The Diploma of Languages meets AQF ‘compliance’

Abstract

The recent new Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) regulations and Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) requirements for 2015 are changing the landscape of Higher Education in Australia. Meeting the specifications of the new AQF was a challenging aspect of gaining approval to develop and offer the new undergraduate Diploma of Languages at RMIT University as a Higher Education program in 2012. Developing new tools to map the program to AQF requirements, and embedding existing sequenced language courses within both AQF Level 5 and AQF Level 7 programs, was particularly complex.

This contribution will present aspects of the development of the RMIT Diploma of Languages. It will briefly outline aspects of its design and explore how these compliance issues were addressed. The contribution also offers some reflections on the broader context of academic development work, and the national and international discussion on minimum academic standards and assessing learning outcomes, including implications for language disciplines in this new landscape.

1. Background

In 2012 a Higher Education accredited Diploma of Languages was introduced as the only formal Higher Education undergraduate qualification in four languages at RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia: Chinese, French, Japanese and Spanish. RMIT University did not at that time offer a major in a language as part of a Bachelors degree, but offered courses as electives to students in any undergraduate program of study. The new program was developed to closely align with the University’s strategic goals and priorities to provide students with a global passport and to internationalise the curriculum, to meet the needs of industry and community, and to foster in students the skills and passion to contribute to and engage with the world (RMIT University 2015). It was also designed to align with the University’s graduate attributes and vision of the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies School in which it is housed: to provide students with language skills and relevant cultural knowledge to enhance their global outlook and employment prospects. For example, a student in Engineering might undertake a Diploma of Languages concurrently with their Bachelor degree to develop additional analytical and problem solving skills, and/or because of a personal interest in learning about one’s own and other cultures. Knowledge of a foreign language may also increase the student’s chance of
studying and/or working overseas, thereby allowing them to add international work experience to their curriculum vitae, all skills increasingly valued by employers in this globalised world.

The program was being developed and implemented at the same time that the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) was becoming an all-encompassing regulatory authority for the higher education sector in Australia. This context was significant, as TEQSA’s arrival marked the end of the era of ‘fitness for purpose’ of our academic qualifications, and the commencement of new ‘threshold standards’ and ‘frameworks’ intended to define the expectations for ‘excellence and standards’ for judging quality in Australian higher education’ (Brawley et al. 2013: 20 citing Bradley, Noonan, Nugent and Scales 2008; Guest 2013: 51). One framework which came under the purview of TEQSA was the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) which had been revised in July 2011 for implementation by 2015. National qualification frameworks like the AQF have been developed worldwide to achieve a range of outcomes including “transparency, accessibility, flexibility” and “portability of learning opportunities and qualifications” nationally and internationally (Drowley and Marshall 2013: 74). Drowley and Marshall (2013) provide an account of the international context of such frameworks, highlighting their apparent ‘common sense’, but also emphasising the political and institutional contexts that influence their scope, acceptance and success.

At the time of the development of the Diploma of Languages at RMIT in late 2011 and early 2012, institutions and disciplines were still struggling with what ‘being compliant’ with the new framework would look like in practice, and how it would impact on current program development processes and program design. In a range of disciplines including economics, history, business and geography, cross-institutional projects were developed to work on definitions of standards, developing more concrete and assessable learning outcomes, embedding University graduate attributes in the curriculum, and developing tools and methods for collecting evidence of learning and graduate outcomes under the banner of ‘assurance of learning’, ‘learning outcome assessment’ and/or ‘award level standards’ (e.g. French et al. 2012; Hay 2012; Brawley et al. 2013; Guest 2013). For disciplines without pre-existing formal external accreditation arrangements, as Brawley et al. (2013) argue from their work in the history discipline, this is perhaps where the most impact will be felt and where the most challenges lie ahead. In America and other countries where a culture of ‘learning outcome assessment’ is perhaps further advanced there are lessons to be learned for the Australian contexts and elsewhere about these challenges.

