Graduate Attributes Spotlight
Curriculum design

Discussion about the curriculum often emphasises the importance of subject content or what many people refer to as the syllabus. However, broader curriculum definitions that include content, structure, processes and outcomes of programmes and courses, enable academic staff and students to design curricula that consider a wider range of influences on learning. Research literature points to the value of starting curricular design processes by focusing on the aims of any programme or course in terms of intended learning outcomes (ILOs) and graduate attributes. In doing so, we ensure that the curriculum processes and structures relating to assessment, teaching approaches, learning experiences and evaluation all support students to achieve these aims and ILOs (Biggs & Tang, 2007).	**Overview**
Wiggins and McTighe (2005) warn of the 'twin sins' of traditional approaches to course design - 'activity oriented design' and 'coverage'. In activity oriented design, academic staff use lots of engaging activities that are often fun, but which tend to lead only accidentally, if at all, to insights or understanding. They term this being 'hands-on without being minds-on' (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005:16). 'Coverage' describes a second form of 'aimlessness', where staff take students page by page through text books or attempt to cover all of the important material in the allotted time. These approaches leave students asking questions such as 'what's the point?' and 'what does this relate to?' This is not to say that interaction in the classroom or covering large amounts of factual information are wrong, but rather it reminds us that clear aims and ILOs linked explicitly to desired graduate attributes should guide our course design including the teaching methods and approaches we use. Another key consideration for curriculum design, particularly in research-intensive universities, is the idea of creating strong links between research and teaching (Healey, 2005). These links might be, for example, through ensuring teaching is informed by current research, teaching students research methods appropriate to different disciplines, students undertaking research projects, or students working in partnership with staff on authentic research projects. Enhancing the range of possible links between teaching and research within the curriculum has the potential to effectively support many students to develop a range of graduate attributes particularly in relation to students becoming critical thinkers, becoming ethically aware and developing investigative approaches. All curriculum design should involve meaningful engagement with our stakeholders – colleagues, students and employers. Recently there have been growing calls for students to have a stronger voice in designing their own learning experiences (Bovill et al, 2011; Cook-Sather, 2010; McCulloch, 2009). Increased student involvement brings a more equal relationship and ongoing dialogue between the tutor and students, increased student responsibility for learning, and the potential for all stakeholders to learn through curriculum design processes. This is not always straightforward and you may feel uncomfortable with handing	**Approach**

over some decision-making to students. You may also be concerned about professional body requirements that constrain curriculum design. However, curriculum design does not have to either involve students or not: there is a continuum of possibility between gathering student feedback to inform curricula through to having students as active partners on curriculum planning committees and designing elements of the curriculum.

Where students have been included there is evidence of beneficial outcomes for their graduate attributes development such as growth in confidence, skills in collaborating with peers, better grades and a growth in meta cognitive awareness about the learning process (Bovill et al, 2011).
When designing programmes and courses:

1. Think carefully about who you involve in curriculum design processes to ensure that from the outset all relevant stakeholders can contribute to defining the aims and ILOs of courses and programmes. Use this process as an opportunity to identify the graduate attributes that students should develop during your course.

2. Try using an 'outcomes approach' to programme design. Define the graduate attributes and ILOs that students should be able to demonstrate by the end of a programme of study. Map out how students will make stepped progress towards these goals via key milestones. This will enable you to see beyond the content and to avoid 'over-stuffing' the curriculum to achieve comprehensive 'coverage'.

3. Ensure that course aims and ILOs fit within overarching programme aims, ILOs and graduate attribute goals. Once course aims and ILOs are set, consider how you will assess these outcomes. Develop teaching approaches that enable students to successfully meet the learning outcomes. By following this approach, disciplinary content is considered alongside other broader learning outcomes.

4. Identify difficult-to-understand disciplinary concepts and concentrate design time on how you will effectively teach these. Our graduate attributes include students becoming investigative, resourceful and capable of self-directed learning. Think about the tasks and exercises you might set students that will involve them having to find out some of your discipline's content knowledge for themselves.

5. As students progress, continue to make links between the knowledge and skills they are developing in their programme of study and the ILOs and graduate attributes that form their overarching goals.

For example, if you wish to enhance students' confidence and effective communication:

- Ensure learning outcomes include expectations relating to oral as well as written communication. For example, you might include marking criteria for presentations that reward well constructed arguments and well articulated and defended ideas, as well as the traditional recognition for accurate

coverage of subject content. • Encourage students to design an additional learning outcome for their research project, and defend within their project how they have achieved this outcome. • Consider the potential added value in terms of confidence and communication, of meaningful student participation in curriculum design discussions and decisions	
Biggs, J. and Tang, C. (2007) *Teaching for quality learning at university* (3rd edition). Maidenhead: Society for Research into Higher Education/Open University Press. Bovill, C. Cook-Sather, A. and Felten, P. (2011) Changing Participants in Pedagogical Planning: Students as Co-Creators of Teaching approaches, Course Design and Curricula. *International Journal for Academic Development* 16 (2) 133-145. Cook-Sather, A. (2010). Teaching and learning together: College faculty and undergraduates co-create a professional development model. *To Improve the Academy, 29,* 219–232. Healey, M. (2005) Linking research and teaching: exploring disciplinary spaces and the role of inquiry-based learning. In Barnett, R. (Ed) *Reshaping the university: new relationships between research, scholarship and teaching.* McGraw Hill / Open University Press. p67-78. McCulloch, A. (2009). The student as co-producer. *Studies in Higher Education, 34,* 2, 171–183. Wiggins, G. and McTighe, J. (2005) *Understanding by design.* (2nd ed.) Virginia: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.	**Resources**