

Griffith Law School

Curriculum  
Review  
Implementation  
Report  
2007

# Overview

This is the first of a series of reports documenting the implementation of the recommendations made in the 2005 Report of the Curriculum Review Committee which detailed a comprehensive review of the Griffith Bachelor of Law curriculum. This Implementation Report will be distributed to Law School staff as well as to senior staff of the University and the Law School Visiting Committee members

## The Curriculum Review Process

The Curriculum Review Committee was convened in late 2003 and continues to meet. The review was conducted through 2004 and the focus since then has been on consultation with colleagues within the Law School, the University and the Legal Practitioners Admissions Board.

Further detail on the review process is set out at pages 2 and 3 of the Curriculum Review Committee Report published in June 2005.

## The Curriculum Review Recommendations

The 110-page Report of the Curriculum Review Committee published in June 2005 sets out in detail the recommendations of the review. Four major reforms which flow from those recommendations relate to:

1. **The ordering and structure of core courses and areas of knowledge.** Equity and Torts have been consolidated in specialist courses and the size of the property law-related courses has been reduced from 2007. New compulsory courses in Legal Research and Legal Writing were introduced in 2006 and a new Transnational Law course was introduced in 2007. The new ordering of courses is designed to meet the needs of graduate students as well as those doing integrated degrees;

2. **A stronger emphasis on incremental development of student knowledge and awareness in a range of areas:** legal theory and interdisciplinarity, group work, ethics, generic and legal skills, internationalisation and Indigenous issues. This emphasis is facilitated through the development of 'Vertical Subjects' that see students engaged on these matters in an incremental fashion over the course of their law studies;

3. **An enhanced internationalisation agenda:** In addition to development of a new course, Transnational Law, our internationalisation agenda will be advanced by the new program structure enabling students to spend a semester studying abroad as part of an overseas exchange program. The provision of this opportunity to spend a semester studying elsewhere is a very distinctive aspect of the Griffith Law program;

4. **Rationalisation of the credit point values allocated to courses.** The introduction of the Graduate Entry Program for Law in the late 1990's had seen differing credit point values allocated to certain courses, depending on which program the student was enrolled in. Such discrepancies have now been removed. The review also moved to disaggregate the larger courses in Property Law (2 x 20 credit points) as well as Constitutional Law, Administrative Law and Unincorporated Associations and Trusts (15 credit points each).

## Professional Accreditation

The Law School approached the Legal Practitioners Admissions Board (LPAB) seeking accreditation for the new LLB program structure in early-August 2005. It transpired that at that time the LPAB was in the process of requiring a much greater level of detail from all Queensland law schools for accreditation purposes. This resulted in the Law School needing to prepare comprehensive statements detailing the coverage of material required for admission in both the original curriculum (1992-2005) and the new curriculum (2006 onwards).

A 4-page statement outlining coverage of required content in the original curriculum had sufficed when the Supreme Court (Legal Practitioner Admission) Rules 2004 were introduced in 2004. When the Law School was required in December 2005 to provide further information to the LPAB to confirm accreditation for the original Griffith LLB curriculum, the statement submitted ran to 49 pages. Fortunately, LPAB staff, in particular Ms Melissa Timmins, were helpful in providing advice regarding development of the documents.

The staged implementation of the new Griffith LLB curriculum over 3 years necessitated accreditation being sought prior to the finalisation of structures of some courses containing required content. The Law School obtained LPAB approval to

submit a reconciliation statement for the new curriculum on a staged basis, commencing with those areas of knowledge not materially altered by the implementation (Criminal Law & Procedure, Civil Procedure and Evidence) together with those areas taught within a cluster of courses that were changed in 2006 (Contract, Equity, Constitutional Law, Administrative Law and Torts). Detail relating to the three remaining areas of knowledge (Professional Conduct, Company Law and Property Law) has been added to revised reconciliation statements as the clusters of relevant courses have been developed.

The Chief Justice and the LPAB approved the new Griffith LLB curriculum in October, 2006 based on the reconciliation statement submitted in July, 2006. The next iteration of the reconciliation statement was submitted to the LPAB in July 2007. A further, updated statement will be submitted in early 2008.