The development of the Diploma of Languages program proposal and curriculum was the result of collaboration between College\(^5\) academic development staff, School learning and teaching management, and language academics. This contribution represents the authors’ reflection and learning from their experience of working together to develop a Diploma of Languages program at RMIT University in the context of the new AQF.\(^6\) It seeks to promote a critical conversation on issues that
arise from the relationship between the AQF and program design/development, and associated broader implications of the quality assurance of programs across the sector. It is consistent with, but offers a different perspective to, other literature on the impact of the AQF and TEQSA in Australian education that primarily documents the outcomes of cross-institutional projects on standards and ‘assurance of learning’. This contribution is informed by this broader context, but it also differs in that its focus is on a case study of our experience. We reflect on this experience and ways of approaching these challenges as is consistent with appreciation for the value of participants doing their own research in education, or at least, being key participants (Flecknoe 2000; Cumming, Wyatt-Smith, Elkins and Neville 2006). Its findings are relevant to other tertiary language providers in Australia, but we also hope that it may provide some insight into practice of academic development work and the changing tertiary context more broadly.

2. Program design structure and objectives

The Diploma of Languages at RMIT was designed to differ somewhat from similar qualifications at other tertiary institutions, primarily due to the strong focus at RMIT for its graduates to be ‘work-ready’. The main objectives of the RMIT Diploma of Languages are to provide students with an advanced level of proficiency in a language other than English (currently Chinese, French, Japanese and Spanish), with a focus on practical language skills. On completion of the Diploma, students are able to speak, understand, read and write the chosen language in a wide range of contexts at a high level of proficiency. The program also aims to enhance students’ understanding of the culture(s) and society(ies) associated with the language, and equip them with intercultural knowledge for social and workplace application. In addition, through two core (compulsory) courses taught in English, the Diploma introduces students to the socio-linguistic and political aspects of language use and language policy and planning, and the language and culture related issues which impact on the management of international business communication. The Diploma prepares students for employment in culturally diverse organisations and/or in the country(ies) where the language is spoken.

The Diploma of Languages consists of eight 12 credit point courses (equivalent to a full time year of study, or 96 credit points) comprised of the afore-mentioned core courses taught in English, and six language courses. The two core courses are Global Language (an introduction to sociolinguistics, language use and language policy and planning); and Language Management in International Organisations (management of linguistic and cultural issues in international organisations). These can be undertaken at any time during the Diploma and in any order; the LOTE (language other than English) courses must be undertaken sequentially. Ab initio language students undertake the two core courses plus LOTE 1-6 in their chosen language. Students entering the Diploma with an existing proficiency in their chosen LOTE undertake the two core courses plus up to at least LOTE 6. They have the option of replacing the lower LOTE levels they do not need to undertake with other LOTE
courses and/or a range of language and culture related electives, offered either at RMIT or undertaken through cross-institutional enrolment or exchange; for example LOTE 3-6 plus two electives (to replace LOTE 1-2); or LOTE 5-8 plus two electives etc.

The Diploma of Languages is available in part-time mode as a stand-alone program or taken concurrently alongside another RMIT program in Chinese, French, Japanese and Spanish. The Diploma is also offered in full-time intensive mode in Chinese and Japanese. This is an ideal program for students wishing to take a gap year and/or as a pathway into another higher education program. The AQF guidelines specify that Diplomas qualify graduates to undertake advanced skilled or paraprofessional work and as a pathway for further learning (Australian Qualifications Framework Council, 2011, 38). On completion of the Diploma of Languages in either mode, students are able to apply for entry into another program at RMIT and may be eligible for credit of up to 96 credit points, depending on the disciplinary relevance of the program they elect to articulate into.

3. Working with the AQF specifications/dimensions

In the early stages of program development work, faced with challenging issues of program design and how it might align with the new AQF, we naturally consulted with colleagues on the proposal for the new program and aspects of the design. In this initial consultation phase quite difficult questions began to be asked of us about how it would align, or be ‘compliant’ with the new AQF. The rhetoric and focus were very much one of compliance. This created some challenges and concerns as at that time there were no clear solutions proposed to us, nor precedents or templates to provide a model of what ‘compliance’ would look like. What quickly became apparent was that we needed to work very closely to the AQF specifications in designing the program, and needed to develop some sort of curriculum ‘map’ to explicitly align the program learning outcomes to the qualification specification of a Level 5 Diploma. As there were variables that we could not be sure of, it felt like there were answers missing from the AQF and significant challenges to address, such as how to achieve the desired program design and learning objectives, while being AQF compliant and still meeting prospective student and University needs.

