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Its overall focus is to promote excellence in legal academic teaching and research with particular emphasis on supporting early career academics, throughout Australasia, in the areas of:

- (a) Legal research and scholarship;
- (b) Curriculum refinements and pedagogical improvements in view of national and international developments, including law reform;
- (c) Government policies and practices that relate to legal education and research;
- (d) Professional development opportunities for legal academics;
- (e) Professional legal education and practices programs.

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**DEVELOPING COURSE OUTCOMES AND AN INTEGRATED CURRICULUM
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA LAW SCHOOL**

DR NORMANN WITZLEB* AND NATALIE SKEAD**

In 2006, the Law School at the University of Western Australia embarked on a Curriculum Review of its LLB degree. Central elements of the review were the identification of graduate outcomes and the mapping and integration of the outcomes appropriately and progressively across the degree. This paper shares the process adopted in undertaking this aspect of the review and describes the results achieved. A bottom-up approach was adopted starting with the development, refinement and statement of student learning outcomes at the level of individual units and progressed to the identification of student learning outcomes at the various year levels. From this data, the school endeavoured to identify those outcomes that required more and/or less focus through the degree and in so doing ensure that the integration of outcomes in the degree is progressive and comprehensive. The results of this exercise informed the formulation of the Course Student Learning Outcomes Statement and Graduate Attributes Statement and will further assist in other aspects of the Curriculum Review, for example, the introduction of new core units and the alignment of assessments with outcomes at unit and year level.

I INTRODUCTION: OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION AT UWA

The University of Western Australia ('UWA') is committed to a student-centred, outcomes-based approach to learning¹ that shifts the focus from teaching to learning;

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¹ University of Western Australia Operational Priorities Plan for 2005 to 2008.

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from what the teacher does to what the student does. The UWA Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning ('CATL') adopted the description of Outcomes-Based Education ('OBE') for this approach. The UWA concept considers that a student learning outcomes approach '*emphasizes the student perspective by:*

- *Clear and explicit identification of what a learner is expected to know, understand or be able to do as a result of a learning process (outcomes).*
- *Assessment that transparently and defensibly aligns with the outcomes.*
- *Teaching and learning activities that elicit the specified outcomes.*
- *Assessment tasks that are detailed and marked consistently using explicit criteria.'*²

A trend likely to ensure that defining and assessing 'outcomes' of tertiary education will remain a concern to educators, and is bound to become of increasing importance, is the ever-increasing government and community expectations of accountability and quality assurance in the higher education sector.³ UWA sought to endorse and implement a student learning outcomes approach to education throughout the University⁴ by establishing an OBE Coordinating Group (now the Student Learning Outcomes Coordinating Group). The group's brief was '*to coordinate university-wide the effective introduction of an outcomes-based approach to teaching, learning and assessment.*'⁵ Following UWA's philosophy and self-conception of being a devolved and diverse institution, the group's activities were based on the understanding that, '*in relation to an outcomes approach in specific fields of study, the development and implementation of such approaches remains, chiefly, the responsibility of the faculties and schools.*'⁶ Faculties and schools received University support in implementing a student learning

² UWA CATL, 'Student Learning Outcomes at The University of Western Australia OBE at UWA' <http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/_data/page/77891/SLO_final.pdf> at 6 February 2008.

³ Hamish Coates, 'Developing Generalisable Measures of Knowledge and Skill Outcomes in Higher Education', in: *Proceedings of AUQF 2007: Evolution and Renewal in Quality Assurance* Hobart, Australia, 11–13 July 2007, (AUQA Occasional Publications Number 11), p 43, <http://www.auqa.edu.au/files/publications/auqf2007_proceedings_final_website_text.pdf> at 6 February 2008.

⁴ Resolution of the UWA Academic Council (R29/01, 4 April 2001).

⁵ Resolution of the UWA Teaching and Learning Committee (R9/02, 2 May 2002).

⁶ UWA Teaching and Learning Development Fund - OBE Scheme 2002, Ref F2600 and minutes of the UWA Teaching and Learning Committee (5.4, 6 June 2002).

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outcomes approach in their curricula. Part of this support was provided in the form of annual grant rounds between 2002 and 2004 offered to faculties and other sections of the university.⁷ Funding was provided, with different priorities from year to year, to projects designed to disseminate and develop an outcomes based pedagogy within the specific context of each discipline.

Within the Law School, the process of further embedding skills and articulating outcomes in the LLB degree commenced at unit or subject level with a series of OBE workshops attended by academic staff and facilitated by education experts from the UWA Faculty of Education and the Business School in February and June 2006. The workshops provided a collaborative environment in which Unit Coordinators and teachers worked together in constructing unit outcome statements and developing assessment and feedback mechanisms aligned to stated outcomes. The workshops were successful in implementing a student learning approach at unit level. An audit of undergraduate units carried out by members of the Law School's Teaching and Learning Committee in August 2006 revealed that over 80% of undergraduate unit outlines stated expected outcomes and in almost 70% of undergraduate units there had been a review of assessment mechanisms to reflect the stated outcomes.

