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Carrots and sticks: mandating teaching accreditation in Higher Education.

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Abstract: This paper questions the value of the current trend towards mandating formal teaching accreditation in Higher Education. It discusses a number of studies that tend to suggest that mandatory courses do little to improve the experience of the student, even though participants most often report a greater confidence in their teaching capacity. The paper goes on to suggest that a combination of short intensive Foundations type courses in combination with supportive mentoring may be a more effective way to ensure that students have a fruitful experience in their undergraduate courses.

Keywords: Higher Education Accreditation Foundations

Given that preparing and accrediting the teaching academic in a meaningful way is going to be a difficult task because *the terrain and responses to it ... are rendered more complex by the fact that both continue to change as the wider higher education environment continually changes, often in a non-linear fashion* (Land 2004) there are seemingly logical reasons why ultimately there is no reason for any university to train its own teaching staff to be excellent – or whatever other descriptor the institution uses to indicate high quality teaching. First, like any other corporation a university can simply hire good staff in the first place and sack those that are not. In many cases it could simply do that by maintaining an open and preferably competitive evaluation process to ensure that standards do not slip, and not renew contracts of those academics who teach poorly. In fact, that is most often the strategy taken by universities in regard to research: there is nothing that requires a university to retain “unprofitable” researchers. No one bats an eye when such employees are sacked or not re-hired at the first possible opportunity. Seen in that light, it seems that universities in general have a history of keeping “unsuccessful” teachers on staff much longer than “unsuccessful” researchers.

Second, universities could simply argue that excellence is a relative, culturally-specific term that in practice refers to a changeable notion of temporally-bound and contextually-bound commonly-agreed best practice rather than to any inherent, irrefutable set of defining characteristics. What a teacher does in order to be considered excellent is a matter of on-going debate. An excellent Economics teacher may not be considered as excellent in an Arts faculty. A teacher working a century ago might then have been considered exemplary and cutting-edge but nowadays be derided as old-fashioned. Perhaps someone considered excellent today may well suffer the same fate ten years from now. Excellence is relative: its main value seems to be as an indication of benchmarking. Name one university that does not claim to provide excellence in

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their teaching staff. Who is an excellent teacher? The answer seems to be anyone who teaches in a university that claims to provide excellent teaching.

On the other hand there are also sound reasons why any university should provide training for its teaching staff. If teaching, in general, is considered as a profession, it must have a code of conduct; a body of professional knowledge and skills; and a set of responsibilities. Because it does indeed subscribe to those criteria, it seems that teaching can be regarded as a profession. But professions also need to have an accreditation or registration mechanism. And for the most part it also subscribes to that. There is however an exception. Once a person has acquired an undergraduate degree, he or she commonly needs to do either a one-year diploma or in some states a two-year degree in education before he or she can be registered to teach in primary or secondary schools. Those requirements are not in place for tertiary teachers. In fact, there is no prerequisite that the person has any training in teaching at all, nor is it necessary to be registered by any kind of professional organisation.

The usual argument was that having achieved a degree, the person was then assumed capable of guiding others to do the same, because the student intake was of a high calibre and needed little in the way of actual teaching. Curiously the same argument did not seem to hold water for the researchers: and even today they usually do get further support and guidance to become expert. Though no longer universally applicable, the traditional English method of reading for a degree was exactly that: the student embarked on a reading program; eventually sat a public exam and if the defence of the thesis was successful was awarded a degree. That system worked quite well when you drew your intake exclusively from the scholastically capable, intellectual elite.

In reality, many universities nowadays do not enjoy such exclusivity. Making tertiary education available to all who can afford it will necessarily mean an intake that includes greater numbers of students who will rely upon the teacher's expertise to pass that final exam, even if it is no longer quite as public. Nowadays, it seems that academic staff need to actually teach rather than primarily research and secondarily mentor. That by no means is meant to imply that there aren't already significant numbers of academic staff who see themselves primarily as educators in the first instance. But at the same time, there are university staff for whom teaching is a part of their activity that is at best a diversion and at worst an irritation. In simple terms then, academic staff can be expected to have to teach more and, importantly, teach more interventionally. At the same time, some of that staff can be expected to regard teaching as an interruption to their research activities. What are the odds for excellence in teaching then?

