What is the
Australian BA?

Defining and describing the nature and role of the Arts in contemporary Australia

AUSTRALIAN
LEARNING
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COUNCIL

DASSH
DEANS OF ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

SUMMARY REPORT 2

This summary report presents definitions and program models developed through the BA scoping project

About the Project

The BA scoping project commenced in March 2007. Materials and resources developed as a result of the project launched on 30 July, 2008 on the DASSH website http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp

Materials Developed

The summary reports of the scoping study are particularly intended for decision makers for the Bachelor of Arts programs: those responsible for coordinating and managing Arts programs. The summary reports can be read independently or as a set of information. The set consists of:

1   The Bachelor of Arts scoping project:
    Executive summary

2   What is the Australian BA?
    Defining and describing the nature and role of the Arts in contemporary Australia

3   Mapping the terrain:
    Trends and shared features in BA programs across Australia 2001–2008

4   Who is enrolled in the Australian BA?
    Student uptake of the Australian BA 2001–2006

5   Who is delivering the Australian BA?
    Trends in staff profiles in the BA 2001–2006

6   Future studies emerging from the BA scoping project

These summary reports are supported by resources developed as part of the project. These resources are available from the DASSH website and include:

•   Case studies

•   Data sets

•   Institutional program profiles

1. Reaching a definition of the BA

This project builds on the previous Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) funded project that produced the report "The Lettered Country" (Pascoe, McIntyre, Ainley, & Williamson, 2003). The Pascoe et al (2003) report offers a historical overview of Arts related programs from the beginnings of higher education in Australia to 2001. That report identified and explored the emergence of the niche or named degree programs that emerged from the Bachelor of Arts, such as the Bachelor of International Studies or the Bachelor of Arts (Japanese). In that report the authors note the resilience of the BA degree, which is one of the oldest degree programs in Australia. It could be argued that the BA program is the 'parent' program for many institutions, in that it is the program from which other programs emerged.

1.1 Problems with defining the BA

There is widespread ambiguity about the definition of the term 'Arts'. Identifying and establishing a shared understanding of this term and the definition of a 'Bachelor of Arts' was a primary challenge for this project. The nature of widely held misperceptions can be illustrated by this extract taken from a student interview held during the pilot phase of this project, in which the student states: *"I did a BA (International Studies) as part of a double but my studies had nothing to do with Arts because I can't draw. I did Modern History and Politics"*.

There even appear to be conflicting and ambiguous views on the meaning of Arts held by those who work within the discipline. The term 'arts' is used interchangeably to describe performing arts, creative arts and humanities and social sciences focused programs (Bridgstock, 2006). This kind of framing perpetuates perceptions that the term 'Arts' is used to describe a creative activity or an artistic endeavour, rather than a human focus traditionally associated with the Humanities and Social Science disciplines. This confusing misperception has prompted some institutions to undertake program name changes. As one project participant noted: *"There is a tendency to drop the style of Bachelor of Arts (profession) and simply have Bachelor of Profession. A major argument for this happening is that programs named with the BA get lost in tertiary entrance organisation brochures, because potential students don't know what this means"*.

When the project was originally conceived it looked to focus on programs which were:

- undergraduate single degrees;
- humanities or social sciences focused, rather than creative arts-focused;
- not accredited or dependent on a professional body for benchmarking;
- flexible in terms of choice.

As the project progressed, it became apparent that many programs that should be included in the scoping exercise are not called 'Bachelor of Arts' degrees; and some programs that are titled Bachelor of Arts, do not fit into the above definition. For example, some project participants (University of Sunshine Coast, RMIT and Flinders University) identified the Bachelor of International Studies as a key 'Arts' program. In contrast, for other institutions (such as The University of Sydney and Macquarie University), a Bachelor of International Studies is coded and reported to DEEWR as a 'business' program. Moreover, there are certain programs which seemingly have little to do with Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, but use the term in the program title (e.g. Bachelor of Arts in Organizational Learning). In this example the particular program is actually focused on education.