II LAW SCHOOL CURRICULUM REVIEW

Towards the end of 2005 the UWA Law School embarked upon a Curriculum Review of the LLB degree. To allow for the involvement of a large cross-section of academic staff, the Law School's Academic Committee and the Teaching and Learning Committee were jointly tasked with the Review, guided by the Chair of the Academic Committee, Peter Creighton. Both Committees had frequently cooperated in the past as their functions in advising the Faculty on the undergraduate curriculum and in considering issues relating to Teaching and Learning, respectively, were closely linked. For the Review, this

⁷ For details of the grant rounds, <http://www.teachingandlearning.uwa.edu.au/tl4/for_uwa_staff/grants_and_funding/outcomesbased_education_scheme> at 6 February 2008.

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cooperation was formalised so that the Committee operated as a Joint Committee. In 2007, the Faculty decided to fully amalgamate the two committees to form the Education Committee. This new Committee is continuing the work started by the Joint Committee in 2005.

The Curriculum Review had to take account of the eleven 'areas of knowledge' that the state admitting authorities in Australia require students to have studied in order to satisfy the academic requirements for admission. These so called 'Priestley 11'⁸ continue to act as the primary guide for law school curricula, but it has long been recognised that students benefit substantially from embedding also a wide range of skills teaching and assessment across the curriculum.⁹ The advantages of embedding the skills development include:

1. An appreciation that skills preparation is as important for graduates' careers as knowledge of doctrine.
2. A positive impact on student motivation through greater diversity of teaching methods.
3. Improved knowledge and understanding of legal doctrine through application in a variety of ways.

The Australian Law Reform Commission's *Managing Justice* Report in 2000 (ALRC 2000) identified deficiencies in this area and recommended that Australian legal

⁸ Consultative Committee of State and Territorial Law Admitting Authorities of Australia, chaired by Hon Justice LJ Priestley, (now Law Admissions Consultative Committee), *Uniform Admission Requirements, Discussion Paper and Recommendations* (1992).

⁹ Debra Bath, Calvin Smith, Sarah Stein and Richard Swann, 'Beyond mapping and embedding graduate attributes: bringing together quality assurance and action learning to create a validated and living curriculum', (2004) 23 *Higher Education Research and Development* 313, 314; Rick Cummings, 'How should we assess and report student generic attributes?', Paper presented at the Teaching and Learning Forum 1998, Perth, <<http://lsn.curtin.edu.au/tlf/tlf1998/cummings.html>> at 6 February 2008.

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education *'should involve the development of high level professional skills and a deep appreciation of ethical standards and professional responsibility'*.¹⁰

Mindful of the importance of skills development, early in 2006 the Joint Committee identified three broad areas to be considered in the Curriculum Review:

1. Course Outcomes
2. Review of Content
3. Semesterisation and Progression of Units within Degree

At a staff retreat held in May 2006, Law School staff unanimously supported the proposal that the Curriculum Review not only address issues relevant to legal content and course structure but that particular emphasis also be given to the identification and coordinated integration of academic, legal, and generic skills into the course structure. The embedding of skills and outcomes across the LLB curriculum was identified as a crucial aspect of that review. The Curriculum Review was thereby a fillip in the formulation and incorporation of student learning outcomes at unit, year and course level in the Law School.

Although all three broad areas identified by the Joint Committee were regarded, appropriately, as discrete areas of focus, the coherent mapping of student learning outcomes across the course and the development of student learning outcome statements (or, shorter, outcome statements) was always recognised as an important step in reviewing unit content, progression and course structure. Indeed, the work done in relation to unit, year and course outcomes has informed other aspects of the Curriculum Review including, in particular, semesterisation of units, the degree structure and new core units. While all three areas are crucial to the Curriculum Review, the focus of this paper is on the Course Outcomes aspect of the Review. This aspect of the Review was

¹⁰ Australian Law Reform Commission, *Managing Justice*, Report No. 89 (2000), Recommendation 2. See also ALRC, *Rethinking Legal Education and Training (1997)*, IP 21.

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conducted as the first stage of the Review and was completed in July 2007. The remaining two stages of the Review commenced on completion of the Course Outcomes project and are still continuing.

III APPROACH TO COURSE OUTCOMES AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

The Joint Committee identified two primary concerns in developing a revised LLB curriculum reflecting UWA's emphasis on student learning outcomes: integration and progression of skills and outcomes. With these concerns in mind, the embedding of skills and outcomes in the LLB degree necessitated undertaking a number of activities:

1. identifying appropriate graduate skills and outcomes;
2. documenting the skills and outcomes in a course outcome statement; and
3. developing and documenting a progressive skills and outcomes map that placed skills teaching and outcomes appropriately within the degree. It was envisaged that this map focus not only on graduate outcomes but also on individual unit outcomes and year level outcomes thereby ensuring both horizontal spread and vertical progression of skills and outcomes throughout the degree.