In short a university has not only a moral obligation to provide the best education that it can, and indeed is funded to do so by governments or other sponsors, it also has a business obligation to do so. Because it advertises itself as a provider of innovative education, it needs to be able to demonstrate that in fact it does so. Otherwise it leaves itself open to litigation.

One way to avoid that is to introduce compulsory training; either through non-certified short courses or an accredited university program such as a graduate certificate designed to teach academic how to teach in a university. However, there are a number of significant concerns that in sum present a powerful argument against the making such courses mandatory.

Firstly, as Davidson (2004) points out, enforcing accreditation is not necessarily the same as professionalisation:

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Professionalization of teachers in higher education should not be confused with the credentialism concerning mandatory completion of accredited programmes for new lecturers... (Davidson, 2004: P 300)

As an idea, Davidson's position isn't new: the Association of University Teachers (AUT) in 1996 warned that going through the hoops of accreditation could not be taken as engagement with the substance of the course:

... a qualification ... cannot merely involve attendance at approved courses (AUT 1996: p2)

Nonetheless the AUT firmly adopted the position that if tertiary teaching is a distinct academic profession then the registered qualification of its practitioners could be legitimately imposed:

The link between quality, individual professional competence and standards, on the one hand, and professional qualifications on the other is inescapable. The longer that the academic profession remains outside of any framework of professional qualification, yet continues to extend its involvement in the education and training of other professionals, the more anomalous the position will seem.(AUT 1996: p2)

Citing Walker 2001, Davidson contends that professional qualification is opposed to the fundamentally managerialist nature of such argument. While accepting that professionalism is a worthwhile aspect of academic development, its genesis rests neither in attending courses nor in acceding to managerial bottom-lines. For Davidson professionalism is not

... essentially about quality assurance, efficiency or effectiveness. It is about valuing individual autonomy and its corollary, accountability, in a society which upholds freedom as an ideal for all and not just for the academic. Programs of higher education studies for new academics are worthy sites in which to contest both the current domestication of the higher education teacher, as an agent of 'quality', and to revisit the values of professionalism. (Davidson, 2004, p301)

While at first glance Davidson's position may seem fanciful, there is a substantial point to it. The idea that rather than training, or as he refers to it "initiating them into 'good practice' of pedagogical (generic) research" participants are to be encouraged to examine the theoretical and philosophical underpinnings of their own and, it is presumed, accepted best practice. Nonetheless, the notion that professionalism is not proactively concerned with quality assurance, efficiency or effectiveness is somewhat contentious. Such a position seems to ignore that academic developers are charged with the task to make academics effective and efficient teachers of university students, in accord with the importance that the students have placed on their tertiary education. Nonetheless, simply because Davidson's suggestion is contentious does not mean it is irrelevant, because the entire business of teaching-capacity training, development, maintenance and support is often problematic.

Most often, learning to teach effectively and efficiently in universities happens on the job. Numerous commentators have pointed out that such a situation is unthinkable in any of the other levels of the profession: Early Childhood Education, Primary and Secondary school, as well as Vocational and Technical college teaching. To be employed to teach at any of these levels of

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education requires a recognised qualification. It is only at the university level that no such requirement is in place.

The argument supporting the notion that there is no need for such a qualification has traditionally rested on the fact that the intake was for all intents and purposes from those capable of teaching themselves and those who were guiding them had progressed through the system themselves and were therefore likely to be good guides.

Any course on teaching for academic staff employed by universities is by definition a postgraduate course; but one that goes further than the standard postgraduate student/supervisor structure in its relationship interaction. For all intents and purposes it places those who teach the course in a peer-teaching situation because they too are academic staff of the university - albeit that the program deliverer may reasonably be expected to be qualified either through experience and esteem or relevant qualifications. Nonetheless the teacher and the student in academic development programs are both academics at the one university and as such, colleagues. In practical terms however, it means that while the student is often a "post-doctoral student", his or her knowledge base, conceptual approach and scholarship of teaching and learning as a profession comes from a discipline entirely separate to Education. While the student's disciplinary base is essential to the content of the teaching it can at times be quite contrary to the activity of teaching.

