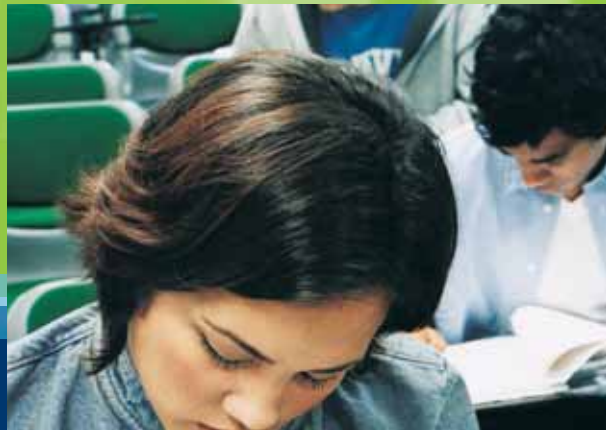


Mapping the Terrain



Trends and shared features in BA programs across Australia
2001–2008

AUSTRALIAN
LEARNING
& TEACHING
COUNCIL

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DEANS OF ARTS, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

SUMMARY REPORT 3

This report summarises the key trends and commonalities evident between Bachelor of Arts programs and programs within the field of Arts currently offered across Australia

About the Project

The BA scoping project commenced in March 2007. Materials and resources developed as a result of the project launched on 30 July, 2008 on the DASSH website <http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp>

Materials Developed

The summary reports of the scoping study are particularly intended for decision makers for the Bachelor of Arts programs: those responsible for coordinating and managing Arts programs. The summary reports can be read independently or as a set of information. The set consists of:

- 1 The Bachelor of Arts scoping project:
Executive summary
- 2 What is the Australian BA?
Defining and describing the nature and role of the Arts in contemporary Australia
- 3 Mapping the terrain:
Trends and shared features in BA programs across Australia 2001–2008
- 4 Who is enrolled in the Australian BA?
Student uptake of the Australian BA 2001–2006
- 5 Who is delivering the Australian BA?
Trends in staff profiles in the BA 2001–2006
- 6 Future studies emerging from the BA scoping project

These summary reports are supported by resources developed as part of the project. These resources are available from the DASSH website and include:

- Case studies
- Data sets
- Institutional program profiles



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The BA scoping project was developed under the auspices of The Australasian Council of Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH).

1. Data sources

As this project is a scoping exercise, different types of data was gathered from a wide range of sources. In total, 40 institutions were investigated and data was collected on 390 programs.

Qualitative data was gathered from the following sources:

- DEST (now renamed DEEWR) data;
- Data drawn from the Graduate Destinations Survey (GDS) and Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ);
- Existing institutional or centre reports of investigations into particular areas such as attrition or employability;
- Institutional strategic plans and program review documents;
- Program structures and details gathered from institutional 'course finder' websites, faculty or school websites, program handbooks and program flyers or publicity materials;
- An online survey of those engaged in the teaching of these programs.

Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted telephonically or 'face to face' with sixty seven people in a range of roles. This range of role reflects the diverse ways in which the BA award programs are managed and coordinated across the sector. Interviewees included:

- 11 ALTC/Carrick national award winners teaching into an Arts award
- managers and coordinators of programs within the field of Arts across the sector, including
 - > 9 Associate Deans (Teaching and Learning),
 - > 18 BA coordinators,
 - > 6 Deans,
 - > 7 Heads of School,
 - > 5 Administrative officers.

Within each institution an award program that represented a Bachelor of Arts according to the project definition was identified. A profile document was developed that enabled a common framework against which all programs to be analysed. These 'profiles' manifested as a 12 page document to be used to identify trends in program. The profiles are itemised program details collated in a uniform framework to facilitate a comparison of programs across a standard instrument.

The first part of each profile describes the details of the award Bachelor of Arts as offered by each institution in 2008. This description is of the Bachelor of Arts award only. It does not include tagged or named programs such as Bachelor of Arts (International Studies), double degrees or honours. The second part of the profile describes the Bachelor of Arts award in contrast to other Arts awards offered by each institution. The profiles were developed from information that emerged from the programs publicity materials, from the interviews and from DEST data.

These institutional profiles and the programs they portrayed were further refined via a series of round table meetings held throughout Australia. Invitations were extended through the Executive Deans from each institution to three representatives with responsibility for management and curriculum coordination. Nine meetings were held across the country, with at least one taking place in each state. A total of 103 participants attended. During these meetings, program profiles were examined, and project findings gathered to date were shared and discussed. The round table format also provided an opportunity for:

- formative evaluation of the project to ensure that outcomes would be effective and relevant to the project aims and foci;
- representatives from the sector to provide input into the proposed methodology for further study;
- discussion about the format of the project's outcomes that would be of greatest use to individual institutions;
- discussion with peers about the structures and design of the curricula in use across the sector.