To begin with, the Joint Committee was faced with the strategy decision of whether this work should be undertaken top-down or bottom-up. A top-down (or course) approach would commence with the formulation of a graduate outcome statement clearly and explicitly identifying the outcomes and skills expected of UWA Law graduates. Those outcomes and skills would then underlie the construction of the curriculum, and inform the appropriate allocation of outcomes specific to each year of study and ultimately to each individual unit. Other Australian Law Schools seem to have opted for a top-down approach to embedding graduate attributes characterised by starting from a formulation of desirable attitudes and skills and then seeking to embed them into the curriculum.¹¹ By

¹¹ See eg. Sharon Christensen and Natalie Cuffe, 'Embedding Graduate Attributes in Law – Why, How, And Is It Working', <http://lifelonglearning.cqu.edu.au/2002/papers/Christensen_Cuffe.pdf> at 6 February 2008, Dennis Gibson, 'A Framework for Developing and Assessing Generic Capabilities in

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contrast, a bottom-up approach would commence with the statement of existing unit outcomes and assessment structures for each unit. On that basis, progressive year level learning outcomes and ultimately course and graduate outcomes would be formulated.

While the Joint Committee could see the attraction of starting with the formulation of a 'most desirable' curriculum, it chose to adopt a bottom-up approach. In doing so, the Committee could draw on the work already undertaken under the OBE process as a result of which unit outcomes and assessment mechanism statements had just been developed for all core and most option units. The decision was made with the understanding that neither a unit nor a course-based approach were likely to be purely linear processes. A top-down approach is unlikely to begin with a truly clean slate but will, at least to some extent, be influenced by existing practice and, probably and appropriately, an examination of the outcome statements of other comparable Law Schools. Furthermore, such an approach would be likely to entail wide scale and open-ended discussion, ideally include consultation with members of the legal profession and admitting authorities, and need to be negotiated and settled among all academic staff interested in the design of the degree.¹² Conversely, a course outcome statement developed through a bottom up approach is more likely to reflect the particular preferences and strengths of the academic staff involved in teaching the existing course. However, it would have to allow for adjustments of the curriculum where gaps or inconsistencies in the current practice were identified.

QUT Law Graduates' (2003) *B-Hert News*, Issue 16 (April 2003), p 4, both on the experience at Queensland University of Technology. For university driven processes on promoting faculty-specific attributes, see e.g. Margaret Gardner & Deborah Martin, 'Graduate Attributes at the University of Queensland' (2003) *B-Hert News*, Issue 16 (April 2003), p 2; University of South Australia, The Teaching and Learning Framework 2007, <<http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au/Resources/pd-ot/UniSA%20Teaching%20and%20Learning%20Framework/TL%20Framework%202007%20Final%20Approved.doc>> at 6 February 2008; The Griffith Graduate Project, *Final Report (Stage 6)* <http://www.griffith.edu.au/centre/gihe/griffith_graduate/GG6_report.pdf> at 6 February 2008; University of Sydney, <<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/GraduateAttributes/timeline.htm>> at 6 February 2008.

¹² For an overview of current Australian approaches to developing and embedding generic skills into tertiary curricula, see Ashley Goldworthy, 'Developing Generic Skills: Examples of Best Practice' (2003) *B-Hert News*, Issue 16 (April 2003), p 1.

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At the May 2006 Law School Staff Retreat, Faculty endorsed to develop the course outcome statement through a bottom-up approach. In doing so, the Joint Committee could not only fully utilise the significant work that had already been done on developing and integrating outcomes at unit level in many core and option Law units under the various UWA OBE grant schemes. This approach also helped avoid the further step of having to subsequently compromise desirable outcomes with the realities of budget, workload and expertise after the formulation of 'blue sky' course outcomes. While the unit outcomes would form the basis of year level outcomes and these be condensed into course outcomes, the course outcomes statement under this approach would be likely to go beyond a pure re-statement of existing practice. It was envisaged that an audit of the unit outcomes statements across all units in the degree would inform and aid the identification of areas of weakness in skills development. It was further understood that the specific content of some units may offer particularly rich opportunities to facilitate and embed some graduate outcomes, in which case these units could be developed in accordance with identified graduate outcomes.

IV PROCESS: LEVEL MEETINGS

As indicated, the systematic articulation of student learning outcomes at unit level had made significant progress under the various UWA OBE grant schemes. The Curriculum Review progressed in semester 1, 2007 to the identification, integration and development of student learning outcomes at the various year levels. This part of the process involved identifying broadly the academic, legal and generic skills and outcomes that might be expected of a law graduate and then considering the extent to which those skills and outcomes are currently facilitated and assessed at each year level of the LLB degree and the changes required to current practices to ensure a more coordinated, comprehensive and progressive outcomes approach both at intra- and inter-year level.