In a recent survey the majority of the teaching academics questioned suggest that a compulsory accreditation is not the preferred option for ensuring that academic staff teach efficiently. Such an outcome is not entirely unexpected because in academic circles there has been on-going questioning of the purpose of academic development for a number of years. In fact we are now beginning to see a few early studies that aim to provide substantive information as to the efficacy of teaching training programs for academic staff of universities. There are a number of fundamental questions. The first centres on the most effective way in which academic development is to take place. Anna Reid (2002) argues that there is no one single way, suggesting instead an approach that integrates the four distinct models of academic development described by Hicks (1999). Hicks argues that academic development is likely to work most effectively as a combination of centrally provided courses and workshops and faculty-based discipline specific programs. The question of what the "right mix" is and the post-delivery integration is as yet not fully resolved anywhere in the literature. For example, Jacob and Goody (2002) show that workshops (especially in series) are not particularly effective, specifically because it is often the case that as whatever new ideas are gained in workshops and courses are often firmly resisted by the departments in which the participants work.

Another question that is increasingly looming large is whether or not academic development programs ought to be compulsory on a university-wide basis; that every teaching academic has to acquire the same qualification. The arguments against such generic requirements contend in general that making such programs universally mandatory will result in university departments and faculties losing their unique qualities because independent external agencies will need to be established to oversee the quality of the accreditation, which will likely if not inevitably result in homogenisation and bland uniformity. Added to this is the resentment of academic who are forced to acquire such qualifications when they have already spent years in acquiring their degrees.

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On the other hand, the advent of massification of universities into more broadly accessible Higher Education providers and the introduction of fees have resulted in a greater demand on academic staff to provide more educative instruction than had been the case before. As well, a greater merging between the government sector and industry has also seen a greater acceptance of accountability in the operational methods of universities. In very simple terms, as students became customers with rights and universities became businesses with obligations and marketing responsibilities, the onus on universities to prove that the providers of the product are properly qualified has increased to the point where the establishment of external national accreditation bodies seems unavoidable.

However, not everyone agrees. According to Edwards (2003) external demands for accreditation of teaching staff actually serve as an argument against such programs. Edwards argues that the debate filters down to whether programs or peers work better as training structures. Will the guidance of established academics be of more avail to the beginning academic than a program of workshops or a certified course of study and/or reflection? It seems reasonable to claim that there are a number of academics currently working who do not have any formal qualifications and who have never attended a single workshop, yet who are nonetheless very effective educators. Edwards suggest that this is so because to have become an academic involves a degree of creativity, imagination, enthusiasm and a concern for students' learning: the basic elements of good teaching. Of course, this isn't always the case but it seems equally reasonable to suggest that there are also a number of academics who do have a graduate qualification in tertiary teaching but who are nonetheless not effective educators.

Running concurrently with this line of thought is the likelihood that once an accreditation has been attained, professional development comes to a halt; that a required qualification such as a certificate of tertiary teaching does not lead to a culture of on-going professional development as educators. Edwards suggests that the development of a culture of on-going professional development is driven much more by politics than by pedagogical thought. To manipulate politics at the university wide level is, in most cases, simply impossible. To manipulate it at faculty level is difficult. At departmental level it becomes more feasible, and it is there that the academic developers ought to be concentrating their efforts.

The argument is fundamentally one against certified and accredited courses being made mandatory for a university's teaching academics, and it is well worth considering in the context of the academic seeking to teach in a foreign country. Over the last decade, voluntary and compulsory graduate certificates in Higher Education (GCs) have become more prevalent, especially in the UK and Australia. Presented in a myriad of ways (one year, two year, on-line, on-campus, unit-based, module-based and so on), each university's GC has developed in its own idiosyncratic way in terms of curriculum, structure, delivery mode and philosophy. Even where content lists seem similar, the conceptual frameworks are often very different. The most probable reason for such variation in the development is the fact that individual institutions accredit their own courses, and thereby naturally tend to provide the most optimal training for their own institutions.