2. The Bachelor of Arts curriculum

A Bachelor of Arts program was defined by the project team as a program filling the following criteria:

- **Categorised by the DEST (DEEWR) field of education as Society and Culture and delimited according to the project definition (See Summary Report 1 for details)**
- **Generalist in purpose and intention**
- **Humanities and/or social sciences focused**
- **Not monitored by an accreditation board or professional association**
- **Flexible in terms of offering student choice**
- **Single undergraduate degree program**
- **Follow a traditional “liberal arts” ethos of aiming to impart general knowledge and develop intellectual capacity**

The BA scoping project takes the working definition of curriculum as the learning experiences required for successful program completion and the way these experiences are structured. The Imaginative Curriculum Project, a project funded by the UK Higher Education Academy (The Generic Centre, 2002) stipulated that learning experiences should include what is learnt (or the content); how and when it is to be learnt (the structure of the learning processes). It should also include how learning that has taken place can be demonstrated (the assessment). All of this is ideally located in the context of an underlying educational philosophy – an explicit statement about why what needs to be learned should be learned.

Of the 390 programs examined across the 40 institutions, 33 institutions were found to have a Bachelor of Arts program that fit the definition above. These programs content and structure of the programs were reviewed. Details regarding assessment and educational philosophy were sought. Little information regarding assessment and educational philosophy were identified or described on a program level, although details were relatively easy to find within unit structures.

Key findings

- 1 The Bachelor of Arts program information examined primarily focused on descriptions of the content and the sequencing of modular units, with some emphasis on the learning process.

- 2 Most programs have, or are moving towards, a management model where an individual or a small structural group has oversight of the curriculum design, management and academic leadership of the program.
- 3 Project participants with teaching and management responsibilities frequently reported a lack of expertise or conveyed a sense of disquiet about program curriculum design, tending to focus discussion on the content and structure. This reflects recent claims that curriculum is rarely a topic for professional discussion within Australian universities (Fraser & Bosquant, 2005; Hicks, 2005). It is possible that an absence of ‘whole-of-program’ curriculum focus can have a detrimental effect on the quality and coherence of curriculum (Barnett & Coate, 2001; Short, 2002; Toohey, 1999).

2.1 Content

For the purposes of this project, the term ‘content’ of the curriculum is defined by what is stated needs to be learned.

Key findings

- 1 A perceived strength of the BA is the flexibility and opportunity available to students to construct a program from the range of units available. However, the actual units available to choose from, and construct a sequence of study in any one year is dictated by external influences such as administration systems (e.g. enrolment computer systems), timetable limitations, market forces and fashions, institutional strategic plans, student work requirements and staff availability. This means that the choice in some institutions is actually quite limited and changeable from one semester to the next, and from one student to the next.
- 2 Interviews with academic staff indicate that staff have a strong focus on the discipline in which they teach. Project participants talk of curriculum structure as operating on a unit or major level. There is little discussion of the student experience of the program as a whole.
- 3 The flexibility of choice available to students means that the learning attained through engagement in the program is unique to the student who has constructed it.

2.1.1 Fields of study/ disciplines

A cornerstone of many Australian Bachelor of Arts degree programs is the large number of fields of study or disciplinary areas on offer to students. This breadth of disciplinary choice is one of the key areas of strength identified by interviewees and the 80% of survey respondents.

Key findings

- 1 There is a problem in providing a sustainable set of specialisations across a range of disciplines. This challenge was frequently expressed by those teaching in regional campuses.
- 2 Shared curriculum is viewed as a possible method of maintaining small discipline areas, as is a multi-disciplinary approach. The multi-disciplinary approach has been adopted by small regional campuses as a mechanism for offering a humanities and social sciences-based programs in the face of limited access to qualified staff and small student numbers.
- 3 The most common majors offered across Bachelor of Arts programs are listed below (These are listed in order of the number of majors offered). Note that the number of majors offered does not necessarily indicate the relevant number of EFSTL in each discipline, nor does it indicate the number of available units that are offered – or are available at any particular time – within the major. This is a listing of the frequency of offerings of majors across all Arts degrees in Australia.
 - 1 History
 - 2 Psychology
 - 3 Sociology
 - 4 Philosophy
 - 5 English
 - 6 Japanese
 - 7 Indonesian
 - 8 Chinese
 - 9 French
 - 10 Anthropology
 - 11 Asian Studies
 - 12 Australian Studies
 - 13 Italian
 - 14 Political Studies
 - 15 Environmental Studies
- 4 There is considerable disparity in the number of majors offered across the campuses of multi-campus programs. This can result in the phenomenon that, within the same institution, students at different campuses are having different educational experiences even though their parchment says they have the same degree.

- 5 The listings of majors on websites do not reflect the availability of units within that major. Interviewees and round table participants reported that the number of units within a major available at any one time is not reflected by the listings of majors that appear on websites and elsewhere. The actual availability of units or modules that construct a major sequence of study change on a semester-by-semester basis.

Details about fields of study are available in the "Fields of Study" data set on the DASSH website <http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp>

2.1.2 Graduate attributes

Data about the graduate attributes for programs were collected from project participants, via program websites and from program reviews or publicity materials. A single dataset was developed which traces the graduate attributes used by Institutions, Faculties, programs and disciplines. This data set is available from the DASSH website.

The project team noted through the project life that there was a shift in the use of graduate attributes from generic institutional attributes to increasingly specific attributes. The team also noted that there exists the potential for leaning too far towards specific outcomes that do not prepare students for the "chameleon" like nature of the modern work force that requires constant adaptation to new environments, and development of new skills (Barnett, 2004; Begley, 2007).