As described above, the project adopted a bottom-up approach to the identification of degree outcomes. Based on the outcome statements of each unit, all Unit Coordinators at

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a particular year level were invited to contribute to the formulation of outcome statements for that particular year level. Several year level meetings were held at which Unit Coordinators and teachers of units taken in a particular year of study met to discuss student outcomes, unit content and assessment. The coordinators of the year level meetings developed a table which identified the following categories of learning outcomes:

- A. Legal Knowledge in Subject Area
- B. Broad Framework of Law
- C. Understanding Contextual Issues
- D. Comparative/ International Perspectives
- E. Analysis / Critical Thinking
- F. Legal Research
- G. Legal Problem Solving
- H. Legal Writing
- I. Oral Communication Skills
- J. Personal and Relational Skills

In preparation for the year level meetings, Unit Coordinators were asked to provide information on whether, how and at what level their unit taught and assessed outcomes in these categories. Discussion at year level meetings focused on addressing areas of weakness in skills development, identifying skills attracting too great an emphasis, ensuring progression in skills development, coordinating the timing and structure of assessment methods and incorporating skills development into unit content, teaching methods and assessment mechanisms. The year level meetings were held consecutively so that Unit Coordinators of Year Level 2 could take into account the discussions, decisions and draft Outcomes Statement of Year Level 1, and Unit Coordinators of the combined Year Level 3 and 4 could based their discussions on the discussions, decisions and draft Outcomes Statements of Year Levels 1 and 2. The Unit Coordinators of each

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year level met twice to allow for a refinement of the draft Outcomes Statements in light of the discussions at other levels.

V RESULTS SO FAR

A Unit Outcomes and Year Level Outcomes Statements

The work done in the year level meetings resulted in the formulation of statements of Student Learning Outcomes detailing the extent to which and the methods by which individual units within each of the four year levels addressed the previously identified skills and outcomes. These statements indicated further, whether an introductory, intermediate or advanced level of skills development was expected at that year level and how the attainment of these outcomes was to be assessed.

Unit Coordinators participating in this series of meetings regarded the discussions as beneficial beyond their immediate aim of producing an Outcomes Statement for each Year Level of the LLB degree.¹³ For example, it became apparent that, despite the series of workshops to facilitate the implementation of OBE in the Law School, no uniform approach had been taken to the identification and expression of unit outcomes. The unit outline (or the handbook entry) for some units contained only a small number of outcomes. Other Unit Coordinators stated the expected outcomes in substantial detail. In a number of cases, certain outcomes were clearly facilitated in a unit even though the documentary material did not specify such outcomes. Apart from collating existing information, the year level meetings therefore also provided the opportunity to make outcomes statements in the core units more complete and to achieve more consistency across units. As a result, on examining the unit outcome statements students in a particular year of study should be in a position to better understand what they are expected to achieve in a particular unit in terms of knowledge of subject-matter, skills and attitudes and how these outcomes relate to

¹³ Prior to these meetings, the Law School had not provided for any formal process of discussion and decision-making by the teachers of a particular level. Instead, issues pertaining to a particular stage of the degree were dealt with informally or through ad hoc meetings of the Unit Coordinators concerned.

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other units the student is taking. At Year Level Two, for example, on reading the Unit Outcome and Assessment Statements for Equity and Property, second year law students will appreciate that while in first semester Equity focuses on the development of skills in the critical reading and analysis of case law, in second semester in Property 2 the focus shifts to the critical analysis and interpretation of legislation. In both instances, the development of the critical skill is facilitated by the teaching programme with case analysis exercises incorporated into the tutorial programme in Equity and statutory interpretation embedded into small group teaching in Property 2. The relevant skills are then assessed by way of an unseen and closed book case analysis exercise in Equity and a problem solving assignment based on a statute not formally covered in class in Property 2.

B Course Outcomes Statement

The OBE team (an adjunct of the Education Committee) was able to extract from the various Year Level Outcomes Statements a draft statement of learning outcomes for the whole LLB degree programme. This draft table of course outcomes collating the outcomes in the core units of each year level was supplemented by a further column specifying the contribution that the option units make to the overall course outcomes. The fact that option units will, by definition, not be taken by all students made generalisations about the outcomes of the option programme as a whole somewhat difficult. Nonetheless, it could be stated with some confidence that option units had particular significance in further developing and deepening some of the skills introduced in core units including, in particular, an awareness of the intersection of law with related disciplines and the critical engagement with contemporary and international issues affecting law. The smaller class sizes in most option units also make it likely that communication skills, research and analytical skills will be further enhanced.

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The resulting Course Outcomes Statement details the progression of the acquisition, development and enhancement of each of the identified outcomes from year to year across the entire course. It reflects the outcomes and skills our Law graduates can expect to and should achieve on completion of their LLB degree. An advantage of adopting a 'bottom up' approach to the formulation of course outcomes has been that the course outcomes accurately reflect the skills and outcomes currently embedded in the LLB degree so that the achievement of these outcomes can, without reservation, be expected of our Law School graduates. In addition, the data collected during the year level meetings and the discussion generated at those meetings, allowed the Joint Committee to identify those skills and outcomes requiring more and/or less focus through the degree and to take steps to ensure that the development of knowledge and skills throughout the degree is progressive and comprehensive. It is further anticipated that the Course Student Learning Outcomes Statement will prove valuable in tackling other aspects of the Curriculum Review, including, for example, the introduction of new core units and unit content.