## New Courses

The new Equity course (replacing the Advanced Civil Obligations 1 course) was first taught in Semester 1 2006. The course had a very large enrolment for this first offering due to transition-related issues. Students from several cohorts were enrolled in the course and reservations were expressed about the suitability of the course for first year Graduate Entry students. The Graduate Entry students were identified as needing a stronger understanding of the range of principles addressed in other courses including Contracts & Civil Obligations 1 & 2, Law and the Modern State and Introduction to Public Law in order to appreciate the concepts under discussion in the Equity course. This resulted in the re-introduction of the Summer semester offering of Law and the Modern State for Graduate Entry students in 2007. The Equity course has also been moved to the second year of the Graduate Entry program structure.

Some 370 students enrolled in the first offering of the Legal Research course in Semester 1, 2006. The course worked very well with the Law Librarians, Rachel Reddacliff and Lisa Paul making a substantial contribution. Students complete 8 hours of computer lab sessions across the semester and are assessed by way of two 1-hour on-line tests, completed under exam conditions. Students were required to access a range of real databases to conduct the research tasks needed to enable them to correctly answer the multiple choice questions. Capacity limits mean that no more than 25 students could undertake the test at any one time. This meant that each of the tests involved sessions spread across a week. Academic integrity issues raised by the spread of sessions have been effectively managed by the teaching team with support of Library staff. Changes to the structure of the course were made for 2007, reducing the call on the Law Librarians.

The new Legal Writing course was offered for the first time in 2006 to all law students commencing their studies. The aim of the course is to encourage students to learn more about the fundamentals of effective legal writing, including (1) the appropriate and effective use of grammar and (2) the adoption of accepted conventions relating to style, structure, and referencing in all common forms of legal writing. The course is designed around four, two-hour seminars in which students engage with written and other materials before completing written exercises on a variety of topics. Results of the set exercises are reviewed in class. Other, supplementary exercises are available on-line for after-class completion. Students are encouraged especially to improve their writing abilities by doing exercises on aspects of writing that they themselves know to need more attention and practice. Students are assessed in one of two forms, which they themselves choose: a final examination only, or a mid-semester formative assignment coupled with the final examination.

The new Transnational Law course was offered for the first time in Semester 1, 2007. The aims of the course are to (1) develop the students ethical, skill-based and intellectual capacity to understand and deal with the different legal systems of the world (formal and informal; state and non-state); and to (2) give students a basic understanding of the categories of law and legal traditions that have developed to deal with legal issues, including: global and public cooperation problems; conflict of laws and legal systems relating to private matters; and international merchants creating their own sense of lawfulness in relation to their business dealings. The course has had a weekly 2-hour lecture and an on-line quiz instead of a small group class. Students have also done a group assignment with 3 colleagues whom they did not previously know so as to model a potential transnational working environment.

## Renovated Courses

Implementation of the Curriculum Review has required or will require changes to most core courses. As outlined earlier in the section on Professional Accreditation, the coverage of Priestley-required content areas has been rationalised. Whereas equity-related required content was previously spread across 8 courses, this is now addressed in 5 courses. The coverage

of Property Law topics will now occur in three 10-credit point courses rather than two 20-credit point courses.

Almost all core courses have been linked in various ways to the Vertical Subjects. These links have been designed to make use of existing teaching practices.

## Transition Arrangements

A great deal of painstaking effort went into ensuring that continuing students are not disadvantaged during the 3-year transition. Special thanks to Professor Sandra Berns, Associate Professor Graeme Orr and Ms Wendy Lawton for their assistance in working through the development of transition structures for continuing students.

To date, the transition arrangements have worked effectively. Queries from continuing students have been less common and easier to address in 2007 than they were in 2006. It was apparent from the queries received that not many students availed themselves of the meetings that were held to discuss and explain the changes to students. Many students also did not make use of the information made available to them on the web.