While the explicit purpose of this project was to 'scope the nature and roles of Arts degrees in contemporary society', a concise and widely shared definition of Arts degrees remains elusive. In the report that precedes this project (The Lettered Country, 2003), Pascoe and his project colleagues took as the project focus 'Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences' and defined the Arts degree as *"all those bachelor programs in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, variously called a BA, BSocSci, or BA (specific field)"* (Pascoe, McIntyre, Ainley, & Williamson, 2003, p. 7). That report referred to DEST data using the codes associated *"the definition of the BA is the field of study described by government statisticians as 'Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences', or, since 2001, 'Culture and Society'"* (Pascoe, McIntyre, Ainley, & Williamson, 2003, p. 10 Section 2).
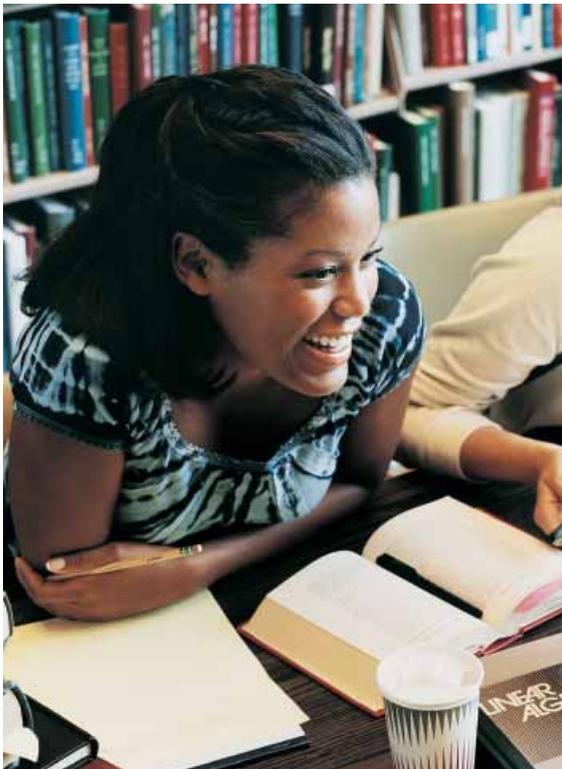
The change in coding from field of study code to field of education coding meant that Law, Economics, Psychology and Human Services, which are not normally viewed as Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, were now included. On the other hand, data on Media and Communication programs are no longer included as they are categorised under the 'Creative Arts' coding. However, many institutions include these kinds of programs as part of their Arts offerings. In sum, a duplication of the methodological approach used by Pascoe et al (2003) for "The Lettered Country" was not appropriate for this scoping project.

1.2   Definition used in this project

1.2.1 Defining the programs for investigation

Following extensive consultation with the Steering Committee, a decision was made to include programs within a restricted set of DEST codes from the Society and Culture field of education classification for this project. These codes are described in detail in the Help file accessible at: http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/statistics/selected_higher_education_statistics/documents/destpac_student_help_2006_zip.htm

The following codes were used as limiters: 0901 Political Science and Policy Studies; 0903 Studies in Human Society; elements within 0911 Justice and Law Enforcement; 0913 Librarianship, Information Management and Curatorial Studies; 0915 Language and Literature; 0917 Philosophy and Religious Studies; 0919 Economics and Econometrics and 0999 Other Society and Culture. The Steering Committee elected to restrict this study to programs that were non-accredited, i.e. those that may have to answer to external professional organisations. Consequently the following codes were excluded; 0921 Sport and Recreation; 0905 Human Welfare Studies and Services; 0907 Behavioural Science and 0909 Law. Also excluded was 1 subset code, 091105 Police Studies. Programs such as the Bachelor of Arts (Public Relations), Bachelor of Social Work and Bachelor of Arts (Psychology) were therefore excluded under this new definition.

Under further advice from the Steering Committee, the project team excluded programs classified in the DEST field of education classification code 100: Creative Arts, but included those under the 1007 code: Communication and Media Studies. These programs were included because, in the most part, they relied heavily on studies within Humanities and Social Sciences.