Key findings

- 1 All the information collected indicates that critical thinking and skills in communication (both written and oral) are core attributes of programs within the field of Arts. The key attributes/skills specifically articulated as essential to programs within the field of Arts include (in order of frequency): Critical thinking; communication (written and oral); independent thought; and social awareness. Interestingly, problem solving and teamwork are mentioned infrequently as are creativity and innovation.
- 2 Participants at many of the round table meetings noted that demonstrating that programs deliver the graduate outcomes and that students have acquired them is a problem. For the most part, particularly in the generalist program, project participants view student outcomes as serendipitous.
- 3 There is little evidence that the Bachelor of Arts is structured to ensure that students demonstrate these skills upon graduating. Consistent assessment across a modularised, atomistic program appears to be a challenge.

A full list of the graduate attributes that dictate these programs is available from the DASSH website <http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp>

2.2 Structure

Most Bachelor of Arts programs are comprised of a range of units on offer. They are highly modularised and are generally open to a range of students at a range of year levels. Most other programs within the broader field of Arts are more structured and are more likely to have a proscribed sequence of study.

Key findings

- 1 Most institutions use the major, minor, and electives as sequencing structures as central to the program.
- 2 The core structure employed by most institutions is centred on the sequencing of the units that are used to construct a major. The structure of a major may consist of a foundational level and a sequence of upper level units or a sequential, incremental structure of units across 3 levels: foundational, intermediate and advanced. These are traditionally called first, second and third year levels.
- 3 In general, there are no pre-requisites for any units constructing a Bachelor of Art program.
- 4 Most institutions refer to levels rather than years in recognition that a number of students no longer complete the program in the traditional 3 year period, or in the traditional first, second, third year progression.
- 5 For many institutions (18 of the 33 examined), sequencing is divided into 2 levels – foundational (usually first level) and upper level that requires a predetermined level of core knowledge, although usually with no prerequisite unit. Interviewees from these institutions reported that the upper levels are frequently offered through open access programs as electives. This means that classes will have participants from foundational and advanced levels in the same group. Classes often contain a wide range of students from various backgrounds. Interviewees commented on the complexities associated with teaching such a diverse student cohort. Three institutions that indicated that there was no restriction as to the sequencing of modules – making all units accessible to all students, regardless of prior learning. Five institutions indicated that there was a clear demarcation between foundational, intermediate and advanced levels in programs that were generalist in nature. In each case there is a clear educational philosophy and structuring in place. Three of the five institutions have newly reviewed programs and therefore curricula is untested to date.
- 6 For those institutions that use majors as a means of sequencing study, a major (or a focused disciplinary study) can range from 25% of the total program to 70% of the total program. This makes inter-institutional transfer difficult.

2.2.1 Duration

- 1 Programs have an average duration of 3 years.
- 2 The shortest program is 2 years at Bond University and the longest time allowed on a part-time basis is 10 years at Southern Cross University.

2.2.2 Core units/ courses

- 1 Capstones and final year core programs that articulate from a planned program are being implemented in a number of institutions as a result of program review recommendations.
- 2 Participants from institutions with core units expressed the perception that some central core tertiary literacy skills are better placed in a single uniform unit. This is based on the belief is that the core courses support the development of cohort identity. However, this trend raises an issue in terms of funding and allocation of credit points and teaching load, since funding for the program is traditionally associated with schools feeding into the program and not the program itself.
- 3 Interviewees expressed varied understandings about what the key literacies that Arts graduates need to study and how students should learn them – even amongst staff teaching in the same discipline.
- 4 Twenty institutions currently have some core aspect in their programs, of which 12 have compulsory first level units. Themes in these programs include communication skills; ethics and values; reasoning; social inquiry; Australia's history/place in the world; working with technology; introduction to information, media or university literacies and professional skills.
- 5 Six institutions have final year units. These units are required for successful completion of the Bachelor of Arts program in 4 of these institutions. Completion of the final capstone units is recommended, but optional, in the other 2. The final year core requirement is a new innovation in 3 of the 6 and is an outcome from a recent review. Topics for the units include writing for professional practice, professional ethics and social responsibility and professional and career development. Two compulsory units are focused on major capstone style projects and one includes a compulsory placement within a community based or work based learning activity.

Details about core programs are available in the "Fields of Study" data set on the DASSH website <http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp>

- 6 Some fields of study or disciplines appear to expect a structured progression through the program. This is particularly evident in disciplines such as languages and psychology, where there is an expectation of incremental learning. In the Bachelor of Arts, students may not benefit from this structure as they piece together their programs from the range of modularised units on offer. This means that, despite the discipline often being planned coherently, there is freedom for students to ignore the recommended sequence. This is exacerbated by online enrolment which often allows students to enrol into units of study without prior discussion. This happens particularly in disciplines which may be unfamiliar to students.

