Curtin Academy: Proposed Model

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Introduction

This paper proposes a model for development of the Curtin Academy. The Curtin Teaching Excellence Framework underpins the aims of the Curtin Academy in line with Curtin’s vision, mission, values and strategic direction of Learning for Tomorrow. Development of the Curtin Academy is a key initiative within the University’s Teaching, Learning and Student Services Plan 2013 - 2017.

The Curtin Academy resides within the Curtin Learning Institute (CLI) to support Curtin’s vision to be recognised as an international leader in research and education and its mission to change minds, lives and the world through leadership, innovation and excellence in teaching and research while living Curtin’s values. The deliverables for the CLI are the; establishment of a Curtin Academy to recognise and promote a culture of teaching excellence; invitation and induction of nominated teaching Fellows into the Curtin Academy; and the development and implementation of a range of activities to recognise and enhance teaching excellence.

The aim of the Curtin Academy is to recognise, reward, enable and extend excellence in teaching at the University, nationally and internationally. The overarching purpose of the Curtin Academy is to promote a culture of teaching excellence by engaging our outstanding teachers, and encouraging them to provide colleagues the opportunity to learn from their expertise and exceptional pedagogical practice (Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Plan 2013-2017, p.6).

The model presented in this paper is based on results of an environmental scan of teaching and learning academies worldwide and contextual understanding of Curtin’s people, culture and strategic foci.

Background

Curtin’s Strategic Plan 2013-2017 states Curtin’s people and culture is committed to leadership, innovation and excellence. Development of the Curtin Academy and the percentage of staff recognised for excellence in teaching are two key performance measures indicative of Curtin’s success in reforming Curtin’s teaching and learning model (Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Plan 2013-2017, p.6).

The number and scope of awards and grants won by Curtin staff since 1999 is shown in Table 1. Some staff members have left the University and some have won multiple awards so the number of current staff members who have won awards may vary from the figures shown in Table 1. However, in spite of the high numbers of staff being recognised for excellence in teaching, to date there has been no system in place to foster collaboration and dissemination of teaching excellence. Hence the need for a mechanism to foster collaboration and dissemination of teaching excellence was seen as essential to the achievement of the University’s strategic direction, Learning for Tomorrow.
In September 2013, an environmental scan identified 16 university teaching academies (5 in Australia, 2 in Singapore, 9 in the United States of America) and the (national) Higher Education Academy (HEA) in the United Kingdom. In December 2013, this initial understanding of teaching academies was informed by a visit to the National University of Singapore (NUS) and discussions with the Deputy Director of the NUS Teaching Academy. The environmental scan also revealed similarities between teaching academies in universities and national entities such as Australian Learning and Teaching Fellows Network (ALTF), the Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia Fellows (HERDSAF) and the Association of National Teaching Fellows (ANTF in the HEA). The model proposed in this paper has been developed as a result of evaluating and synthesising national and global approaches to recognition of teaching excellence in alignment with Curtin’s vision, mission, values and Strategic Plan 2013-2017.

Analysis of data gleaned from consultation and the environmental scan revealed a range of distinctive characteristics in terms of the purpose, membership, selection criteria and activities of these academies. These ideas were refined in February 2014 by consultation with an advisory group comprised of key stakeholders (including representatives from all Faculties) and incorporated in this proposed model.

**Proposed Model**

The following outlines the aims, benefits, structure, Fellowship, and activities of the proposed model.

**Curtin Academy Aims**

The Curtin Academy will be an active honorary, network of exceptional teaching staff (teaching focused and teaching research) committed to the collaboration and dissemination of teaching excellence at Curtin. It will take a key advisory role in the strategic leadership and decision making in relation to teaching and learning.
The aims of the Curtin Academy are to:

a) Foster innovation, development and enhancement of teaching excellence;
b) Promote and encourage a culture of teaching excellence;
c) Create an independent, learned voice to advocate on behalf of teaching and learning;
d) Provide strategic leadership and decision making advice in teaching and learning matters;
e) Provide strategic advice to the University in relation to scholarly teaching and/or the scholarship of teaching;
f) Create opportunities for teachers to interact regarding the scholarship and/or experience of teaching and learning; and
g) Inform and support the Curtin’s teaching and learning priorities.

**Benefits to the University and Staff**

The benefits of establishing the Curtin Academy include:

a) Creating a sense of ‘belonging’ for exceptional teaching staff;
b) Providing recognition for and acknowledgement of staff for excellence in teaching;
c) Promoting a University culture of teaching excellence;
d) Encouraging collegiality in sharing expertise and pedagogical excellence within a community of practice;
e) Providing professional development and career opportunities for staff; and
f) Enhancing the quality of teaching and learning at Curtin by providing strategic planning and decision making advice.

**Structure and Governance**

A Terms of Reference (see Appendix 1) will govern the way in which the Curtin Academy operates and is managed. The Terms of Reference specify the roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, term and composition of membership, decisions and voting rights, meeting frequency and reporting.