Guided by ongoing discussions with project stakeholders, the project team were able to allow further elimination or inclusion of programs for detailed examination. For the purposes of this project, a Bachelor of Arts program or programs within the field of Arts is defined by the parameters described in the preceding paragraph.

1.2.2 Defining a Bachelor of Arts program

A Bachelor of Arts program was defined by the project team as a program filling the following criteria:

- Categorised by the DEST (DEEWR) field of education as Society and Culture and delimited according to the project definition
- Generalist in purpose and intention
- Humanities and/or social sciences focused
- Not monitored by an accreditation board or professional association
- Flexible in terms of offering student choice
- Single undergraduate degree program
- Follow a traditional "liberal arts" ethos of aiming to impart general knowledge and develop intellectual capacity

1.2.3 Taught load vs. program load

Using the data from DEST/DEEWR in this manner did not allow for the inclusion of data related to 'taught load'. The opinion expressed during discussion at all of the round tables was that the Arts, Humanities and Social Science disciplines fed into a range of other degree programs as "taught load". They do this by providing electives for other programs seeking to broaden the educational experience of their students, or though service teaching. Service teaching was described at these meetings as instances where units traditionally taught in the BA program are made available to other programs, either as whole core units, or as electives within a unit structure. Unfortunately, the data capture method described above restricted the project team's ability to provide an accurate picture of the number of students who get some form of exposure to the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences through service teaching.

1.2.4 Double degrees

Programs comprising double degrees pose a different set of complexities for this project, and particularly for the aim of trend identification and reporting. The project team used two points of reference to identify double degrees:

1   Institutions were given a list of potential double degrees and asked whether they should be included; and
2   DEST data was sorted according to two field codes and where a relevant supplementary code existed, the program was considered to be a double degree.

This process revealed that some institutions appear to combine the award so that while the program name is Arts/ X, the award is then marketed on the tertiary entrance websites under the combination, rather than as a program within the field of Arts. Consequently, an Arts program is listed with Economics first and is marketed on tertiary entrance agencies as an Economics program. This marketing ploy increasingly renders programs within the field of Arts as invisible.

1.2.5 Higher Education curriculum

The term curriculum when used in the context of Higher Education curriculum in Australia is usually limited to a "content" focused use or as a basis for discussion in other educational issues such as "learner-centered curriculum", for example (Hicks, 2007). The term *curriculum* was usually used during the interviews and round table discussions to describe *curriculum structure* rather than pedagogical models of education.

The meaning of curriculum is further confounded by the perspective from which it is viewed. Students, lecturers, course-coordinators and institutions all have a differing perspective on curriculum. These differing perspectives raise the point of who is it that defines curriculum. The flexibility of choice available to students in a highly modularised Bachelor of Arts program means that the learning attained through engagement in the program is often unique to the student who has constructed it.

Interviewees frequently reported curriculum design implemented on a major level rather than a program level. The project team found that there is little discussion of the student experience of the program as a whole. This is consistent with observations of knowledge fields continuing to dominate higher education, not only as a source of academic identities, but as a means of structuring curricula (Ron Barnett, Parry, & Coate, 2001). Toohey (1999) also argues that when academics operate in a manner that is not programmatically focused, curriculum is dominated by their research and disciplinary interests. This phenomenon was found across all the programs examined: interviews with academic staff indicate that staff have a strong focus on the discipline in which they teach and project participants consistently talked of curriculum structure as operating on a unit or major level.

Project participants with teaching and management responsibilities frequently reported a lack of expertise or conveyed a sense of disquiet about program curriculum design, tending to focus the discussion on the content and structure. This reflects recent claims that curriculum is rarely a topic for professional discussion within Australian universities (Fraser & Bosanquet, 2006; Hicks, 2007). It is possible that an absence of 'whole-of-program' curriculum focus can have a detrimental effect on the quality and coherence of curriculum (Barnett & Coate, 2001; Short, 2002; Toohey, 1999).