Some British commentators lay the blame for the wide range of courses at the feet of the Dearing Review of Higher Education in the UK (NCIHE, 1997), which sought among other things to impose greater accountability on universities in regard to the quality of their teaching. Undoubtedly the Review played a part because it fitted in with the corporatisation of universities

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that was already underway. On the one hand, universities could point to their academic development programs as evidence that they were taking the recommendations to enhance their teaching very seriously. On the other, little was done in the way of studies to see whether or not GCs actually improved teaching practice.

In retrospect, GCs were adopted as training programs for reasons other than effectiveness. First, they are relatively easy to deliver, particularly by a central academic development unit. Second, official accreditation was presumed to be an incentive. Third, GCs are relatively easy to administer from a management perspective. Fourth, GCs are efficient from a compliance perspective: by issuing a certificate the university has visibly fulfilled its requirement to provide good teaching. However, there is doubt as to whether a GC actually does make someone an effective teacher from a learning perspective.

The most influential studies in this area have been done by Graham Gibbs (Gibbs, 2003; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004; Gibbs & Coffey, 2001). Gibbs and Coffey compared a cohort of new teaching staff who underwent training and a similar cohort who did not. It was an extensive study over 22 institutions and eight countries. They tabulated their results according to three measures of impact (SETLs, self-descriptors as learner or student focused and teacher analyses of student approaches to learning). They interpreted the results as indicating positive changes in the trained teachers and their students but not in the untrained teachers or their students.

Gibbs' findings seem to afford support to formal qualifications but there are some contentious aspects to their interpretations. For example, it is entirely predictable that those who have been versed in the language and the concepts of Higher Education are more likely to assess themselves as being learner centred than those that have not, simply because they have been made conscious of the concepts and given the language with which to express them. Similarly, staff self-analyses of learning approaches also require a solid grounding in the language and concept of learning theory. Further, the whole notion of SETLs is questionable to say the least, not least of which is the possibility that trained teacher are more likely to be able to teach "to" them. Most importantly, there is not a single reproducible finding in Gibbs work: why was there no indication of students' exam results or of their graduate competencies as measure by employers?

In a paper delivered at the 2004 AARE Conference in Melbourne, Australia, MacArthur, Earl and Edwards reported on a study of the impact of GCs for university teachers (MacArthur et al, 2004). Basically they tracked a group of beginning teaching academics during and after they had voluntarily completed a GC. At the same time they tracked a similar (but not the same) group of beginning academics who did not complete a GC. Despite the authors' best efforts to interpret the results as not being contradictory to those of Gibbs, the bottom line was that there was fundamentally no difference between the trained and the non-trained group.

In 2004 Radlof (2004) conducted a major review of the University of New South Wales' PC to determine its value in supporting the achievement of the university's goals for teaching and learning. She summarised her findings as:

Findings from the review indicate that staff who have participated in the GCULT [Graduate Certificate in University Learning and Teaching] and the FULT [Foundations of University Learning and Teaching program] programs:

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- *express high degrees of satisfaction with their experience including with the diversity of content and the quality of facilitation,*
- *report valuable learning outcomes including becoming more reflective and aware of the importance of assessment for learning,*
- *describe positive changes to their teaching practice including becoming more student-centred and innovative,*
- *and identify impacts including getting positive feedback from student and peers and producing publications on teaching and learning.*

Comments from peers and supervisors support these positive views.

However, Radlof also notes that participation in the GC is very low. That the GC is voluntary will have a positive impact on the feedback: staff do not have to do it. Because there is no control group of any kind, it is impossible to say whether these survey responses are reflective of the teaching staff as a whole.

