AUQA Good Practice Database

CSU Commendation 11 - Workplace Learning Standards
(Note: Following the CSU AUQA Review the term Fieldwork Education used during the Review was replaced by the term Workplace Learning. Since this term is more universally transferable and will be of greater relevance to AUQA Database readers this term has been used in this Database Entry.)

Consent Statement

1. Validating Body
AUQA

2. Reference Document
AUQA Audit of Charles Sturt University January 2010

3. Commendation Number
11

4. Organisation Name
Charles Sturt University (CSU)

5. Organisation Web site Address
http://www.csu.edu.au/

6. a) Good Practice Name
Workplace Learning Standards and Self-assessment Tool

b) Definition
Workplace learning, also known as work-integrated learning, practicums and professional practice, professional experience, internships, intra-mural and extra-mural placements, fieldwork and clinical placements, allows students to learn through direct implementation of their professional roles in real workplace settings. Workplaces may encompass on-campus and off-campus facilities. Commonly such learning involves supervision to provide safeguards and ensure duty of care towards clients and students. (CSU, 2010, Academic Senate)

7. Goal
Workplace learning is a vital aspect of professional education. Workplace learning prepares graduates to make valuable contributions to society and their workplaces. It enables students to develop the agency and confidence to cope with the reality of their work. The pursuit of high standards in workplace learning is thus a critical aspect of professional education. The good practices reported here focus on workplace learning standards and the development of a self-assessment tool to review and promote the achievement of these standards.

8. Context
CSU pursues excellence in professional education and has a sound reputation for the provision, support and continuous quality improvement of workplace learning. CSU’s professional courses encompass a wide range of recognised and emerging professions.
Each has different stakeholder groups, professional expectations and professional cultures. Standards (external and internal) and accreditation requirements generate course expectations. Each of these factors impacts on the language, roles of learners and teachers, learning contexts and curriculum interpretations of workplace learning. Drawing this diverse group together to produce a set of standards that encompasses good practices without these standards becoming so general or baseline that they fail to inspire or improve workplace learning practices provides considerable challenges.

9. Practice
Workplace learning provides opportunities for experiential learning and occurs within curricula which seek to prepare quality professional graduates for the demands and opportunities of practice. The pedagogical value of workplace learning lies in its capacity to enable students to:
• integrate classroom learning with occupational/workplace learning;
• understand their practice world;
• prepare for workplace realities and expectations;
• develop a professional or vocational identity; and
• understand the norms and expectations of their future practice community.

Internationally, higher education is facing demands for accountability. The pursuit of standards in workplace learning is part of this agenda. In Australia workplace learning faces a number of challenges, the combination of which are particular to this country: Australia is geographically large but has a small population; the size of the professional workforce is small but the rate of increase in professional education courses seeking workplace placement is growing rapidly placing great pressure on (often) understaffed workplaces to supervise/educate increasing numbers of university students; and the majority of the population and employment for graduates lies in narrow coastal regions but the scarcity of placements, supervisors and graduates is greatest in regional and remote areas.

The pursuit of educational standards in workplace learning at CSU is occurring in a broader context of curriculum renewal and the pursuit of excellence in professional education. Workplace learning is regarded as a key part of professional and practice-based education. A set of professional and practice-based education standards have been developed through exploration of international and national trends, a review of exemplary practices across CSU and through University-wide consultation.
The Professional and Practice-Based Education Standards comprise twenty two core dimensions across four categories:

Category 1 – Course Learning Outcomes
- professionalism and citizenship,
- professional judgement,
- communication and interactions,
- information literacy,
- professional competence and work readiness.

Category 2 – Teaching and Learning Activities
- Curriculum Design
- Curriculum review
- Risk Management of the Curriculum
- Practice-Based Education Teaching and Learning Activities
- Workplace Learning Activities

Category 3 – Course Infrastructure needed to realise the outcomes and teaching/learning activities
- Staffing
- Staff Support and Development
- Student Support Systems
- On-Campus Workplace Learning Environments
- Learning Resources
- Placements and Workplace Experiences
- Workplace Learning Management Systems

Category 4 – University Infrastructure
- Staff Support
- Student Support
- Learning Spaces
- Learning Resources
- Continuous Quality Improvement System/Strategies

A self-assessment tool was developed during 2008 to enable course teams to review and assess the level of performance of their courses around an initial set of workplace learning items. The survey comprised 95 items within 12 dimensions. The dimensions were – program design, fieldwork education management system, learning and teaching, student placement, students’ work, industry partnerships, quality and risk management, staff development, student support, continuous quality improvement, stakeholder satisfaction, resourcing. The instrument used a five point Likert scale ranging from very well satisfied to very dissatisfied. The self-assessment tool was an on-line survey designed as a means for self-appraisal, with the ability to identify areas of greatest risk or in need of the most improvement.
10. Evidence of Success
Based on the original standards and self-assessment tool the following initiatives have been implemented:

- Recognition of the value of expanding the standards to encompass practice-based education generally
- Revision of the self-assessment tool around these expanded standards (Categories 1-3 above)
- Development of a set of practice-based education guidelines to inform curriculum renewal at CSU
- Development of strategies to consistently collect data across CSU to inform internal benchmarking of course performance
- Establishment of a practice-based education strategic plan to inform the University’s strategy for the next planning cycle
- Establishment of a position attached to the Education For Practice Institute to pursue risk management around areas identified in the 2008 review of workplace learning.
- Implementation of Teaching Fellowships to review curricula and embed the standards in CSU curricula.

11. Resources Required
Development of the Standards has required considerable time by core staff in reviewing literature, existing standards/benchmarks/accreditation requirements and exemplary practices. University-wide discussion was also time intensive. A major benefit of this time commitment is the widespread engagement by CSU staff in discussions of the nature of practice-based education and the expectations (standards) of good workplace learning practices.

Ongoing staff development including teaching fellowships, workshops and information dissemination has been and will continue to be needed to provide the adoption, critique and continual development of the standards and implementation of practice-based education and workplace learning. Fellowships provide staff with mentoring and financial support (time release) to implement standards in their courses. Resources such as exemplars of good practice and an operational manual are being developed to assist users.

Four key groups have been involved in the development of the Standards and Self-Assessment Tool:

- The Workplace Learning Network (a network of staff involved in the management of workplace learning across CSU)
- The Education For Practice Institute
- The sub-deans responsible for workplace learning in the four faculties
- The Workplace Learning Task Force established by EFPI to continue initiatives around workplace learning following the 2008 self-review and the AUQA review at CSU in 2009.
Three key members of the CSU Team producing the Workplace Learning Standards and Review and Development Strategies
Left to Right:
Professor Joy Higgs, Director of The Education For Practice Institute, led the Theme 2 Self-Review and the development of these standards, Associate Professors Maree Simpson, Chair of the Workplace Learning Task Force and Associate Professor Wendy Bowles chair of the Workplace Learning Network.

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