The Imaginative Curriculum Project, a project funded by the UK Higher Education Academy (The Generic Centre, 2002) stipulated that learning experiences should include what is learnt (or the content); how and when it is to be learnt (the structure of the learning processes). It should also include how learning that has taken place can be demonstrated (the assessment). All of this is ideally located in the context of an underlying educational philosophy – an explicit statement about why what needs to be learned should be learned. The project team used the Imaginative Curriculum definition as a working definition of the project and sought to identify instances where the content, structure of the learning processes, assessment and educational philosophy were articulated.

2. Models of BA programs

Of the 390 programs examined across the 40 institutions, 33 institutions were found to have a Bachelor of Arts program that fit the definition of a Bachelor of Arts as described previously. These programs content and structure of the programs were reviewed. Details regarding assessment and educational philosophy were sought.

Little information regarding assessment and educational philosophy were identified or described on a program level, although details were relatively easy to find within unit structures.

In 2008, there were seven universities that did not offer a generalist Bachelor of Arts degree program. They did, however, retain the use of the words Bachelor of Arts as part of a "tagged" degree. Interestingly, five of the seven are institutions that emerged from the old "polytech" type of colleges. These institutions offer programs that are predominately Communications based rather than a generalist Humanities and Social Sciences program. All other institutions offer a program that is called a Bachelor of Arts and then usually offer a series of programs that are "tagged" in the form of Bachelor of Arts (XXX). Most institutions also offer a program that is a "named" degree – a program that is emerged from the Bachelor of Arts program and now stands in its own right. Examples include Bachelor of Journalism, Bachelor of International Studies, Bachelor of Archaeology and Bachelor of Communication. Consequently, the reliance on the concept of a single model to describe a Bachelor of Arts needed to be explored. There are other models that emerged from this study, in addition to the generalist degree.

The notion of different 'models' that have been in the media over the last year is arguably a media diversion to draw attention away the plethora of degrees under the label Bachelor of Arts, which encouraged to proliferate between 2001 and 2006. Using the coding as described above, and excluding honours programs that are reported differently across the sector, it is possible to map the fact that in 2001 there were 434 programs within the field of Arts on offer, 342 programs in 2005 and by the beginning of 2008, there were only 222 programs that fitted the identified criteria. In most cases, the reduction in courses coincides with media releases describing new models that arguably offer a rebadged format.

The models that have been described and attracted a large amount of media attention, particularly the QUT, Melbourne, Griffith and emerging Macquarie model, can be viewed as opportunities to re-badge and refocus a large number of programs into more specific programs.

Most reviews of programs within the field of Arts across the sector had the recommendation that the number of "tagged" or specific programs be reduced as they were unsustainable and attracted small numbers of students, even though they artificially increase the entry (TER/UIA) scores. For example, in the case of QUT, the diminution in Humanities was a shift in focus, providing programs in the 'New Humanities' in the form of 'Creative Industries' (Sorenson, 2007). Both Curtin and QUT are planning on implementing a revised generalist degree in the near future. It remains to be seen what format this will take and whether it will match the models described below.

Under the Melbourne University's 'New Generation' model, key program changes are primarily the implication of moving the entire institution towards a Bologna-like model of undergraduate and postgraduate for professional qualifications, at the expense of double degrees. Unlike the US structure of 4 years generalist undergraduate followed by a professional 2nd degree, the Melbourne model follows the Bologna model of 3 + 2 years. In effect, this means that students who had enrolled in double degrees will still be able to finish in a similar time frame, albeit in a different sequence. The sequencing of the degree is the other key change, particularly the introduction of a clearer curriculum structure through the introduction of majors. The real shift in the model is a movement towards making a clear statement to the community and end users of the program that the undergraduate degree is a generalist program that provides broad education, with professional programs coming later. This model appears to be mimicked in the proposed "Macquarie@50" model, which plans to eliminate 'tagged' programs to expose students to a liberal arts model with compulsory Humanities and Science-based units for all undergraduate programs.