The Curtin Academy will be developed initially by an Advisory Group comprised of representatives from across all Faculties and other key areas. The Advisory Group will be responsible for the selection and induction of the first cohort of Fellows to the Curtin Academy. Thereafter a Curtin Academy Executive will be elected by and from the inducted Fellows. Governance of the Curtin Academy will then be by this Executive which will be comprised of up to six Fellows and two ex-officio officers who will lead and manage the Curtin Academy according to the Terms of Reference.

**Curtin Academy Fellowship**

The first cohort of Fellows inducted into the Curtin Academy will be a maximum of 20, and thereafter be up to five per annum. Fellowship will be for a period of three years. Fellows may reapply for Fellowship.

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1 The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning for Curtin is systematic inquiry, critique, research and development in teaching, learning and the broader educational context which advances and publicly provides educational benefit to students, staff and the higher education sector.
There will be four pathways through which nominations for membership as a Curtin Academy Fellow can be initiated;

a) By invitation from the Curtin Academy;
b) Nomination by Faculties and Schools;
c) Self-nomination; and
d) Open nomination.

All nominees will be required to submit an expression of interest (EOI), which includes a completed nomination form and a covering letter in which they address one or more of the selection criteria and outline how they can contribute to the Curtin Academy.

Once inducted as a Curtin Academy Fellow, fellowship will be for a period of three years, renewable, during their employment with Curtin.

**Commitment**

To achieve the goals and purpose of the Curtin Academy, members will be expected to participate in the following ways;

a) Attend collegiate events and/or induction of new fellows (3-6 per annum);
b) Contribute to one Curtin Academy project per annum;
c) Provide advice on strategic teaching and learning matters;
d) Assist with the development of teaching and learning strategy;
e) Be actively involved in peer review of teaching; and
f) Foster communication and connection between Schools, Faculties and the Curtin Academy.

**Establishment of the Curtin Academy**

An Advisory Group of key stakeholders, including representatives from all Faculties, was convened to provide advice about the establishment of the Curtin Academy. This Advisory Group will progress the establishment of the Curtin Academy, operating under the Terms of Reference (Appendix 1). The Advisory Group has developed selection criteria and will appoint an independent knowledgeable group to assist in the shortlisting and appointment of Fellows. Following this, the Advisory Group will be responsible for induction of the inaugural group of 20 Fellows. In consultation with the newly inducted Curtin Academy Fellows, the Advisory Group will be responsible for identifying key initiatives for the remainder of 2014, commencing the implementation of these initiatives and arranging for the election of the inaugural Curtin Academy Executive from the inducted Fellows.

Strategic teaching and learning funding has been allocated for the initial establishment of the Curtin Academy through the Curtin Learning Institute project. Once the Curtin Academy is fully operational, it will operate as business as usual within allocated Curtin Learning Institute recurrent funding. Where larger projects are proposed requiring significant funding, opportunities will be investigated via the Office for Learning and Teaching grants system or an appropriate request will be submitted to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education for consideration for University strategic funding.

**Eligibility for Fellowship**

Expressions of interest will be sought from nominees who;
a) Have been employed by Curtin for at least three years;
b) Have the ability to work cooperatively with staff at all levels; and
c) Are willing to actively engage with the governance and activities of the Curtin Academy.

Where there is no conflict of interest, staff regardless of the level of appointment or whether they have completed their doctorate or not will be able to apply, if they meet the above eligibility requirements. Fellows will be selected on merit and participation in the Curtin Academy will be voluntary and honorary.

**Selection criteria**

All nominees will be required to submit an expression of interest in which they demonstrate their sustained excellence in teaching in their responses to two of the following criteria:

1. Proven track record of using innovative approaches to enhance student learning;
2. Significant contribution to professional development of colleagues;
3. Development of unique internationally recognized teaching and learning programs or models;
4. Demonstrated understanding of the higher education sector and insights into how policy might evolve in this area;
5. Demonstrated sustained engagement in pedagogy beyond the University;
6. Demonstrated relevant engagement with external stakeholders; or
7. Proven track record of evidence-based research and/or scholarship in higher education, including achievement of high quality grants and publications.

**Selection process**

The selection process is by way of an expression of interest which is submitted to the Curtin Learning Institute cli@curtin.edu.au and includes:

- Submission of a signed expression of interest; and
- A 2-3 page curriculum vitae.

Depending on the number of expressions of interest, shortlisted nominees may be invited to participate in a 30 minute interview.

Assessment and shortlisting of expressions of interest will be conducted by the Curtin Academy Executive who will notify the nominees, in writing, of the outcome of the selection process.

**Examples of some possible activities of the Curtin Academy**

The number, nature and scope of special projects will be determined by the expertise, resources and planning of the Curtin Academy, managed through the Executive. The following list of activities indicates some of the types of activities that might eventuate.

- Mentoring – awards, grants, fellowships, scholarly teaching, scholarship of teaching;
- Peer review – teaching, applications for awards, grants, fellowships, research in scholarship of teaching;
- Open Door Classrooms – peer-based professional learning;
- Participation in special projects, in conjunction with Academic Study Leave;
- Exchange programs with (inter)national universities;
- Visiting scholars;
- Creation of resources exemplifying teaching excellence;
- Relationship building within and across higher education institutions;
- Strategic planning, leadership and decision making;
- Community of practice; and
- Special interest groups.