2.2.3 Curriculum design

- 1 Students tend to develop their educational experience to varying degrees according to their interests. For the most part, academics teaching in the programs within the field of Arts have little control over this. Thus it could be argued that most contemporary Arts curricula are therefore determined by students, the administrative process, and time constraints.
- 2 There are also contexts (like work-based learning, and overseas exchanges) where people create their own curriculum and learning opportunities within a regulated framework.
- 3 Informants expressed the perception that online enrolment has had a profound impact on curriculum. Academics and administrators are no longer able to counsel students about which courses to take to develop a coherent program. Interviewees observed an increase in the number of students who did not correctly complete the program requirements and blamed the lack of contact with students as a reason for not being able to adequately counsel students. Three institutions are addressing this issue as part of their review processes, as a means to increase the level of staff/student engagement and to provide curriculum guidance. Most institutions provide an office that can support students in structuring their programs.
- 4 Some program outlines are highly complex and use language that presumes a high level of understanding in order to interpret what is required to complete a degree; or identify the processes required for choosing courses to develop a program.
- 5 It appears that much curriculum design is easily influenced by marketing departments answering the perceived market demands. This results in a constantly changing program that vacillates between the fashionable trends.

2.3 Assessment

Key findings

- 1 Assessment is often focused on the learning required within the units. There was no mention made of assessment of learning or of whether students attained the espoused graduate attributes across the program as a 'whole-of-program' outcome. However, while some participants found this to be a concern, others considered this to be a strength of the program.
- 2 Interviewees expressed the perception that there were differing assessment expectations on a unitary level to take into account 2nd and 3rd level of study, but this was at the discretion of the academics responsible for teaching the module. There is no monitoring reported to ensure that this is the case.

2.4 Educational philosophy

Key findings

- 1 A clear educational philosophy is frequently reported as missing on a program level in the BA.
- 2 There is a trend for the locus of the program design to be distanced from any pedagogical intentions or educational philosophy. This may be part of the question as to the value of the programs within the field of Arts that is constantly being asked.
- 3 Most academics consider that there is a clear philosophy that guides disciplines and informs how units within disciplines interact. This educational philosophical standpoint was expressed by many interviewees when talking about their teaching or the structure of the program. However, students experience many of the generic programs within the field of Arts as units, as separate and distinct modules. This means that the educational philosophy – the “why” the unit is integral to their experience of the whole course and the purpose behind the study – is constructed by the student. Students may not be equipped to understand this on a first year level, which may account for the notion that the program is somehow not valuable.
- 4 There appears to be few opportunities to explore with the students the philosophy behind the learning. Indeed, the educational philosophy – the why it ‘should be learnt’ – appears to be the responsibility of the student.
- 5 Interviewees and informants frequently referred to students only being able to make sense of the value of what they learnt once out in the workplace for a few years.
- 6 The project identified that the management of a program of the nature of the BA is a highly complex activity. It requires negotiation and management across a range of disciplinary pedagogies and organisational structures such as schools and Faculties. Many individuals with responsibility for these activities expressed a concern about potential limitations in their capacity and their knowledge of curriculum.

3. Advanced study programs

Advanced programs are programs that attract exceptional students or programs that offer a deeper understanding of a particular discipline. These are undergraduate programs that follow a liberal arts tradition.



3.1 Advanced programs

For 2009, nine institutions either offer or plan to offer a program design to attract and enhance the educational experience for exceptional students, mostly with an average TER score of over 90. Some have attracted students with high scores, such as the Monash program in 2007 where the ENTER score was set at 98.95. There has been an increase in the number of these programs. In 2001, only 3 institutions offered an Arts specific advanced program. This increased to 5 in 2006, but with a limited number of students totalling 75 students nation-wide.

These programs are called either Dean's Scholars programs or Advanced programs, and most offer an exit with an honours level. In most instances, these programs offer preferential facilities and access to research focused study units or engagement with researchers in a particular research field. Some programs straddle science and arts programs.

3.2 Honours programs

The honours programs remain the most common form of advanced program.

- 1 The majority of honours students are enrolled in GO8 institutions, with IRUA institutions following.
- 2 The University of Sydney has had the highest number of honours students enrolled in an Arts honours program between 2001 – 2006.
- 3 There has been a steady decline in the number of students taking an honours program between 2001 and 2006. In 2001, 4436 students enrolled in an Arts honours program. (The definition of Arts used here is as described in 2.1 above) This constituted 5.93% of the entire national Arts cohort. By 2006, 3157 students enrolled in Arts Honours programs or 4.11% of the whole cohort.

4. General trends across the programs within the field of Arts

The following sections emerge from a review of all the programs within the field of Arts that fit into the broader definition of the term, i.e. programs that may not be titled “Bachelor of Arts”, yet fit the definition articulated in Summary Report 2: What is the Australian BA?

Across the sector, programs within the field of Arts are diverse in terms of audience, offerings, intended outcomes and curriculum design. Different models of the BA are offered at different institutions (See Summary Report 2: What is the Australian BA? for details). Some institutions offer all models while others offer BA programs with a specific focus.

ATN institutions appear to be following a more vocational/professional structure while GO8 institutions appear to follow the traditional liberal arts degree model. This is supported by the fact that the ATN institutions are primarily those that do not offer a standard Bachelor of Arts that fit the definition described earlier. This is, however, changing as two of the institutions will be offering a traditional liberal arts style model in 2009.

