed costs will be borne by your School/College.

A financial statement (in PDF), signed by the team leader and relevant Finance Manager of acquittal of funds must be attached to the report. It should include a statement of income and expenditure against the budget categories specified in the approved project proposal. Please consult your Finance Manager for further information.

Please see attached
### Cost Elements

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7. **Appendices**
   - Include any material that may support your claims of outcomes and impact.
   - Attach pictures, presentation material, website links and so on that may be important. In particular, please provide an image that can be used for publications, such as a poster.

   **N/A**

**Submitting the Final LTIF Project Report**

- Please follow the headings listed above.
- Please save the report in Microsoft Word using the following formula: team leader’s surname_College_LTIF2011_finreport.doc (e.g. brown_DSC_LTIF2011_finreport.doc).
- Please include a Table of Contents.
- Please sign the final signature page.
- Submit the final report by close of business, Friday, 17 February 2012 to diana.cousens@rmit.edu.au

**Further information**
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