2.1 Towards an Australian model for Bachelor of Arts programs

Ash (2006), argues that the Humboldt model on which the German and possibly US higher education systems are based is actually a myth, but concedes that the Humboldt model does describe the core features of both the American and the German models. He argues that the German model develops on the principle of the undergraduate degree providing the foundations for research training. This is based on the premise, traditionally ascribed to Humboldt, of the unity of teaching and research. In reality, the early American models were founded on the British model of character building – on preparing 'well-rounded men' (sic). He continues that *"Later, 'general education' was substituted for character formation as the ideal aim"* (pp. 249), which leads to the US perception that everyone is entitled to a liberal arts degree.

What then is the basic purpose of the undergraduate degree in Australia? It appears as though Melbourne and Macquarie are proposing to following the US model, while QUT and others are following a model that could be arguably based on the German technical academies of the early 1900s. In contrast, the University of Sydney and others are following a British model; an opinion confirmed at the Sydney round table meeting where the consensus was that the BA is not a standalone program – it is what is completed as the first degree. The first degree in this case is not necessarily intended to be followed by a professions based program, but is rather viewed as the first step along a life-long journey.

One of the questions which needs to be asked is the degree to which Government policies and predilections shape changes in the Australian BA, compared with those in other countries. Arts degrees tend to be underpinned by Government funding and external scrutiny and compliance appears to put particular pressures on Universities in ways which may not be so apparent in the US, Canada, the UK and Europe. It is pertinent to ask whether such pressures will see a convergence of Arts degrees driven by forces external to the Universities.

It is likely, moreover, that the development of a common understanding of the Australian model is important in the face of increasing global mobility in the modern age, particularly in terms of transferability of the programs across the world. Is a Bachelor's degree in Australia equal to a Bachelor degree in Germany, Canada, Britain or the US? The emerging trends from the analysis of the programs explored in this project suggest that there is not a single Australian model, but rather many. These models serve a range of purposes and are structured and marketed to suit those purposes. These models are further expanded in the following section.

2.2 Models used in Australian BA programs

2.2.1 The Generalist Model

The traditional generalist degree, the Bachelor of Arts, aims to equip students with the skills essential to a university education. These include critical thinking, problem solving, an understanding of the human condition and how society operates – an education in cultural awareness. Elements of these skills are seen to be central to all programs within the field of Arts and form a core feature of the models described below.

A true generalist degree is structured in a highly flexible manner. Areas of study are selected according to a student's individual interests. The model can create an effect of appearing disjointed and uncoordinated, as there is frequently little or no clear sense of progression. This is made increasingly more complex by the lack of engagement with program coordinators and advisors in enrolment processes that are increasingly relying on technology to structure course outlines. Project informants frequently expressed the opinion that students following this kind of program appeared to be testing various interests to determine possible potential vocations or were gaining credits into a preferred degree by mirroring a degree pattern through the flexible BA study plan structures. To some extent choice is also guided by timetable availability and work commitments.

2.2.2 The Socially Engaged Models

There is a trend towards the rhetoric of a BA graduate as a socially aware and socially active citizen; Macquarie's proposed volunteer scheme and Griffith's notion of social enterprise are good examples of this trend. These programs have community engagement built into their programs, frequently with community based work providing integrated learning opportunities. This model aims to develop an awareness of social responsibility, where students develop the skills required to facilitate community engagement. This is frequently promoted and seen as part of a university's 'mission'.

2.2.3 The Professional Models

Across the sector there is a clear suggestion that the programs within the field of Arts are being increasingly required to incorporate a professional aspect to their degree program. Both Victoria University and Swinburne will be moving to a professions based unit, requiring students to engage in professional learning, including workplace learning activities. There are also institutions moving towards providing core units in programs that concentrate on the professional or generic skills afforded through a program within the field of Arts; however, the CQU experience of this feature warns of the dangers of alienating the generic skills from the context of the discipline, as this has the effect of making the skills seemingly incomprehensible to students.