**Timeframe**

Planning and scoping of the project commenced in 2013, with an environmental scan, resulting in the development of the proposed model in this paper. The development phase will run until the first round of Fellows are inducted into the Curtin Academy and an inaugural Executive elected.

The following provides an indicative forecast for key activities:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Task</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7 April 2014</td>
<td>UTLC endorsement for the Proposed Curtin Academy Model</td>
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<td>7 April – 19 May 2014</td>
<td>Consultation with Faculties on Proposed Model</td>
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<td>30 May 2014</td>
<td>Academic Board approval of Proposed Curtin Academy Model</td>
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<td>June 2014</td>
<td>Curtin Academy website to go live</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Open nominations and request expressions of interest (9 June)</td>
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<tr>
<td>July 2014</td>
<td>Close nominations and expressions of interest (18 July)</td>
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<td>August 2014</td>
<td>Notification of outcome (week commencing 11 Aug)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Team building and strategic planning activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 2014</td>
<td>Launch the Curtin Academy</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Induct 2014 Curtin Academy Fellows (September)</td>
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<td>November 2014</td>
<td>Showcase Curtin Academy and induct new members at awards ceremony</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Election of Curtin Academy Executive</td>
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<td>December 2014</td>
<td>Development of Curtin Academy program of activities for 2015</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Develop and implement an evaluation strategy</td>
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<td>Evaluate Curtin Academy initiative</td>
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<td>Report prepared for DVC Education</td>
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<td>January/February 2015</td>
<td>Launch of Program of 2015 activities</td>
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<td>June 2015</td>
<td>Open nominations and request expressions of interest</td>
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<tr>
<td>August 2015</td>
<td>Notification of outcome</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Report to DVC Education</td>
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Curtin Teaching Academy

Terms of Reference

The Curtin Academy is an active honorary, network of exceptional staff (teaching focused and teaching research) passionate about and committed to the collaboration and dissemination of teaching excellence. The establishment of the Curtin Academy is a joint initiative by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education and the Curtin Learning Institute and supports the Teaching, Learning and Student Experience Plan 2013-2017.

1. Role/Purpose

The role of the Curtin Academy is to celebrate, foster and promote teaching excellence at the University, nationally and internationally.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

The Curtin Academy will:

2.1 Foster innovation, development and enhancement of teaching excellence;

2.2 Promote and encourage a culture of teaching excellence;

2.3 Create an independent, learned voice to advocate on behalf of teaching and learning;

2.4 Provide strategic leadership and decision making advice on teaching and learning matters;

2.5 Provide advice to the University in relation to scholarly teaching and/or the scholarship of teaching1;

2.6 Create opportunities for teachers to interact regarding the scholarship and experience of teaching and learning; and

2.7 Inform and support the Curtin’s teaching and learning priorities.

The Curtin Academy will be accountable for:

2.8 Liaising with the Curtin Learning Institute regarding proposed initiatives and programs.

_1 The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning for Curtin is systematic inquiry, critique, research and development in teaching, learning and the broader educational context which advances and publicly provides educational benefit to students, staff and the higher education sector._
2.8 Selecting and inducting new Fellows on an annual basis in accordance with approved selection criteria and processes.

2.9 Implementation of initiatives and strategies to support the aim and role of the Curtin Academy.

3. **Term**

This Terms of Reference is effective from May 2014 and continues until the December 2015 unless terminated by agreement of the Curtin Academy Executive.

The term of office of the members of the Curtin Academy Executive who are not *ex officio* members is to be for two years commencing on 1 April and concluding on 31 March. A member may serve consecutive terms but no more than three successive terms. The term of office of Fellows will be three years, renewable.

3. **Membership**

The Curtin Academy Executive will comprise the following membership:

3.1 Chair and Deputy Chair (appointed by the Curtin Academy Executive);
3.2 Six members comprised of members inducted to the Curtin Academy through an approved selection process including the Chair, Deputy Chair, elected by the Academy Fellows;
3.3 Executive Officer; and
3.4 Secretary.

4. **Decisions and Voting Rights**

4.1 Members, including the Chair, will have voting rights for matters contained within this Terms of Reference Roles and Responsibilities. Decisions will be made by consensus, if in the event of any unresolved decision, the decision of the Chair will be final.

4.2 The Chair, by agreement with members of the Curtin Academy Executive, may co-opt individuals for specific tasks as required. These members will hold an observer status.

5. **Meetings**

5.1 Meetings shall be convened quarterly or as determined by the Chair.
5.2 A meeting quorum will be one half of members including online attendance.
5.3 Any recommendations for approval which fall outside of this Terms of Reference shall be referred to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education for consideration.
6. **Reporting**

6.1 The Curtin Academy shall provide an annual report on activities to the University Teaching and Learning Committee via the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education or more regularly as determined by the Curtin Academy Executive.

7. **Amendment, Variation or Review**

7.1 This Terms of Reference may be amended, varied or modified after consultation with the Curtin Academy Executive members and approval by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Education.

7.2 This Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually by the Curtin Academy Executive.