C Graduate Attributes

The Education Committee relied on the mapping exercise described above to construct, through its OBE team, a Graduate Attributes Statement. Prior to this process, UWA Law School had not formulated any faculty-specific graduate attributes or outcomes.¹⁴ At University level, the Senate has adopted a set of 11 'Educational Principles' which form part of UWA's Strategic Plan.¹⁵ The Law

¹⁴ Other Australian Law Schools with published Graduate Attribute Statements include the University of Adelaide <<http://www.law.adelaide.edu.au/degrees/attributes.html>> at 6 February 2008, the University of Sydney <<http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/GraduateAttributes/facultyGA.cfm?faculty=Law>> at 6 February 2008. The Melbourne LLB Curriculum states 'generic skills', see <<http://undergraduate.law.unimelb.edu.au/go/courses/the-melbourne-llb-curriculum/index.cfm>> at 6 February 2008.

¹⁵ University of Western Australia, Strategic Plan, Part 4 (Updated April 2007), <http://www.registrar.uwa.edu.au/_data/page/65557/Strat-Plan-2007.doc> at 6 February 2008: "Students at The University of Western Australia are encouraged and facilitated to develop the ability and desire:

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School's new Graduate Attributes Statement is formulated against the background of these Principles but did not originate from them. Instead, its formulation has been principally informed by the Course Student Learning Outcomes Statement which distilled the Year Level Student Learning Outcomes Statements and, ultimately, the Unit Learning Outcome Statements into a single document.

The Graduate Attributes Statement is thus the result of condensing the actual outcomes of law teaching in each unit, each year and ultimately throughout the course making this statement a more authentic reflection of the student's actual learning experience and achieved outcomes than attribute or outcome statements originating from a wish list of desirable outcomes. The Graduate Attributes Statement provides an accurate account of the skills and attributes a graduate of the Law School can expect (and be expected) to have gained during his or her studies.

The Graduate Attributes Statement was then presented to academic members of staff at a Faculty meeting for further discussion and endorsement. It will now be formally launched in the Law School and then communicated through a variety of means to our present and future students, the University, the legal and wider community.

The Law School Graduate Attributes Statement provides:

-
- *to master the subject matter, concepts and techniques of their chosen discipline(s) at internationally-recognised levels and standards;*
 - *to acquire the skills required to learn, and to continue through life to learn, from a variety of sources and experiences;*
 - *to adapt acquired knowledge to new situations;*
 - *to communicate in English clearly, concisely and logically;*
 - *to acquire the skills needed to embrace rapidly-changing technologies in a global environment;*
 - *to think and reason logically and creatively;*
 - *to undertake problem identification, analysis and solution;*
 - *to question accepted wisdom and be open to new ideas and possibilities;*
 - *to acquire mature judgement and responsibility in ethical, moral, social, and practical, as well as academic matters;*
 - *to work independently and in a team;*
 - *to acquire cross-cultural and other competencies to take a citizenship and leadership role in the local, national or international community."*

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Graduate Attributes

During their undergraduate studies UWA Law graduates are expected to develop and demonstrate the following essential attributes and skills:

- *an understanding of fundamental legal concepts and principles and an ability to make connections, appreciate the relationship between and integrate knowledge across the various areas of law (provide link to page 3 [of the Course Student Learning Outcome Statement]);*
- *an appreciation of the broad framework of law and generic legal knowledge, applicable beyond a particular area (provide link to page 4);*
- *an awareness of the historical, ethical, political, socio-economic and philosophical dimensions and significance of law and the rule of law (provide link to page 5);*
- *the ability to make and assess recommendations for law reform (provide link to page 5);*
- *the acquisition of comparative law perspectives including an appreciation and understanding of the significance of different principles and rules relevant to common issues in interstate, state and federal and foreign jurisdictions and the potential impact of international developments on domestic law (provide link to page 6);*
- *the ability to critically interpret, analyse and comment on legal issues and principles, primary and secondary resources and contextual debates about the law (provide link to page 7);*
- *engagement in comprehensive and independent legal research (provide link to page 8);*
- *the ability to draw on and apply knowledge across a range of areas in solving substantive and procedural legal problems and providing relevant advice (provide link to page 9);*
- *clear, concise and effective writing skills using correct and plain English in communicating with others and in drafting court and other legal documents (provide link to page 10);*
- *competent, confident and respectful oral communication and advocacy skills (provide link to page 11);*
- *effective personal skills including critical reflection on performance, skills, learning and personal ethics and managing time and workload (provide link to page 12); and*
- *competent relational skills in interacting with others, working in teams, interviewing clients, taking instructions and negotiation (provide link to page 12).*

These graduate attributes are integrated progressively into the undergraduate curriculum at year level (provide link to the summary of Year Level Student

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Learning Outcomes Statement) and at unit level (provide link to Year Level Student Learning Outcomes spreadsheet) are consistent with and reflect the Educational Principles of UWA (provide link to UWA Educational Principles on CATL web site).