Most importantly, Radlof's report mirrors the MacArthur study and Gibbs' work in that it focuses on how the teacher believes the GC has improved their practice, which makes the whole exercise teacher centred. None of the studies ask whether the GC graduates' students are getting higher grade scores than the students of the unqualified staff. We may well argue that a university education is much more than just getting good marks but getting bad marks makes it a pretty horrible and ultimately useless experience in terms of a basis for a career. Slipping into speculation for a moment we might imagine that those who pay for a university education hope that the teaching staff enjoy their jobs and gain deep personal satisfaction from it but first and foremost they will be concerned with whether or not the student is getting an education that will allow him or her to do well in terms of results. Neither the student nor the sponsor is likely to be all that fussed whether the teachers have GCs or not – as long as they are good at their jobs and help the students to be good at theirs. The proof of the pudding is in the eating; not in how nice the recipe sounds.

Mike Prosser and Keith Trigwell have conducted numerous studies into the effectiveness of GCs. They have come up with contested interpretations of their findings but have long argued that the role of GCs is to change practitioners' conceptions of and attitudes towards what they are doing. They maintain that because they tend to place a great deal of emphasis on changing the conceptual underpinnings of the teacher, GCs are a manifestation of a more professional approach to teaching in Higher Education sector. In simple terms, GCs raise the standard of university teaching by focussing Higher Education on learning. Their argument is based on the assumption that teachers refer to those underpinning conceptions when they prepare for teaching, when they teach and when they reflect on teaching (Prosser and Trigwell, 1998).

That assumption has been rigorously challenged by Eley (2006) who conducted a study that indicates that they generally do not. Eley's findings seem to tie in with the interpretation of the 2004 MacArthur study. Whereas GCs certainly give participants the language and the concepts to think and talk about Higher Education, the concepts themselves may not actually do much to improve the practice; particularly from the student's point of view. Further, there is no real evidence that GCs have played any discernible part in raising the standards of teaching in Higher

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Education; in fact there is no real evidence that those standards have increased at all. Most tellingly, there has been no causal relationship established between teaching effectiveness and accredited, formalised courses of study for academic development.

Many of the propositions put forward by Prosser *et al* in their 2006 study are contested by the results of Knight's 2006 study. Whereas Prosser *et al* suggest that although the responses varied significantly, GC participants in general rated their courses as being well related to institutional mission statements, Knight's study shows no such result, which lends support to MacArthur *et al* (2004).

There is another factor to consider. Even in those universities where GCs are compulsory, non-compliance is a significant issue – and one that will inevitably skew the figures. At Monash University for example, not everyone who should actually do complete a GCHE before getting tenure. First of all only the ranks below Associate Professor are compelled to enrol. Second, staff employed by way of contracts are not obliged to complete a GCHE. Third, staff enrolled in another postgraduate qualification course such as a PhD cannot enrol in the GCHE until they have completed their doctoral studies because no student can be enrolled in two different courses simultaneously. Fourth, staff who already have a teaching qualification do not (in general and subject to showing that they have transferred their teaching skills to the university environment) have to complete the GCHE. Fifth, even from the small pool left, the compliance rate is around 65%, which means a third of those who are required to complete a GCHE have been tenured without it. It is possible that those who do not enrol in the course avoid it because they see no value in it but it seems much more likely that they feel they do not have the time to devote to it.

In summary there are three pertinent points to be made. First, participants in GCs consistently indicate that they believe the GC has had a positive effect on their practice. Second, there is little in the way of verifiable evidence that a GC has any significant impact on practice from the learning point of view – which does not mean that there is no impact, simply that as yet we have no appropriate measures. On the other hand some studies suggest that in fact there is no difference between the effectiveness as facilitators of learning amongst those that have a specific qualification and those that do not. Third, by inference and anecdotal evidence the requirement of a formal qualification is often seen as an extra and unjustifiable imposition on a (beginning) academic's time.