The AQF consists of ten levels where level 1 has the lowest level of complexity and level 10 the highest. These levels are defined by learning outcomes, based on what graduates are expected to know, understand and be able to do as a result of learning. These outcomes are expressed in terms of three dimensions: knowledge; skills; and the application of knowledge and skills. The ten levels are outlined in Table 1.

The School and College developing the program were new to offering a Higher Education accredited (Level 5) Diploma program so there were no pre-existing models to follow. Further complexity was added by our intention to design the program primarily around existing LOTE courses that were already offered as electives in Undergraduate (Level 7) programs. According to the AQF, “The Diploma qualifies individuals who apply integrated technical and theoretical concepts in a broad
range of contexts to undertake advanced skilled or paraprofessional work and as a pathway for further learning”, while “The Bachelor Degree qualifies individuals who apply a broad and coherent body of knowledge in a range of contexts to undertake professional work and as a pathway for further learning” (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013: 15-16).

Table 1: AQF levels and qualification type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Qualification Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Cert. I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Cert. II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Cert. III</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Cert. IV</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 7</td>
<td>Bachelor Degree</td>
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<tr>
<td>Level 8</td>
<td>Bachelor Honours Degree, Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 9</td>
<td>Masters Degree (research, coursework, extended)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 10</td>
<td>Doctoral Degree</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Faced with a degree of uncertainty and the spectre of ‘compliance’, we necessarily worked even more collaboratively across Faculty and academia borders, and adopted a principle of transparency in our work. As we formed our own ‘common sense’ interpretations of the framework, and developed the program curriculum and the case for approval in an uncertain landscape, we adopted this approach of transparency in our curriculum mapping and decision making, believing that this would ensure more opportunity to invite feedback as well as support from colleagues and University committees.

Developing our own mapping tools we began a process of aligning the AQF descriptors for Diploma programs with the proposed program purpose and objectives, and the program learning outcomes we wanted our students to develop, to the AQF and the University’s graduate attributes (see section 5 below). Developing our own tools was necessary as we had no previous example of such a mapping exercise at our institution, and no clear road map for what the curriculum documentation for an AQF compliant program should look like. This is the same kind of work that was being undertaken in different disciplines around the country—an additional challenge for disciplines not already practised in meeting external accreditation standards set by industry (Brawley et al. 2013; Hay 2012; Guest 2013; French et al. 2012). There were some particular challenges in this case given that even at the basic structural level of the program there were still questions, including whether we could continue to offer the language courses as electives in other programs at RMIT as well as in the Diploma due to the different AQF levels (i.e. Level 5 vs level 7), and how we could design a program which would be flexible to a range of student cohorts.
4. Specific technical challenges of language courses and working with the AQF—processes of adaption

The revised AQF states that ‘the purpose of the Diploma qualification type is to qualify individuals who apply integrated technical and theoretical concepts in a broad range of contexts to undertake advanced skills or paraprofessional work and as a pathway for further learning’ (Australian Qualifications Framework Council 2013: 15). The Diploma of Language aligns well with the AQF description above, as the program was designed to provide Diploma of Languages graduates with technical and theoretical linguistic and sociolinguistic concepts, as well as advanced language skills that can be applied in their work and/or lead to further study. The volume of learning of a Diploma is described as “typically 1-2 years” in the Framework, and the Diploma of Languages as the equivalent of a one year full time program offered in either part time or full time mode (i.e. eight x 12 credit point courses at our institution) is therefore consistent with this ‘typical’ duration. While we felt our proposed program clearly met these requirements, it was nevertheless somewhat uncertain how to confirm the appropriate AQF level for the proposed program.

One particular challenge we had to consider was in relation to the sequential nature of language delivery. At our institution we offer LOTE 1 through to LOTE 6 (or higher) courses which progressively develop in sequence language proficiency and skills alongside intercultural knowledge. With the language courses in the Diploma of Languages students start at a level appropriate to their previous experience, and continue on as far as they can. LOTE 1 is designed for the *ab initio* student, whereas LOTE 6 assesses a higher level of oral and written fluency and various evaluation and critical thinking skills. As the courses are sequential from 1 to 6 we could not claim that as units of study they mapped to any particular AQF level, nor would all students graduate from the program with the same level of technical language proficiency. This is a common feature of all language programs at tertiary level, given the possibility to commence at varying proficiency levels. The program had to allow for flexibility in this regard to meet student needs.