Like graduate attributes statements elsewhere, the UWA Law School statement aims 'to articulate the nature of the education the university offers to its students and through this an aspect of the institution's contribution to society'.¹⁶ However, the UWA Law School Graduate Attributes Statement aims to go further. On the UWA Law School website, each of the stated attributes will be directly linked to the relevant section of the Course Student Learning Outcomes Statement. In this way, prospective students, parents, potential employers and other interested parties can inform themselves as to how this particular outcome will be addressed within the curriculum. Providing hyperlinks to the Year Level Student Learning Outcomes Statements and Unit Outcome Statements will allow one to drill even deeper and to obtain information on how each year level and, ultimately, how individual units contribute to a particular outcome. It is hoped that the close linkage of the UWA Law School Graduate Attributes Statement with course outcomes, year outcomes and unit outcomes will signal to students, potential employers and the community as a whole that the achievement of these outcomes permeates the whole degree and is not merely a statement of aspiration.

Contrasting the UWA Law School Graduate Attributes with the UWA Educational Principles shows that the Attributes do more than re-cast the generic skills referred to in the Educational Principles for the discipline of law. Despite the independent genesis of the Graduate Attributes, the University's Educational Principles nonetheless find reflection in the Attributes which suggests that the Law School's educational practice and vision is in line and consistent with the approach of UWA as a whole.

¹⁶ Simon C. Barrie, 'A Research-Based Approach to Generic Graduate Attributes Policy' (2004) 23 *Higher Education Research & Development* 261, 262.

D Adopting a More Structured Approach to Skills Teaching

The aim of the outcomes project was two-fold; the implementation and documentation of an outcomes based approach to teaching and learning at Unit, Year and Course level in the Law School, and also providing information for the ongoing Curriculum Review. In relation to skills teaching, the mapping exercise allowed the Education Committee to identify areas where progression and coordination of skills teaching and learning could be improved.

Teaching of skills has long been a central part of education at UWA Law School. Still of primary importance are the usual academic or cognitive skills, such as essay writing and legal problem solving, which are developed through exercises and assignments in most of the substantive law subjects. Over time, however, other skills have been explicitly recognised, and sometimes assessed, in various units. These include more generic academic and professional skills such as oral communication, team work and critical analysis, and, in the later years of the degree, skills specifically directed to legal practice, such as negotiation, mooting and legal drafting.

The Curriculum Review was based on a conception that the coordination and progression of skills teaching across the degree could and should be improved. The Education Committee came to the view that the core curriculum should continue to focus on developing skills in finding and understanding legal materials, legal reasoning, legal problem solving and written and oral communication. There was broad based support, however, for giving greater attention to structuring the curriculum in a way that ensures that these skills are deepened and refined as students progress through their degree. Such efforts could draw on the example of the Law School's research skills programme. Rather than in a stand alone unit, UWA law students are instructed in research skills in the context of a range of consecutive core units beginning in the first year of study. This integrated approach to research skills teaching has been developed by the Law Library staff in close cooperation with the

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Unit Coordinators of a number of designated consecutive core units. The research skills programme aims to give students hands-on instruction in increasingly sophisticated research techniques while each time requiring them to use their newly acquired skills in the completion of research tasks in the relevant subject areas.¹⁷

Discussion among teachers during the outcomes project revealed that writing skills as well as oral skills should become further priority areas. While effective teaching of writing and oral skills is a demanding undertaking in the context of increasing class sizes, these skills are so essential that all students should develop and refine them continuously throughout their law degree. On further consideration of the issue the Education Committee favoured an approach that focused on writing skills in the very early stages of law studies whereas oral skills, by contrast, are likely to be developed more successfully after students have completed some basic law units.

The results of the course outcomes aspect of the Curriculum Review suggested that the teaching of some other skills should also be given greater attention. Skills identified as being in need of further emphasis or development in the core curriculum include:

- recognition and resolution of ethical issues;
- more advanced research;
- more practical and contextual problem solving, where the relevant factual and legal materials must be determined and located independently by the student;
- ability to think across traditional subject boundaries; and
- negotiation.

¹⁷ Penny Jones, Taming The Teaching And Learning Hydra: Does It Have To Be A Labour Of Hercules? Teaching Legal Research Skills Within The Context Of University Teaching And Learning Goals, National Trends And Professional Requirements (2002) 9 *Murdoch University E Law Journal* 3.

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On the other hand, except for negotiation, there was less support for major changes to the current teaching programme of specific lawyer skills such as trial advocacy and client interviewing. The Law School offers here a range of well-regarded option units in Forensic Advocacy, Alternate Dispute Resolution as well as Negotiation and Mediation, all taught predominantly by members of the legal profession. The view prevailed that it may not be appropriate to require all students, including those with no intention of entering the legal profession, to acquire those skills within the core curriculum and that, in any event, it may not be practicable to do so.

Apart from being able to choose from available option units, students with a particular interest in Mooting, Client Interviewing, Trial Advocacy and Negotiation can, and generally do, take up the many opportunities to develop these skills in extra-curricular Law School competitions. These competitions are organised by the UWA Law Students' Blackstone Society and supported, financially as well as in kind, by many of the large law firms. In some cases, sponsoring firms also offer some instruction in the relevant skills. On balance, the Education Committee favoured therefore, at this stage, focusing on ways in which the Law School could provide additional support to the competition programme rather than making instruction in lawyer skills compulsory. The exception to this was found to be negotiation which is set to become a component of the teaching in Contract Law, Contract Law being an ideal substantive core unit within which to embed and integrate the development and instruction of negotiation skills.