4.1 Tertiary Entrance Ranking (TER) scores

There is a widely-held perception that there has been a steady decline in entrance scores for programs that fall within the field of Arts over the period 2001 – 2008. It is argued by project informants that the development of niche or tagged degrees (often the popular segments of the BA) has seen load carved from the traditional Arts degree. There is also evidence in some universities that the Arts degree acts as a “sop-up” degree for load not filled in other programs, which also has the effect of reducing the entrance score.

TER scores from the period 2001 – 2008 were gathered from 21 institutions, for programs specifically called the Bachelor of Arts. The 21 institutions are representative of the full range of types of universities, sizes and numbers of campuses.

The TER scores are recorded as part of the program profiles available on the DASSH website <http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp>

Key findings

- 1 The lowest institutional TER score for a Bachelor of Arts was 50.1 and the highest in this exercise was 87.2. There was a spike in the TER scores in 2003, which is in keeping with the spike in numbers of students enrolling in programs within the field of Arts at that time.
- 2 The average TER scores drop in rural campuses, and there is a noticeable difference between rural and metropolitan campus TER scores in multi-campus institutions.
- 3 The peak in 2003 and 2004 replicates the increase in demand at that time for programs within the field of Arts, 2003 numbers being the highest in the period under investigation.

Table 1: Average TER scores for BA programs across the project period

| 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------|----------|
| 68.77957 | 67.38261 | 73.03696 | 72.15435 | 70.03261 | 66.88478 | 66.5087 | 62.89348 |

Source: Institutional profile documents

4.2 Work Integrated Learning (WIL)

Work integrated learning as a part of an arts degree is gradually increasing in importance as a part of the learning activities in the programs within the field of Arts. In addition to industry related work experience, students are often encouraged to be involved in social or community-based programs.

Table 2: Prevalence of WIL in programs within the field of Arts

| | Institution | Community | | Industry | |
|--|-------------------------------------|------------|----------|------------|----------|
| | | Compulsory | Optional | Compulsory | Optional |
| Incorporated into BA structure | Australian Catholic University | ✓ | | | |
| | Deakin University | | | | ✓ |
| | Edith Cowan University | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Griffith University | ✓ | | | |
| | Queensland University of Technology | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | RMIT | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| | Swinburne University of Technology | | | | ✓ |
| | University of New England | | | | ✓ |
| | University of New South Wales | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | University of Notre Dame | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | University of Technology Sydney | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | University of Western Australia | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | University of Western Sydney | | ✓ | | |
| | University of Wollongong | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Victoria University | ✓ | | ✓ | |
| WIL opportunities depend upon the discipline studied | Australian National University | | | | ✓ |
| | Bond University | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Charles Darwin University | | | | ✓ |
| | James Cook University | | | ✓ | ✓ |
| | La Trobe University | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Macquarie University | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Monash University | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | Murdoch University | | | | ✓ |
| | University of Adelaide | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | University of Melbourne | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | University of Queensland | | ✓ | | ✓ |
| | University of South Australia | | | | ✓ |
| | University of Southern Queensland | | | | ✓ |
| | University of Sydney | | ✓ | | ✓ |

Source: Institutional profiles, interviews and course handbooks

Key findings

- 1 There is an increase in work related learning units in programs within the field of Arts and a focus on community and service related activities. This raises issues of available placements and skilled supervision and assessment.
- 2 An examination of review documents indicates that there is an increased movement towards including professional learning as an assessable core feature of the degree program. Institutions making this shift include Victoria University, Swinburne and Macquarie, each of which has an institutional strategic plan that will have implications for the programs within the field of Arts. This trend appears to be supported by Vice-Chancellors across Australia. The media release of position paper *"A National Internship Scheme: enhancing skills and work-readiness of Australian university graduates"* calls for collaborative action to further enhance the employment skills of university students and graduates. (Universities Australia, Thursday 8 May 2008)
- 3 The data gathered via the profiles and interviews in this project appears to be at odds with the data provided by DEST/DEEWR. This data is available in the load data sets from the DASSH website. The discrepancy may be due to the change in regulations regarding funding and definition of work integrated learning. The DEST/DEEWR data indicating the total EFSTL of students enrolled in programs within the field of Arts who have been involved in some form of work in industry takes a drastic drop in the EFSTLs allocated to 2005 and 2006. This phenomenon may be in keeping with the new definition of work in industry introduced in 2005. EFSTL allocated to the new DEST/DEEWR definition is predominantly from students engaged in Media Studies. This data suggests that the work-integrated learning articulated in Table 2 above does not fill the DEEWR funding requirements.

The study identified the different types of work integrated learning that form part of the programs within the field of Arts and the discrepancies in EFTSL recorded by DEST/DEEWR as being involved in these programs. These data are collated and available from the DASSH website. In light of the recent interest and directions expressed by Universities Australia (Universities Australia, Thursday 8 May 2008), developing a definition of work integrated learning as it applies to the Arts is becoming a crucial issue.



4.3 Attrition/ retention

Attrition and retention was viewed by all informants as an issue of concern. Qualitative data related to attrition was difficult to extract from participants. The following key findings emerge from informants and a review of related projects.

