Cultural Competency and the need for an Indigenous specific Graduate Attribute

Thank you for the opportunity to give feedback on the draft *USQ Education Experience Plan*. Of particular interest to the College for Indigenous Studies, Education and Research (CISER) are the draft, generic graduate attributes associated with the Plan, and especially item 7, “Demonstrate capacity for cultural competency, including awareness of Indigenous perspectives” (line 316).

Our interest in the notion of ‘cultural competency’ and how such a notion might be articulated in terms of a generic graduate attribute is underpinned by a number of considerations. Primarily, at an institutional level, the current *USQ Strategic Plan 2013-2015* has the stated aim of “building the cultural competence of staff and students”, and while positive steps are being taken with a number of proposals in draft form, to date there are no measures formally adopted by USQ that might assist in achieving the stated aim. We agree that the stated aim is rightly positioned at an institutional level and, therefore, from a student perspective a generic graduate attribute is a desirable outcome. But, we would argue that within an Australian context the focus of cultural competency needs to be Indigenous-specific. This is further supported by the *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Final Report* (Behrendt Report 2012), which has attributed “success to an approach that is embedded and supported at a whole-of-institution level” (Behrendt Report 2012, p. 162).

In relation to Indigenous cultural competency at a whole-of-institution level, we are guided by Universities Australia’s *The National Best Practice Framework for Indigenous Cultural Competency in Australian Universities* (2011), and we note that all member universities, including USQ, have agreed to support that framework. We are also in agreement, therefore, with the *USQ Indigenous Cultural Competency Framework* currently under development and in alignment with national best practice. And, the *USQ Indigenous Cultural Competency Framework* logically needs to be the framework that informs, among other things, the proposed graduate attribute.

The rather lengthy exposition above is necessary background to understanding CISER’s proposed amendment to the graduate attribute in relation to cultural competency, as well as why we believe the attribute deserves the importance and prominence of being considered as a stand-alone attribute, rather than bundled loosely with what may be termed issues of openness and inclusivity. And, on this note we are also of the opinion that graduate attributes of any type should exist to articulate a single broad idea. We
have, therefore, re-formulated each of the draft attributes as below, without detracting from the original intent:

**Existing wording:**
1. Written and oral communication
2. Critical and analytical and reflective thinking
3. Problem-solving, creativity and innovation
4. Information literacy
5. Learning and working autonomously
6. Learning and working collaboratively
7. Ethical, open and inclusive engagement with communities, cultures and professions and environments
   - Engage ethically as learners and as future professionals.
   - Demonstrate capacity for cultural competency, including awareness of Indigenous perspectives.
   - Demonstrate the implications of global and cultural issues for their discipline/professional practice.
   - Show critical awareness of sustainability as an issue for their discipline or profession.

**Proposed changes:**
1. High level written and oral communication skills
2. Demonstrated abilities in critical, analytical and reflective thinking from an ethical base
3. Demonstrated creativity and innovation in problem-solving, including sustainable practices and the implications of global and cultural issues for their discipline/professional practice
4. Demonstrated information literacy
5. The ability to learn and work autonomously
6. The ability to learn and work collaboratively
7. Demonstrated cultural competency, including appropriate Indigenous cultural competency based on the USQ Indigenous Cultural Competency Framework

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