The professional model has a clear curriculum intention – to educate entry level professionals for a specific job market. The graduate is expected to be job ready with a set of graduate capabilities particular to a specific market and vocational skills to match a professional disposition. Curriculum features of this model include the development of practical skills underpinned by theoretical knowledge. There may be specific work integrated learning or internship opportunities with curriculum structure embedding theory into practical. These programs are often highly structured and highly prescriptive with little option for electives, with training in specific technical/ practical skills. As a result, there is often more of a cohort identity, arguably because of this highly structured nature. The chief criticism of this model from project informants is the fact that it specifically prepares for a particular vocation, and the learning may not be readily transferable to other contexts. It also requires students to know what it is that they want to study as there is little opportunity for testing and change.

2.2.4 The Apprenticeship Model

For some, a BA is seen to be an 'apprenticeship' into the academy. There is evidence that some students embark on this journey by following their undergraduate degree with Honours or similar into a focused study in their chosen discipline. Programs that fit this model frequently have units that rely heavily on research methodologies, having an upper level focused research project or are described as an 'advanced' program for exceptional students.

2.2.5 The Focused Model

There are also degree programs that are 'focused' programs within the field of Arts, which are disciplinary based programs such as Bachelor of Arts (English), Bachelor of Arts (Justice Studies) or multi-disciplinary such as Bachelor of Arts (European Studies), or Bachelor of Arts (Sustainable Development).

The focused model aims to provide a structured program in a particular field of study, creating a graduate with specialist knowledge or disciplinary understandings and skills in their specific field. It usually requires a highly structured sequence of study with mandatory core units, and breadth is frequently provided through electives. This model provides a cohort identity through the nature of the program. The program might include sequences of study that constitute a whole, for example Languages or International Studies, and may be multi-disciplinary. The point is that this model structures the outcomes; the connections are made through the progression of the program, rather than relying on students to make the connections.

3. Outcomes of the BA

3.1 Graduate attributes

Most programs within the field of Arts have espoused graduate attributes, qualities or capabilities associated with them. The key attributes/ skills specifically articulated as essential to programs within the field of Arts include, in order of frequency: critical thinking; communication (written and oral); independent thought; and social awareness. Interestingly, problem solving and teamwork are infrequently mentioned, neither are creativity or innovation.

At many of the roundtable meetings, it was noted that proving that the programs deliver appropriate graduate outcomes and that students have acquired them is a problem. For the most part, particularly in the generalist program, outcomes are serendipitous for students; however, there is a real danger of leaning too far towards specific outcomes that do not prepare students for the 'chameleon' like nature of the modern work force that requires constant adaptation to new environments, and development of new skills (Ron Barnett, 2004; Begley, 2007).

Of primary concern for most informants was 'not what you know, but how you came to know it'. This is not something that is specifically or easily articulated within many programs. The roundtables generated a large number of questions pertaining to graduate attributes that will need to be answered should there ever come a notion of an Australian BA. Foremost:

- What are the core graduate attributes for the BA?
- How do they feature as part of the espoused value of the program?
- How are the programs assessed to ensure they do what they claim to do?
- If critical thinking is one of the chief graduate attributes identified by institutions as core to the BA, how is this implemented (Van den Akker, 2003)? How can it be taught?

3.2 Employability

In a recent study conducted in Britain, researchers explored early career development and employment outcomes according to age at graduation, (Kate Purcell, Wilton, & Elias, 2007). They found a clear correlation with a slower rate of growth in earnings in graduates who had studied Arts, Education, and Social Science degrees. Their finding is supported by a similar study conducted in British Columbia, *"Our main conclusion is that graduates from applied education programs experience a more rapid integration into the labour market as compared to graduates from liberal arts education programs. Although earning differences by program type and age either decrease or even disappear over time, earning differences by gender are enhanced 5 years after graduation. Also, we conclude that graduates from applied education programs establish and accomplish more focused educational and career goals, while graduates from liberal education programs establish broader educational and career goals"*, (Adamuti-Trache, Hawkey, Schuetze, & Glickman, 2006).