Key findings

- 1 Overwhelmingly, the interviewees express the opinion that attrition rates from the BA are artificial. They are of the opinion that the BA is expressed and marketed as a feeder into the University, meaning attrition rates are artificially high as students move into other programs within the same institution.
- 2 Most interviewees commented that it was difficult to get accurate and reliable data regarding attrition and retention from within their institutions, let alone across the sector.
- 3 A study by ACER in 2004 indicated that students in Humanities/Social Science programs are more likely to move to other programs that have a vocational emphasis (Long, Ferrier, & Heagney, 2006). This supports the perceptions that interviewees and round table participants expressed – that the BA is used as a pathway or as a testing ground for students before they decide what they want to do.
- 4 Four universities are currently engaged in projects that specifically address the issue of attrition from a BA program.

Details about projects are available via the
"Projects" data sets on the DASSH website
<http://www.dassh.edu.au/basp>

4.4 Perceptions of strengths, challenges and outcomes of programs within the field of Arts

Those project participants within teaching, administration and management identified what they perceived to be the strengths, limitations and key outcomes of the BA programs through the surveys, round table discussions and interviews. Data was also collected from DASSH members (mostly heads of schools or Executive Deans) who participated in the DASSH conference workshops. Responses were gathered and collated to form a qualitative data set that was then analysed using Nvivo software.

Key findings

- 1 The key strengths were almost uniformly identified as the flexibility and the diversity of the areas of studies and the programs.
- 2 Key outcomes were seen to be the ability to think and operate in a critical fashion, to be able to adapt to the “super-complexities” (Barnett, 2004) of the modern world, and to communicate. The following table (Table 3) lists the key outcomes as identified by respondents in the online survey in order of the number of responses.

It would be useful to match these with student perceptions that could be gathered in further studies.

Table 3: Key outcomes of the BA

| Outcome | # of mentions |
|--|---------------|
| Critical Thinking / Analytical skills | 150 |
| Humanistic Education, broadening of horizons | 122 |
| Communication skills, writing particularly mentioned | 115 |
| Generic skills | 45 |
| Research skills | 41 |
| Adaptability | 34 |
| Life Long Learning / Independent learning | 19 |
| Tertiary literacies | 19 |
| Cultural understanding | 18 |
| Disciplinary knowledge and skills | 17 |
| WIL / practical experience / applied skills | 9 |
| Information gathering and processing skills | 9 |
| BA is not about employment | 5 |
| Depends on the discipline | 4 |

Source: Online survey of academic staff teaching into the BA

Hardly surprisingly, there were more challenges than strengths or outcomes identified in the survey. Financial constraints and resourcing issues were mentioned most frequently, combined with a sense of reduction in quality of teaching and learning. The perceived value of the BA was the next highest challenge. In this respect, most respondents focused on the lack of a clear link between a generic BA and employability. Another concern identified by participants was the growing number of students commencing university inadequately prepared for university study.

4.5 State differences

As a result of the round table meetings and interviews, it became apparent that there were common issues across the regions that need to be addressed or to be taken into cognisance when considering programs within the field of Arts.

Key findings

- 1 Queensland institutions share three uniquely Queensland experiences.
 - > an evolved school curriculum means no guarantee of what's been taught in schools, expressed perception that this range of abilities is wider than those of other states;
 - > Queensland school learners are younger than the national average. A new state requirement implemented in 2007 for a Grade 0 in schools may change this, but it won't have any impact for at least the next 12 years;
 - > OP scores and ability to improve them, rather than reliance on an improved GPA as a mechanism to gain access to programs with a higher TER score may have implications on retention rates. The suggestion is that students enrol into “easier” programs in order to improve their OP scores so they can access other courses – in effect using a first year as a year 13 school year.
- 2 In most states the inclusion of BA programs in double degrees is dictated in many ways by the registration boards or employers' requirements for disciplines (traditional teaching subjects) in order for accreditation for teaching. This is problematic for smaller institutions which have moved towards multidisciplinary majors to cope with staffing challenges.

4.6 Student access

The complexity of language and structures of BA programs as communicated via the web and publicity materials makes it intimidating for those who are not familiar with the language and processes of Australian higher education. The flexibility and open choice which are identified as the strengths of the BA, make the program appear unintuitive and complex.

Key findings

- 1 The use of websites as a mechanism of dissemination of course details can result in incoherent and contradictory information being circulated. The project team found instances where the information on Faculty websites differed to what was on the institutional 'course finder' web pages. In some instances, institutional 'course finders' are arranged according to professional outcomes, making a Bachelor of Arts difficult to find. Potential students are required to search for programs according to professional outcomes rather than programs. Others focus on discipline areas. In more than one instance, searching for a Bachelor of Arts produced some incorrect results that indicated that the institution did not have such a program; or listed the incorrect program as the only institutional offering. This was at odds with hard copy and Faculty publicity. It appears as institutions are unclear about what the BA is and does, making it hard to slot into what the institution is promoting itself through these types of instruments.
- 2 Using the tertiary entrance agencies as a tool for searching for programs raises the same issues. Search parameters on the most of these search facilities make searching for a Bachelor of Arts difficult or something that doesn't appear as a top result.
- 3 There is a perception that the community – particularly students, school career counsellors and parents – are not clear about what is meant by "Arts".