E New Core Units in Remedies as well as Legal Theory and Ethics

Apart from skills development, the outcomes project also informed the Curriculum Review as to the desirability of increasing the range of core units. The Education Committee considered it desirable to elevate Remedies from an option unit to a new core unit. It is intended to serve as a capstone unit to a number of units in the Law of

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Obligations, such as Contract Law, Torts Law and Equity, and to be closely aligned with the teaching of Civil Procedure.

The Education Committee is also currently considering introducing a compulsory new unit that seeks, at an early stage of the degree, to familiarise students with theoretical approaches to law and ethics as well as the role of lawyers and law in society. Currently, UWA does not have a single compulsory unit in Legal Theory. Instead, students doing a combined degree generally have to choose two options from a wide suite of units designated as providing them with a “Law and Society” perspective.

VI NEXT STEPS

A Implementation and Dissemination

At a recent meeting, following completion of the mapping exercise and development of the Graduate Attributes Statement, the Education Committee agreed that:

1. Unit Outlines be revised to incorporate all of the student learning outcomes stated for particular units and to locate the unit outcomes within the broader year level and course outcomes;
2. the Graduate Attributes Statement as well as the various Year Level and the Course Student Learning Outcomes Statements be disseminated to the student body, the profession, and the wider legal community by way of a formal launch aimed at raising the awareness of the content and purpose of these documents;
3. students be encouraged to use the Statements for self-assessing their progress and to better understand the integration and progression of skills and outcomes across the units, year levels and the degree;
4. the Statements should be used to promote wider recognition of the breadth of theoretical and practical content within the degree; and finally

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5. before the start of each academic year, Year Level meetings should be held with all Unit Coordinators and teachers of compulsory units taken in that year, to review and ensure the continued coverage and coordination of level outcomes and assessment in that year level.

B Evaluation and Ongoing Review

The results of the outcomes project have not yet been formally evaluated. However, anecdotal evidence from most, if not all, members of the Faculty who participated in the process suggests the following:

1. The identification of outcomes and generic skills currently embedded in individual units and across year levels in the undergraduate Law degree revealed significant coverage of both desirable and essential Student Learning Outcomes. The process also revealed some outcomes and skills that require greater attention within the degree.
2. The process of meeting with fellow teaching staff to develop and coordinate the integration of Student Learning Outcomes within units, across year levels and also across the degree, appears to have had the added benefit of improving awareness of, and support for, a student learning outcomes approach to teaching on the part of academic staff who participated in the OBE workshops, the Education Committee and the various working groups and year level groups that met to carry out the mapping exercise.
3. The discussion regarding Learning Outcomes across units and at year level, has proven particularly fruitful. The Education Committee therefore intends to retain regular meetings of Unit Coordinators and other teachers at each year level to allow for the continuous refinement and development of Year Level Student

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Learning Outcomes Statements and to coordinate the teaching and assessment of these outcomes across the various units at that level.

4. The process of identifying Course Student Learning Outcomes and developing the Graduate Attributes Statement received widespread support and approval from both Faculty members involved in the above activities and also from the UWA Law Students' Blackstone Society, which has two representatives on the Education Committee.

It is too early at this stage to demonstrate an improvement in student learning outcomes. However, it is expected that students will benefit from a clearer understanding of anticipated student learning outcomes at unit level, year level and course level as detailed in the various Student Learning Outcomes Statements resulting from this project. Further, the mapping exercise facilitated better integration and coordination of different forms of assessment in order to enhance student learning outcomes. The year level and course outcome statements will make it easier for academic staff to explain to students how teaching practices and assessment exercises in an individual unit relate to other units and how they therefore contribute to students' progression through the degree. Ideally, students should use the outcome statements to reflect on their progress towards achieving the desired graduate outcomes.

It is anticipated that success of the outcomes project and the improvement in student learning outcomes will be evaluated in a number of ways. The students' perception of the clarity of articulation of learning outcomes and the alignment of teaching and assessment methods with those outcomes will be evaluated by way of the various student survey mechanisms already in place at UWA¹⁸ as well as the national Course

¹⁸ UWA has two forms of student survey currently in place:

- a) voluntary Student Perceptions of Teaching ('SPOT') surveys. SPOT surveys aid academic staff in developing their teaching and learning skills and strategies. SPOT questionnaires can be used for

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Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) graduate survey.¹⁹ The profession's perception of the improvement in skills development will be assessed by way of employer feedback and surveys, and the staff perception of the improvement in student learning outcomes will be considered annually at the Year Level meetings.