### Nature of student queries

Some students were simply confused over the change of names of some courses e.g. Advanced Civil Obligations to Equity. This uncertainty was reinforced by the fact that the year of offer for this course was also changed. Students who had followed their program plan were directed to the information on the web. This was sufficient for the majority. Most students who had not followed their program plan for whatever reason requested a program plan done up for them to include the changes brought about by the review. Some students needed to navigate the change from the two 15 credit point courses to three 10 credit point courses. This was a particular issue for students who had completed one of the 15 credit point courses and so queried what further courses they would need to do to fulfil the requirements. The change from the two 20 credit point property law courses to three 10 credit point courses and a 10 credit point elective was easier to follow.

### Complexity of queries

Provided students had followed their program plan, the queries received were simple to answer. The queries received from students who had not followed their program structure were sometimes very complex as the new and old structures both needed to be taken into account and married.

### Frequency of queries

In late 2005 and early 2006, there were a significant number of queries as students sorted out their enrolments. From November 2005 to March 2006, there were at least 30 e-mail queries per month. Some other students either rang or spoke to law school staff in person. Associate Professor Graeme Orr also fielded some of these queries as Undergraduate Program Convenor. Queries slowed down towards the middle of 2006 then started again when enrolments opened for second semester and for a few weeks thereafter.

There have been fewer queries as time has progressed and students are getting familiar with the changes that have been brought about. The queries have become easier to answer as continuing students who commenced under the previous program structure progress towards the completion of their studies.

## GLS Support for Teaching Teams

Teaching and learning funds were allocated by the Law School to all core courses for development of new content and learning activities. Some course convenors and teaching teams made extensive use of these allocations. Funds have been used for the Legal Research, Administrative Law, Negligence & Accident Compensation, Transnational Law, Jurisprudence, Property Law, Criminal Procedure & Sentencing courses and the Legal Skills Vertical Subject.

\$35,000 in GLS teaching & learning funds remains available to support initiatives generated by the implementation of the Curriculum Review.

## University Support

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Professor John Dewar agreed to contribute \$15,000 in each of 2006 & 2007 towards the costs of employing casual staff to assist the Undergraduate Program Convenor and our administrative staff to act as Student Transition Advisors. With Law School funds, this continues to enable the employment of casual support at key times during the year. The Law School thanks Professor Dewar for this support.

The Pro-Vice Chancellor (Arts, Education & Law), Professor Marilyn McMeniman, has also supported the implementation process through providing much-appreciated access to the expertise and time of staff from the Flexible Learning & Access Service (FLAS).

## Vertical Subjects

The Vertical Subjects involve incremental development of student knowledge and skills in the areas of legal theory and interdisciplinarity, group work, ethics, generic and legal skills, internationalisation and Indigenous issues. The introduction of this idea is one of the key innovations emerging from the curriculum review which is designed to significantly improve the quality of the student learning and the graduate outcomes from the program.

In each vertical subject, students are required:

- to initially engage with the basic principles governing its subject matter and skills, .
- to subsequently engage with more advanced principles and skills, and the relationship between these and other principles and skills;
- to use and practice the principles throughout the law program; and
- to undertake assessment tasks in relation to the skill and/or subject matter throughout the law program.

The Curriculum Review Committee is continuing to work on development of the Vertical Subjects. Administrative arrangements have been put in place to collect and collate the results achieved by students on assessment items that address Vertical Subject content. These arrangements will need to be finalised by mid-2008 in order to enable documentation of the Vertical Subject achievements of Graduate Entry students who commenced in 2006 ahead of their graduation at the end of 2008.

There will also be continuing work done with FLAS on the development of websites for the vertical subjects. Sites exist for each of the Vertical Subjects and further content will continue to be added.

The Curriculum Review Committee is continuing to work on ways of evaluating whether the Vertical Subjects have in fact brought about improved learning outcomes and student capabilities. Given that the implementation of the new Griffith LLB curriculum will not be complete until the finish of 2008, it is not yet possible to conduct this evaluative work but the Committee is seeking to prepare for this.

It would have been useful to spread responsibility for implementation of the Vertical Subjects amongst a larger group of colleagues. Having the Chair of the Curriculum Review Committee also take the role of Convenor of the Legal Skills Vertical Subject (with the largest number of links to substantive courses) involved a concentration of responsibility that should now be re-visited.