The first and second points together allow some interesting speculation. Most GCs promote the idea of learner-centredness. We might reasonably assume that the staff who deliver the GCs practice what they preach and place the emphasis on their students, who in this case are themselves teaching academics. By their own measures then, creating graduates who self-centred would be seen as a desirable outcome: and ideas such as self-reflection; understanding of concepts; awareness of teaching and learning theories and so on are indeed ideas that are of immediate benefit to the teacher-as-learner rather than to the students he or she is going to be teaching. GCs tend to be teacher-as-learner centred, aiming to academically develop the GC participant. It seems perfectly legitimate then to evaluate a GC as successful if it achieves that – hence the apparently contradictory results.

A more profitable line of speculation is to consider whether a GC is a waste of time if it is such a major intrusion and if there is no evidence that student learning is improved significantly. First, we iterate that simply because there is no evidence as yet, does not mean that it does not exist.

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Second, we ought to acknowledge that teaching staff who believe they are teaching effectively are more likely to enjoy their work and therefore more likely to stay in the job, and GC graduates are more likely to have a bank of knowledge about teaching and learning to which they can refer if they have to. Third, when appropriate measures are devised, it is possible that GC graduates do have a significantly positive impact on their students' academic achievements.

The only significant obstacle to GC then is the inopportune imposition it is thought to make by departmental heads and deans on the teaching academic's time. At a stage of their career when they are usually under immense pressure to establish a research portfolio as well as to establish themselves as teachers, and therefore anything that requires as much time and commitment without providing immediate benefit as a formal teaching qualification may well be seen as a hindrance to professional development. It may well be that courses constrained by their accreditation requirements are no longer the most effective or efficient way to either develop teaching academics or accredit them as qualified.

The idea that graduate certificates in Higher Education are ineffective as development programs is also posited by Dearn *et al* (2002) for different reasons. They suggest that although a number of institutions provide formal preparation programs for new teaching staff, and others offer non-credit seminars for enhancing teaching, and/or graduate certificate programs in higher education, anecdotal evidence suggests that the take-up of such programs is small. They suggest that this is so because universities still do not, in general, value teaching very highly. More provocatively, John Dearn equates graduate certificates in higher education with sheep dips, which appeal to some but can never meet the needs of all academics. On the other hand, in the farming context at least, sheep dips get the job for which they are designed done effectively and efficiently.

Partially the problem could rest with the programs themselves. Often they are not programs that teach staff to teach well as such but rather they are programs about good teaching. Academic developers are indeed in danger of becoming "marginalised romantics" if their programs are not constructed from the clients' point of view (which is not meant to suggest that the so-called happy sheets which usually conclude a workshop or a course ought to be considered as indicators of effectiveness). According to Goody (2003) few if any graduates of such programs indicated that they had in any way been able to influence the quality of teaching in their schools. None indicated that doing such a course had in any way diminished the barriers that new teachers face. The reasons put forward for such ineffectiveness include the suggestion that they contain too much reflection and not enough practical information and the recommendation from the participants that they be more faculty specific .

Knight (2006) argues that there is no

...evidence of a real, causal link from the PGC to greater student-centredness, nor to a different quality of student experience, let alone to the claim that PGCs represent the only, or the best, way of improving the student learning experience through improving teaching.

We might summarise the argument thus: if universities are to have academic development programs at all, they are likely to be most effective when conducted at faculty or school level. They are likely to be more effective if they are not theory based but practical, not reflective but informational, not generic but tailored and not encapsulated in specific courses but part of an on-

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going, needs-based providence. Most of all they need to be delivered in and at an appropriate time.

Praetz (in Cook, 2003; p4) maintains that “it’s absurd to think that you can teach without some training” and goes on to cite an unreferenced Open University study that found that new academics with “training” were more student-centred than those without. Regardless of whether Praetz’ assertion can be substantiated by discernible evidence or not the problem is that we have no evidence for deciding what form of training is the most effective and efficient. Hence there is no general agreement about what form the training is to take: accredited courses, non-accredited just-in-time courses, the experienced hands in the faculty or simply experience and trial and error. Further, Biggs (2003) argues convincingly that teaching academics move through developmental stages, suggesting that the best academic teaching develops from being content centred through being teacher centred to being student centred. We might add a further stage to Biggs’ hierarchy: after being student centred, the exemplary teacher in the academy will focus on learning. The point here is that such development is bound to take time, which on the one hand has implications for the students of beginning academics, those still focussed on content, and on the other hand whether any development is due to training or simply a function of experience.