C Alignment of Assessment with Outcomes

In developing student learning outcomes at unit, year and course level, the Education Committee has been mindful of the importance of aligning assessment mechanisms with student learning outcomes. A successful student focused approach to education requires student awareness not only of *what* they are expected to know and be able to do on completion of a unit but also *how* they are expected to demonstrate that knowledge and ability in the assessment tasks set for that unit.²⁰ At unit level, the linkage between outcomes and assessment was addressed in the 2006 OBE workshops. As indicated previously, an audit of undergraduate units in August 2006 revealed that assessment mechanisms had been reviewed and amended to reflect stated unit outcomes in almost 70% of undergraduate units. At year and course level, the frame of reference of the various year level coordinating groups included the coherent and coordinated incorporation of skills development into assessment mechanisms with a view to ensuring that the progressive development of all identified

both summative and formative purposes in confirming teaching strengths and identifying weaknesses. The questions for inclusion in the SPOT survey are neither prescriptive nor proscriptive and can be tailored to suit the purpose/s for which the survey is being conducted.

- b) compulsory Students' Unit Reflective Feedback ('SURF') survey. SURF is a UWA instrument providing feedback on students' educational experiences. Two of the six questions on the SURF evaluation forms are related to learning outcomes and assessment. They are:

Q1. It was clear what I was expected to learn in this unit; and
Q3. The assessment tasks were closely related to the unit objectives.

For information on the SPOT and SURF surveys see http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/etu/spot_vs_surf.

¹⁹ A comparative analysis of the 'Clear Goals and Standards Scale', 'Appropriate Assessment Scale', 'Generic Skills Scale [CORE]' and 'Graduate Qualities Scale' will prove useful in assessing the views of future Law School graduates on the embedding and progression of skills development within the LLB curriculum. For more information on the Course Experience Questionnaire, see

<http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/content.asp?page=/policies_programs/graduates/index.htm> at 6 February 2008.

²⁰ See <http://www.catl.uwa.edu.au/_data/page/77897/OBE_and_Assessment.pdf> at 6 February 2008.

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student learning outcomes is appropriately and adequately assessed and evaluated throughout the LLB degree. The Year Level Student Learning Outcomes Statements and the future year level meetings will enable Unit Coordinators to continue to coordinate their efforts in this regard.

D UWA Review of Course Structures

The University of Western Australia is currently undertaking a major review of its course structures.²¹ This wide-ranging review will consider a variety of issues including degree structures, the balance between breadth and depth of learning within UWA courses, practicum and 'cultural competence' course elements, and the impact and relevance of UWA courses in a local, national and international context. The stated aim of the review is to ensure that UWA provides the best possible student learning experience now and in the future.

The outcome of the UWA Course Structures Review may well have a significant impact on the ongoing Law School's Curriculum Review. Submissions following the publication of a Discussion Paper on the UWA Review address a wide range of topics. In particular, external stakeholders emphasised the need for students to acquire a range of generic/transferable skills as part of their tertiary learning experience. Another issue which is likely to have an effect on the future contours of the Law School curriculum concerns the appropriate relationship between breadth and depth of the degree. The options put forward in the Discussion Paper included a general degree preceding a professional degree, a general first year, and requiring students to undertake units outside their home faculty.

²¹ For details of the UWA Course Structures Review, see <<http://www.coursestructuresreview.uwa.edu.au>> at 6 February 2008.

VII CONCLUSION

As part of an ongoing curriculum review, the Education Committee of the UWA Law School identified and mapped the outcomes of all core units, then collated and coordinated these outcomes for each year level, the option unit programme, and, finally, the LLB degree.

This detailed mapping has been invaluable in developing a Course Student Learning Outcomes Statement, a Graduate Attributes Statement and improving the progression and integration of skills teaching in the curriculum. The academic staff's strong endorsement of the Graduate Attributes Statement is due, in part, to its authenticity and validity as truly reflecting student learning outcomes in the degree. The mapping exercise further enabled the identification of deficiencies in the range of outcomes and skills currently embedded in the LLB degree. Addressing these weaknesses within the still ongoing review of the LLB curriculum should lead to further improvements in student learning outcomes. Outcomes of this project will thus impact on the other aspects of the curriculum review including, for example, the introduction of new core units, the semesterisation of the few remaining full year core units, opportunities for addressing and achieving outcomes by extra-curricula activities and further coordination of assessment.

The adoption of a bottom-up approach (beginning at the grassroots of individual units, then moving to year level and, finally, course level) distinguishes this aspect of the UWA Law School Curriculum Review from the majority of other projects seeking to embed and formulate a coherent set of graduate capabilities within a particular course. The strong sense of ownership and involvement that this approach has instilled in academic staff, coupled with the introduction of Year Level meetings of all Unit Coordinators and teachers of compulsory units taken in a particular year, aims to ensure the continued coverage and coordination of level outcomes and assessment in future years. It is anticipated that there will be tangible benefits from

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providing academic staff regular opportunities for both collaborative and individual reflection and review of current pedagogical objectives and practices in light of stated unit, year level and course level outcomes – these include better insight into what is required for optimal student learning outcomes and how to work (both individually and cooperatively) towards providing real opportunities for students to achieve such outcomes.

This paper focused on describing the process by which the objectives of the project were developed and the results achieved so far. It could provide a useful template for other disciplines or faculties wanting to embark on a similar project. Further, the documents created as part of this project would provide an informative resource and useful model to other Law Schools contemplating an outcomes-based review of their curriculum.