Our team took the view that to align with the AQF, individual courses/units are of less significance than the holistic picture of the program’s volume of study and the overall outcomes that students would achieve, as expressed in the program learning outcomes. Yet it was still critical to take great care to ensure that there was transparency in how the units related to each other, the sequential development of courses to program level outcomes, and the proposed assessment. In other words, we needed to review the level of each language course in relation to each other as well as the University’s graduate attributes and program learning outcomes.

The resulting work involved using Bloom’s taxonomy (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill and Krathwohl 1956) as a tool to re-write learning outcomes with great care for all the language courses to clearly demonstrate what students would have to do, and at what level, to pass the course, and how the sequence of courses linked to the program learning outcomes and University graduate attributes. The work was
collaborative and involved the experience of academics, education developers and learning and teaching managers in the fine detail of the work. We ensured that the AQF classifications of ‘Knowledge’, ‘Skills’ and ‘Application of Knowledge of Skills’ were evident across the course guides. The learning outcomes in the final units were mapped to the AQF dimensions and the associated mapping evaluated through a peer review process. Although this alignment process and the process of writing clear learning outcomes that clearly align with assessment have long been espoused as good learning and teaching practice, achieving the right detail of levelling and the focus of courses in a traditionally skill based field was challenging and new. However, it seems that we are not alone in this, in reading accounts from other Australian and international disciplines:

A shift towards an outcomes based approach requires clarity of leadership; expertise; appropriate support in the form of staff development; and, above all, time. Although Bloom’s taxonomy was published as long ago as 1956, it has taken higher education over 35 years to address ‘what our students learn’ rather than ‘what we teach them’ (Drowley and Marshall 2013: 86).

As well as clearly defining the LOTE courses in relation to the program learning outcomes, we specified in the program proposal that all students must achieve ‘level 6’ in their chosen language as a minimum, as well as successfully completing two core courses on linguistic, socio-political and cultural issues. This helped ensure the minimum level of language proficiency that all students would meet and that the related program learning outcomes could be met. There is the option for students commencing the Diploma with existing proficiency in their chosen LOTE to take some additional higher level language subjects, or to take fewer courses in their chosen language and diversify in another language or in other language and culture related electives, but we can say with confidence that all students meet the minimum of the program learning outcomes in relation to their LOTE.

Another issue we explored was whether the new Diploma courses (AQF Level 5) could continue to be offered as electives to students enrolled in undergraduate courses (AQF Level 7) across the university as we had in the past, and if so, could the level of assessment be the same in both offerings (see following section). Again, we worked on the premise that it was the overall program outcomes that were critical.

5. Program and course learning outcomes—the result

The result of this work was to map the individual course learning outcomes to each other and then to the Diploma as a whole, and to document clear learning outcomes to show how at the end of their studies students will have at minimum attained certain graduate attributes and program learning outcomes (at AQF Level 5). The program learning outcomes were mapped to the AQF Diploma dimensions, and our institution’s graduate attributes are shown in Table 2 below. As outlined above, we mapped the outcomes to the level of proficiency in the target language that all students would meet (regardless of their progression in a Bachelor degree
program if taking one concurrently). All graduates would have the knowledge, skills and application in the LOTE to: ‘communicate effectively in the target language in a range of forms and in different international and cross-cultural contexts, using appropriate modes of communication including electronic, written, graphic, oral and aural forms’; and to ‘reflect on the role of culture in communication, and apply this knowledge in a range of cross-cultural interactions’, and so on. Some graduates will exceed this minimum standard.

As the equivalent of a one-year program pitched to students from a range of existing language proficiency levels, including those without a LOTE background at Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) level, we concluded that the Diploma (AQF Level 5) was the most appropriate qualification and that our program learning outcomes clearly align with those at that level.

