Engaging Staff in Curriculum Change: Reflections from an Accounting Ethics Initiative

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Abstract

This paper identifies the challenges associated with engaging staff in curriculum change, using the context of systematic inclusion of ethics in the accounting curriculum of a major Australian metropolitan university, and offers some suggestions as to how these challenges might be overcome. We characterize the inclusion of ethics in the accounting curriculum as ‘pluri-disciplinary’ following the typology of Davies and Devlin (2007) and draw on 22 interviews with accounting academics to examine curriculum change in a pluri-disciplinary context. We find that key staff concerns are the impact on broader accounting discourse, assignment of teaching responsibilities, curriculum content, and identification of who is ultimately responsible for the curriculum change. The responses indicate that staff would like to be equipped to confidently deliver ethics content and to have material relevant to a technically-focused student cohort. One means of achieving this might be to involve ethics experts in developing and delivering foundational material early in the curriculum and having accounting staff teach applications of this material in the latter stages. Our observations might also be of interest to those seeking to embed other ‘soft’ skills (such as communication, critical thinking and sustainability) within a technical curriculum.

Keywords: interdisciplinary, pluri-disciplinary, business ethics, curriculum