4.7 Standards and equivalences

A different range of offerings of majors may exist in programs within the field of Arts that are offered over multiple campuses, both onshore and offshore. It is possible for students to have a range of experiences over the length of their degree in the same program in the same institution; depending on what majors they have chosen and which campuses they were based. Students may graduate with the same degree, but have experienced an entirely different course of study.

Key findings

- 1 There is no notion of standards and/or equivalence across the disciplines. Most program reviews look across institutions as a benchmarking exercise with similar programs offered by institutions that might be considered peers. There seems to be few review processes that look within the institution, into the disciplines and the units that make up the degree program.

4.8 Decreasing enrolments

The Society and Culture field of education program consists of the second largest group of students in the sector, second only to Management and Commerce. Programs that are classified as belonging to the broad field of study Society and Culture show that there is a steady increase in the number of students, both commencing and enrolled, suggesting that students enrolling in these programs stay within them (See Table 1). At surface level, the observation made by Pascoe, et al (2003) that *"the future of the Humanities in Australia seems secure"* appears to be supported by the data.

However, the data initially appeared to be at odds with the concern at the attrition rates from BA programs expressed by almost all interviewees and project informants. This trend is supported by examination across the data related to the groups as defined in the project. The Arts definition used here indicates that this is a very different picture to the one described by Pascoe et al in 2002. This data indicates a slow, steady decrease in student numbers in BA programs.

The percentage of students who have been engaged in undergraduate programs in the field of Arts has dropped from 8% of the total student enrolment in 2001 to 5.8% in 2006. This is despite the fact that the actual enrolment in the broader Society and Culture definition has been increasing steadily over the last few years – largely in the areas of Psychology and Law. Note that although there has been an increase in numbers of students engaged in Society and Culture programs, the percentage of Society and Culture in contrast to the total student enrolment has declined between 2001 and 2006.

Table 4: Enrolments and percentage of enrolments in Society and Culture programs for commencing and all students 2001 – 2007

| Year | Commencing Students | | | All Students | | |
|--------|---------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|
| | No. | % of total enrolments | % increase from previous year | No. | % of total enrolments | % increase from previous year |
| 2007 * | 65,723 | 21.60% | 5.50% | 199,347 | 22.20% | 4.70% |
| 2006 | 79,412 | 20.80% | 4.80% | 216,193 | 21.97% | 3.80% |
| 2005 | 75,781 | 20.54% | 7.63% | 208,275 | 21.76% | 2.48% |
| 2004 | 70,411 | 19.40% | -1.30% | 203,236 | 21.50% | 0.20% |
| 2003 | 71,345 | 19.40% | -1.20% | 202,738 | 21.80% | 3.50% |

Source: (Department of Education Science and Training, 2007)

* Note: Data for first half of 2007 only

Table 5: Enrolments and percentage of Society and Culture enrolments against total enrolments 2001 – 2006

| Year | Total enrolments | Society & Culture enrolments | Society & Culture as % of total enrolments |
|------|------------------|------------------------------|--|
| 2006 | 984,146 | 216,193 | 22.0% |
| 2005 | 957,176 | 208,275 | 21.8% |
| 2004 | 944,977 | 203,236 | 21.5% |
| 2003 | 929,952 | 202,738 | 21.8% |
| 2002 | 896,621 | 195,965 | 21.9% |
| 2001 | 726,418 | 168,571 | 23.2% |

Source: Derived from DEST selected higher education statistics available http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/publications_resources/profiles/ (Department of Education Science and Training, 2007)

Figure 1 illustrates the percentage of enrolments in programs in the field of Arts as a portion of the Society and Culture enrolments and the steady decline of enrolments between 2001 and 2006. (Note: the definition of Arts is restricted to DEST code groups 901, 903, 911 (excluding 91105), 913, 915, 917, 919, 99999, 1007; including honours, but not other postgraduate programs and including combined/ double degree programs unless otherwise indicated).

Using these definitions, there is also a clear shift over the last few years in contrast with the earlier study about the chief providers of the program. Pascoe (2003) identified the following institutions as the nine institutions enrolling the most Arts students: University of Sydney, University of Melbourne, University of Queensland, Monash University, La Trobe University, University of Newcastle, Griffith University, Deakin University and University of Western Sydney. Table 6 illustrates the institutions that attracted the largest number of enrolments in the period 2001 – 2006, indicating a clear shift. Reasons to explain this beyond the

changes in definition used between the two studies, are explored further below.

There are a range of views as to why there is a decrease in uptake of programs within the field of Arts. The following were the most common reasons expressed in the round tables and through the interviews, in order of frequency:

- 1 Competing tagged programs and double degrees are taking away the numbers,
- 2 Too much choice within Arts – the tyranny of too many options,
- 3 Students want jobs and do not see Arts as vocational,
- 4 Students and parents do not see the value of a generalist education,
- 5 Because of HECS, students have to pay for their education and want to see immediate outcomes.