In response to the challenging issue of how our language courses related to a student’s Bachelor degree level and experience, we took the position that in a three year undergraduate Bachelor degree not all individual courses consist of AQF level 7 learning outcomes—these might only apply to the 3rd year or capstone courses—as learning over a three year program is progressive. We felt that there can be some flexibility at unit level as long as overall program learning outcomes clearly map to the appropriate AQF qualification level. Where students enrol in language courses as electives in a Bachelor program from a different discipline they are developing breadth outside of their home discipline, developing knowledge and skills that resonate with the University’s graduate attributes and ‘global passport’ aspirations (for example, the Engineering student referred to in section 1 above). The Diploma of Languages then can be considered as a cluster of electives taken within a Bachelor degree for breadth (but not necessarily all at the same level as an accredited ‘major’), as well as like a more typical Diploma offering a pathway to Higher Education. It could alternatively be described as a pathway Diploma delivered in a flexible manner either prior to or in parallel with a Bachelor qualification. The award(s) and testamur(s) students receive however are ultimately based on their performance in core studies in their home discipline. So again, most important were the outcomes with which all students will exit their award programs. The time and effort we spent considering holistically how individual units would lead to the newly mapped and defined program learning outcomes laid the program foundations as we move to the next challenges as outlined below.
Table 2: Diploma of Languages—Program Learning Outcomes Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Learning Outcome</th>
<th>University Graduate Attributes*</th>
<th>AQF Level 5**</th>
<th>Courses***</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate effectively in the target language in a range of forms and in different international and cross-cultural contexts, using appropriate modes of communication including electronic, written, graphic, oral and aural forms</td>
<td>GA1, GA2, GA4</td>
<td>K1, S2, S4, A1, A2</td>
<td>Higher level LOTE (e.g. French 6, Japanese 6 etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect on the role of culture in communication, and apply this knowledge in a range of cross-cultural interactions</td>
<td>GA1, GA2, GA4</td>
<td>K1, S4, A1, A2</td>
<td>SOCU1046, SOCU1049, Higher level LOTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access and critically examine a range of resources (including text and electronic) to further your learning in your target language</td>
<td>GA5</td>
<td>K1, S4, A1, A2</td>
<td>Higher level LOTE (e.g. French 6, Japanese 6 etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectively manage your own learning, developing skills in the life long learning of languages</td>
<td>GA5</td>
<td>S1</td>
<td>SOCU1046, Higher level LOTE (e.g. French 6, Japanese 6 etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work independently and in diverse teams to solve problems, using effective communication strategies</td>
<td>GA1, GA6</td>
<td>S2, S4, A3, A4</td>
<td>SOCU1046, SOCU1049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adapt and develop effective communication strategies to address linguistic diversity in the workplace</td>
<td>GA1, GA2</td>
<td>S2, S4, A2, A4</td>
<td>SOCU1049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflect on the role of languages in cultures and societies, and apply this knowledge in local and global situations</td>
<td>GA1, GA2, GA3, GA4</td>
<td>K1, S2, S4, A2</td>
<td>SOCU1046, SOCU1049</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* RMITs graduate attributes (http://www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/graduateattributes): GA1 Work-ready; GA2 Global in outlook and competence; GA3 Environmentally aware and responsive; GA4 Culturally and socially aware; GA5 Active and lifelong learners; GA6 Innovative

** The program learning outcomes are mapped to the corresponding dimensions of knowledge (K), skills (S) and Application of knowledge skills (A) outlined for Diploma qualifications in the AQF (http://www.aqf.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/AQF-1st-Edition-July-2011.pdf).

*** Courses:
LOTE 1-6
SOCU1046: Global Language (core course)
SOCU1049: Language Management in International Organisation (core course)
6. Next challenge for the languages and cultures teaching sector: assurance of learning—what next?

In our view a clearly-documented curriculum that explicitly outlines program learning outcomes, and transparency and clarity about the decisions we make in any new program design in response to some of the unique challenges, is very important for good learning and teaching practice. It may have taken over 35 years to fully ‘catch up’ on Bloom’s taxonomy, but it is still important to aspire to get there. Our program now has over 300 students enrolled and has been delivered successfully for two years. However, in terms of implementing the AQF and ensuring that we meet quality standards set by TEQSA, it is likely that the next big challenge to ensure the program meets AQF requirements will be about more formal measurement and documentation of learning. This is still a challenge for the sector in Australia where most program evaluation to date has been based on student and industry feedback in different forms:

In contrast to indirect measures, such as student appraisals of their course experience, and industry feedback, direct measures of assuring learning outcomes involve the measurement of the learning outcomes realised by students to demonstrate their achievement of a program’s explicit learning goals (French et al. 2012: 1).