From an institutional point of view, there is little doubt that any university’s academic development strategy needs to be coherent, cohesive and cogent. It also needs to be equitable; it needs to be universal and most importantly it needs to be based on a set of institutionally agreed upon underlying principles of good practice or core concepts. With those attributes in place, the length, the delivery mode and the accreditation processes of academic development ought to be defined by the outcome it is intended to have. Whatever the optimal structure or structures of academic development might be, its core concepts need to be at the heart of all training programs, no matter how long or short and they need to apply to all teaching staff, including sessional and tutorial staff, guest lecturers and visiting cross-border teaching academics.

Any person employed to teach in a university can be reasonably expected to attend a short workshop on teaching and learning: particularly teaching staff new to the university. Each year universities are likely to have a small number of beginning academics who are completely unfamiliar with the academic environment. Most universities provide a general induction of some sort and most will provide “just-in-time” academic development of some sort. In general, the central idea of such programs is to provide a platform upon which the new academic can build his or her own practice. The structural theme of the program is most often a combination of “survival management” (based on the idea that if you can manage all the demands of academia you will at least be an efficient academic) and rudimentary, practical hints and tips on teaching. Encapsulated in a reasonably short timeframe such programs provide teaching academics with bare-bones information as well as introduce him or her into the institutional staff network. Most universities have some form of such “Foundation” programs and in general academics make good use of them.

Every such short intensive academic teaching development program will reflect the set of conceptions of effective teaching championed by the university. Hence graduates can be legitimately expected to demonstrate in their practice clear conceptual understanding of the core concepts of teaching in the Higher Education sector. Individual universities will have idiosyncratic focuses but universally one of those core concepts is that teaching ought to be focussed on learning (Umbach & Wawrzynski, 2005) and therefore, inclusive (Hellsten &

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Prescott, 2004). In short, learning centredness requires an understanding of student behaviour, purpose and attitude (Stage, Muller, Kinzie and Simmons, 1998). Therefore Foundations programs should be designed to instruct, encourage and support all those who come into contact with students to able to deliver learning-centred teaching. At the same time professionally effective and efficient practice understands that the specific objectives of the University and each discipline impact upon practice (D'Andrea & Gosling, 2001).

Of course, individual institutional and disciplinary contexts will have their own practices, protocols and processes, and that staff teaching at any university will be expected to operate as well as they can within them. But such work-place savvy and operational compliance is not the domain of Foundation programs. Tknamedate has shown that systematic and casual mentoring works most effectively – especially when the mentor monitors as well as advises. Such arrangements allow less experienced staff to derive maximum professional and personal benefit from the experience without putting the learning experience of the students at any great risk. There is a further benefit: it facilitates a relationship between a junior and a senior academic in the university. Such networking ought not to be underestimated.

Formal qualifications like graduate certificates, completed over substantial periods of time have their place in academic development in Higher Education, especially when a staff member is about to assume a position of authority or mentoring. But there is little in the way of evidence to indicate that they are of immediate benefit in terms of the learning experience of students taught by newly appointed staff. Therefore, it is both impractical and unwarranted to require them to either have such a qualification before they start teaching at a university or require them to enrol in such courses during the first years of their appointments – unless of course they want to and have time to complete the course.

Rather than forcing newly appointed staff to complete formal qualifications such as graduate certificates of teaching I have suggested that most universities have a “foundation” type program that newly appointed academics can (and perhaps ought to) make use of to orientate their practice in line with the aims and mission of the university. Further they ought to avail themselves of the benefits of an assigned mentor. On the other hand, I have also argued that that universities need to know what they can and ought to expect from their teaching staff and that they have an obligation to communicate their expectations clearly and unambiguously. In order to make that manifest in practice, it is just as important that each university knows, codifies and enforces what they expect of their students and staff, and to communicate that clearly to all parties concerned.

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