## Student Numbers

Increasing student numbers have added further challenges to implementation of the curriculum review. In each of 2006 and 2007, in excess of 350 students entered first year law studies at Griffith. The Vertical Subjects include assessment activities that are beneficial to students yet time-consuming for teachers. This is particularly significant for the Legal Skills Vertical Subject. Maintaining the right balance will require careful monitoring.

The clearest example of the impact of increasing student numbers on the implementation of the Curriculum Review has been the changes made to the availability of the Interdisciplinary Research Project (IRP) course. The Curriculum Review Committee had proposed that the IRP would be the research capstone of the Griffith LLB, highlighting its importance in relation to research, writing and interdisciplinarity. In 2006, the Law School recognised that the supervision of the research projects of all these students involved an unsustainable burden on academic staff. This led to changes, implemented in 2007, limiting the availability of the IRP to students likely to achieve a Grade Point Average that would attract an award of Honours. The plans of the Committee have to some extent been over-run by student numbers and the supervision pressures placed on staff.

## Work with the Flexible Learning & Access Service (FLAS)

We have received valuable support from our Pro-Vice Chancellor, Professor Marilyn McMeniman enabling us to access the services of the Griffith Flexible Learning & Access Service (FLAS) in 2006-8.

We are continuing to work on various curriculum review-related projects with FLAS. During 2005 and early 2006, much of this work was done with Educational Designer, Gary Tischer. We are now working closely with Donna Shepherd. The Curriculum Review Committee wishes to record its special thanks to both Gary and Donna for the excellent work they have done with us.

Major projects include development of websites for the Vertical Subjects, ethics scenarios, a CD on legal interviewing and a DVD on negotiation.

## Evaluation

This report forms part of the evaluation process. It demonstrates that the Curriculum Review Committee has met regularly to monitor, review and adjust implementation of the curriculum reforms in an ongoing and informed way. Notwithstanding this fact, the Committee has also identified specific foci for our evaluation efforts.

These are:

- support for continuing students during the transition to the new structure;
- whether the renovated program structure provides a comprehensive and coherent legal education;
- introduction of new core courses & changes to revised courses; &
- development and embedding of the Vertical Subjects.

The Committee also noted that the collection of data relating to performance on these issues needs to be an ongoing activity. It was noted early that much data is of a 'volatile' kind which if not captured 'at the time' is lost. Various measures have been enacted by staff to capture, collate and consider evaluation data in an integral ongoing way.

Examples include retaining a set of submissions on assessment items submitted by students undertaking their studies in 2005 under the previous program structure. These will ultimately be reviewed and contrasted with the responses of students completing the corresponding courses that form the new program.

Presentations have been made at the Law School at the University of Warwick and at the recent International Journal of Clinical Legal Education Conference in Johannesburg outlining the outcomes of the Curriculum Review and their implementation.

## Endorsement of the Faculty Review

The Review of the Law Faculty conducted in August, 2006 commented favourably on the Curriculum Review process and outcomes. The following 2 paragraphs from the Report of the Committee Reviewing Griffith Law School set out the Committee's findings relevant to the Curriculum Review:

1.4 The process was one of considerable sophistication and reach which built on the evident success story the School has to tell. That success story can be told in terms of Course Experience Questionnaire data. ... The School is particularly to be commended for its elaboration of the attributes of a Griffith Law graduate and the tracking of those attributes into curriculum design. While it is too early yet to determine whether the School has begun to achieve the advantages, for students, for staff and for external constituencies, of this process, the School is to be commended for the work it is doing on developing evaluation methodologies of the Curriculum Review changes.

1.5 The RC notes the range of curricular ideas generated by the Curriculum Review process, and particularly notes the vertical subject institution. This is an inspired response to the need for better (and better documented) skills and ethics training which capitalises on existing arrangements and is directed to controlling the staff workload burden. The RC also notes, however, that the vertical subject will impose substantial implementation burdens calling for strong direction from the School at the executive level as well as sophisticated evaluation methodologies to monitor the results and apply the lessons of them.