TEQSA have foreshadowed that this measurement and documentation of learning should be ‘benchmarked against similar accredited courses of study offered by other higher education providers’ (Australian Government 2011: 17). In response, disciplines like Economics are exploring whether this should be an external test in final year undergraduate degrees, or a process of expert peer review of samples of student work (Guest 2013: 59). Other institutions are considering how graduate attributes are best assessed without ‘clear and accessible quantitative measures’ already in place like other dimensions of program quality assurance, and exploring student portfolios as a tool to enable self and peer assessment of achievement of graduate attributes (Oliver 2013). Internationally-recognised language proficiency tests (such as the HSK (Chinese), the DELF/DALF (French), the JLPT (Japanese), and the DELE (Spanish) could serve this purpose for tertiary language programs.

We designed the Diploma of Languages program with explicit program learning outcomes mapped throughout the curriculum with these upcoming requirements in mind. We know we will also need to continue to consider how our assessment design, the artefacts produced by the students and our record keeping clearly demonstrate individual students’ learning and achievements to the standards we have set. We can describe the future challenges facing language disciplines in relation to the concept of ‘learning outcome assessment’. We will be required to provide a form of ‘outcomes assessment’, or in other words to document how we know that students know what we think they know.
Brawley et al. (2013) draw on the American experience in their analysis to suggest that in this work the process must be one of ‘faculty engagement’ rather than isolated interventions. They make the important point that ‘individual academics and discipline communities need to be part of the debate that establishes the means by which they are compelled to prove what they claim they deliver for their students’ (Brawley et al. 2013: 22). Heiland and Rosenthal (2011) and others in the literature of language and culture disciplines also clearly outline the importance of the engagement of academics rather than just getting in the experts. They express the hope that academics will become ‘critical thinkers in shaping student learning on one side and assessment strategies and policies on the other’ (Heiland and Rosenthal 2011: 17). If we consider academic development work more broadly, as Boud and Brew have done (Brew 2010; Boud and Brew 2012), we see also the critical importance of ‘where’ this practice takes place: it is “practice [that] drives learning, not only to solve immediate problems, but also to address wider concerns” (Boud and Brew 2012: 214). Academic development work, they argue, “must move ever closer to everyday practice and the materiality of academic work” (Boud and Brew 2012: 219).

Collaborations between academic developers and learning and teaching leaders on the assurance and assessment of learning should be as close to the site of practice of learning and teaching and the work of academics as possible. In the case of our project, the uncertainty of institutional, AQF and TEQSA requirements led to closer collaboration and more engagement of academics on the detail of student learning outcomes which we hope represented a move towards a new culture that can be expanded on in future intra and cross-institutional collaborations. To facilitate this engagement between academic developers and academics, and to successfully “create a culture of assessment and becoming assessment literate”, we need to shift our focus away from compliance to ‘student learning’ as others have also concluded before us (Ricardo-Osorio 2011: 324). We had to depart from our initial focus on AQF compliance before the most productive work could begin. For us it was our uncertainty about ‘compliance’ that helped us more clearly define the curriculum and do more than just ‘comply’. By focusing on compliance alone we may have been asking the wrong questions. Academics and learning and teaching leaders need to work together to focus on learning and quality improvement, be flexible enough to collaborate, and move into new cultures of assurance of learning and assessment.

Notes

1. Despite the nomenclature more usual to the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector, this is a Higher Education qualification, as is common with this type of Diploma of Languages in Australian universities.

2. At RMIT, a course is a basic unit of study (e.g. Business Statistics A, Accounting B).
3. At RMIT, a program is a set of units (courses) that are undertaken to qualify for a specific academic award (e.g. Diploma of Languages, Bachelor of Business (Marketing)).

4. International internships such as the French Company Experience program (http://www.ambafrance-au.org/French-Company-Experience-Program) are becoming increasingly popular with students, but speaking a foreign language is a pre-requisite.

5. At RMIT, a College corresponds to what is sometimes known elsewhere as a Faculty.

6. Kerry Mullan is Program Director for the Diploma of Languages and Meredith Seaman is Senior Advisor, Learning and Teaching, in the Design and Social Context College Office.

7. ‘Work-ready’ is in fact the first graduate attribute listed; see http://www.rmit.edu.au/teaching/graduateattributes.

8. Some universities also offer a Graduate Diploma of Languages (AQF Level 8), thereby facing the additional complexity of meeting learning objectives for students undertaking the same language course while enrolled in programs across three different AQF levels.

References