Figure 1: Programs in the field of Arts against programs in the DEST field of study of Society and Culture 2001 – 2006

Table 6: Institutions with the highest number of enrolments 2001 – 2006

| Bachelor of Arts only | Broader definition of Arts to include programs within the field of Arts |
|--|--|
| The University of Queensland The University of Melbourne The University of Sydney Monash University La Trobe University The University of New England Deakin University University of Tasmania The University of New South Wales | The University of Queensland Monash University The University of Sydney The University of Melbourne La Trobe University University of Western Sydney The University of New England The University of New South Wales Deakin University |

Note: The enrolment numbers used to develop this table did not include double degrees or honours programs

4.9 Bachelor of Arts is under change

Bachelor of Arts programs are in a constant state of flux, and in 2006/7/8 this has been particularly apparent. Sixty-five percent of the BA programs offered in Australia (or 24 of the 37 examined) are in the process of change, in some instances, a profound shift. Table 7 provides an outline of the programs that are currently under change and the proposed or actual changes. This information was drawn from a review of institutional curriculum review documentation and from the round table meetings or interviews.

Key findings

- 1 Of the 37 programs subjected to close examination during the project:
 - > Six are undergoing a standard cycle of review
 - > Eight are undergoing faculty restructuring
 - > Fifteen are either implementing an entirely new program in 2008/2009 or developing a program for implementation in 2010.
- 2 The most common outcome of a review, for most institutions, is the reduction in the number of majors on offer rather than a major curriculum change.
- 3 A trend away from mixed upper levels can be observed. There appears to be a gradual movement towards making distinctly separate 2nd and 3rd level set of programs in some institutions, but this is by no means uniform. While some programs are currently under major review as part of institutional renewal and appear to be moving to this model, others have moved towards a curriculum model of foundational level followed by an upper level.
- 4 Many of the above changes are in response to reviews that have found the curriculum to have become inflexible, overly burdensome in the proliferation of the number of programs, and the problems created in attempting to service them.
- 5 There is a general trend to include some form of work integrated learning program, often in the form of service or community work; and to offer some sense of exit unit or capstone program.
- 6 There is a general movement towards programs that offer learning activities that enact some form of social awareness or responsibility beyond that of universities with a particular mission or ethos because of background. Examples include ACU, Notre Dame; Griffith, with the new social enterprises implemented in 2008 and Macquarie, with the proposed institutional commitment to be implemented in 2010.



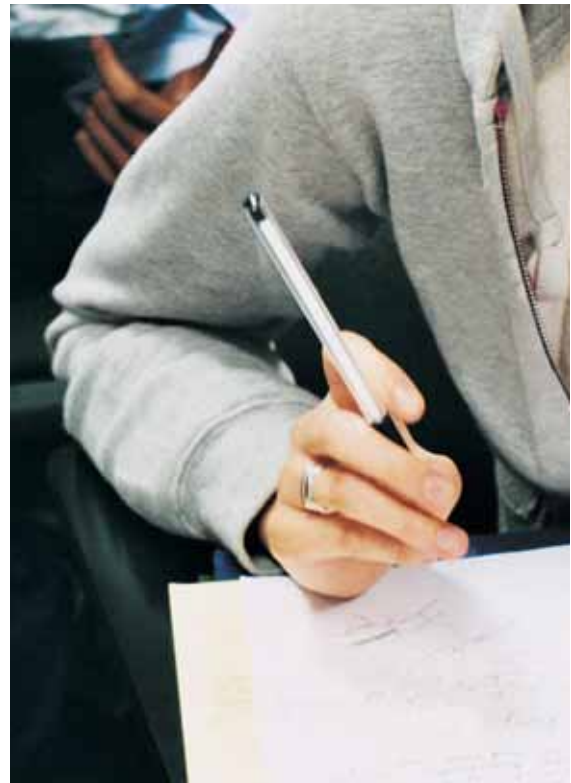
Table 7: Programs in change and analysis of the reasons for the changes

| Changes | Implement date | Reason | Changes |
|-----------|----------------|---|--|
| Griffiths | 2008 | curriculum review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> curriculum restructure core program developed development of 'social enterprises' module |
| SCU | 2008 | institutional strategy "New Directions" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of core units into program culling of the disciplines feeding into the Arts programs |
| Melbourne | 2008 | institutional strategy "The Melbourne Model" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> implementation of new program structural changes including culling disciplines to introduce majors and remove double degrees |
| QUT | 2008 | institutional strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> phase out BA looking at redeveloping for release in 2009/10 |
| Adelaide | 2009 | curriculum review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> entirely new program offered culled disciplines |
| UTS | 2009 | curriculum review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> whole new program to be offered |
| La Trobe | 2009 | curriculum review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> whole new program to be offered |
| UTas | 2010 | curriculum review | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> restructuring of majors |
| Macquarie | 2010 | institutional strategy "Macquarie @ 50" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> proposed reduction of number of programs offered to include service component plus possible inclusion of compulsory science-based and humanities-based units |
| UNSW | 2009 | institutional review of academic programs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> BA is the 1st program to be revised intro of 'gateway' and 'capstone' units |
| Curtin | 2010 | institutional strategy "Curtin 2010" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> restructuring of program possibly to reduce 4 programs into 1 generic program |
| VU | 2010 | institutional strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> commitment to learning in the workplace and community @ 25% of each program's assessment to be in workplace context |
| Swinburne | 2010 | institutional strategy "Curriculum Framework Project" and "Swinburne Professional Learning model" | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to make all generalist degrees have a similar structure align curriculum with outcomes specifically in terms of professional learning |

Source: Institutional profiles and interviews

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