One of the key issues raised by the informants during this project is the delay in BA graduates finding their niche – their ideal position. The perception is that the current data on employability is collected by the Graduate Destinations Survey (GDS) too soon after graduation. There are a number of institutional projects that investigate this feature at University of Wollongong, Victoria University and UniSA. There have been a number of studies that have provided communication with employers and stakeholders, but few that focus on graduates and their future prospects when they have achieved their learning.

4. Observations emerging from the analysis

4.1 Limitations of existing data sources for accurate comparison

DEST does not gather information at a program level in a manner that easily facilitates comparison across programs across institutions. This is because institutions have individual reporting methods using different data entry systems. DEEWR/DEST reports findings at a broad level of each program (Bachelor, honours, doctorate) and on field of education/study (Society and Culture, Creative Arts). Consequently, it is very difficult to compare discrete programs, and the experiences within those discrete programs, as they may be at odds with what is reported nationally. Other national data collection agencies such as the Graduate Destinations Survey (GDS) and the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) replicate this broad field of education, making it difficult to determine information at a program level.

4.2 Flexibility of the program

The flexible nature of the program structure and the fact that it does not need to answer to any particular professional body means that the programs can change relatively rapidly. This has both advantages and disadvantages as it makes a concrete approach to defending/ justifying a liberal arts approach difficult if it is constantly changing. A potential for a national curriculum or a benchmarking framework was raised at more than one meeting, along with concerns about prescription and curbing the diversity of the programs across the sector.

4.3 Service teaching

There appears to be a general trend toward discipline experts in Social Sciences and Humanities to provide service teaching into other programs. Several interviewees expressed that service teaching into other programs often resulted in the attraction of students into the BA programs. It was specifically mentioned by some institutions where a large amount of service teaching into other programs happens, including University of Ballarat, Central Queensland University, Charles Sturt University and University of Queensland. Interestingly, University of Wollongong no longer provides any service teaching into other programs, citing funding complexities as the reason for withdrawal. While there was a lack of clarity about how service teaching could be used for funding advantage, it was noted that some institutions engage in service teaching in order to add to a funding source. There was also concern that institutional student services are increasingly picking up skills based programs that would otherwise have gone to programs within the field of Arts. Some interesting issues around curriculum may arise from these relationships.

4.4 Value of the BA program

When QUT decided to close Humanities on one of its campuses, the reasons cited were *"declining first preferences and cut-off scores, high attrition rates and less than optimum employment rates"*. These features are hardly unique to QUT. A number of people in managerial positions at other institutions expressed the fact that they are constantly drawn on by their central administration to defend the BA for precisely the same reasons. Each time, they are compelled to write position papers on what the benefit of maintaining a BA program is to the institution, and to society at large. Consequently, a constant refrain through the life of this project has been the appeal for some support in developing a clearly articulated value statement describing the value of the BA program to society, to the economy and to the individual. A commonly expressed argument has been that if the value of the BA is not about the immediacy of employment, then what is the value of the Australian BA? Commonly expressed statements included:

- What does the BA really teach?
- What does the student really value?
- What does society really value?
- What is the value of the BA?
- When does an appreciation of the value of a BA emerge in the BA graduate, if at all?

The core issue with projects investigating the BA is that they are highly subjective in terms of methodology. A possible methodological approach might be to follow the value-added approach currently in use in the US. Projects need to focus on what an educated sceptic would view as valuable. They need to have objective evidence that can be used to support or defend the BA in terms of value to society, economics and to the academic community.

The current quality assurance processes, of which the GDS is part, is the standard against which universities and programs are measured. The GDS and the related Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) rate generic skills and employability within 6 months of graduation. Institutional research indicates that this is too soon for graduates of Arts degrees to provide a favourable outcome, although they might catch up at a later stage. These instruments rate the generic skills and employability as paramount, and the results are disseminated across secondary schools nationwide.

It is, therefore, hardly surprising that students and parents measure the value of the degree in terms of employment. Value is associated with employability. There is no question or measurement of intellectual capability, of acquisition of human capital, or of being more knowledgeable. The quality assurance processes of the Australian higher education system appear to be set up to measure vocational worth, not social capital gains.

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