## Getting the Degree Structure Right

Minor Program Change Submissions to LLB program structures were prepared to enable Equity to be taught in the second year of the Graduate Entry program from 2007. The changes involved the reintroduction of a Summer semester offering of Law & the Modern State for Graduate Entry students, moving Transnational Law and Introduction to Torts (the re-named Intentional Torts & Remedies) from Year 2 to Year 1 of the Graduate Entry program with Equity and Trusts moving from Year 1 to Year 2.

## Reflections

All things considered, implementation of the Curriculum Review proceeded very effectively through 2006. Support was provided to staff and students, new courses were introduced while other courses were re-worked to align with the objectives of the new program. Professional accreditation of the new program was obtained and has been maintained.

There is a difficult balance to be struck in achieving comprehensive and systematic change while not unduly increasing the burden on both academic and administrative staff. Data (presented above) suggests we have effectively achieved that balance.

There have also been a range of factors that have made the process of reviewing the curriculum and implementing changes more difficult than was anticipated.

These include:

- Announcement of the Research Quality Framework. Law School colleagues were understandably concerned at the time that would be taken to implement curriculum changes;
- The professional accreditation authority expecting greater detail. The Law School was required to prepare reconciliation statements that ran close to 50 pages for each of the existing and proposed new structures. This was a very time-consuming process that could not have been anticipated;
- The Law School had a different Dean in each of the 4 years since the curriculum review commenced. Each of these Deans took a different approach to the review process;
- Consistent over-enrolments. This placed additional teaching and assessment pressures on academic colleagues. It also increased the potential for the Curriculum Review to be held responsible for increased teaching loads;
- A University restructure in 2005 that saw the Law School no longer part of a Business and Law Group, becoming part of the Arts, Education & Law Group, diverting some of the attention of senior Law School staff from the curriculum review;

- Administrative staff changes. The School Administrative Officer was seconded to another part of the University at the time that detailed and substantial paperwork was required to progress the implementation process;
- The 5-year Faculty Review was set for August 2006. A very substantial amount of effort was required of senior Law School staff to prepare for the review during the first semester of the new law program;
- Key staff go on leave. Staff involved in the curriculum review process have substantial research expectations to meet. This has meant that various members of the Curriculum Review Committee have been on research and other leave during the review and implementation phases. It can be challenging to locate colleagues who have the expertise and inclination to continue the implementation work commenced by someone else.

Too often, literature related to curriculum review has focused on the changes that a school or faculty proposes to make rather than on how effectively those proposals have been implemented and then evaluated. The benefit to the Law School of this evaluation project is that it will enable the completion of a more comprehensive evaluation of the processes used in developing and implementing our curriculum reforms.

## Looking forward

Undertaking a comprehensive and systematic curriculum review and implementing its recommendations is a major undertaking. The key members of the Griffith Law School Curriculum Review Committee have been engaged in this enterprise for the past 4 years and we still have more than a year before the new program will be fully implemented for Graduate Entry LLB students and more than 3 years before the first Combined Degree students undertaking the new program are due to complete their studies. The Committee is mindful of the need to continue to monitor the implementation of the review recommendations. Collecting evaluation data will be an ongoing priority.

It is important to recognise the contributions of the Law School administrative staff in attending to student queries regarding the new program structure. In particular, Wendy Lawton, Anne Mackay and Sue Wilkins have taken on this role, in collaboration with Undergraduate Program Convenors, Associate Professor Graeme Orr (2005-6) and Lillian Corbin (2007).

It is also very important to acknowledge the continuing contributions of the Curriculum Review Committee members. Major contributions have been and continue to be made by Professor Richard Johnstone, Professor Sandra Berns, Associate Professor Michael Robertson, Associate Professor Mary Keyes, Dr Duncan Nulty from GIHE, Afshin A-Khavari, Lillian Corbin & Shaun McVeigh. We are also pleased to have recently welcomed Kieran Tranter to the committee. Professor Rob McQueen and Associate Professor Graeme Orr also contributed to the Committee through 2005 and 2006.

Professor Jeff Giddings  
Chair, Curriculum Review Committee  
September 2007