

**AIMING HIGH: CAN THE NEW ZEALAND DIPLOMA IN BUSINESS
CREATE THE GRADUATES IT DESIRES?**

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Abstract

The new NZDipBus is an interesting national qualification. Owned by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), it is not a unit standard based qualification, such as the National Diploma in Business nor is it grounded in any higher education provider as are business degrees. It is a stand alone qualification, not aligned to any specific institution or educational strategy. The graduate profile was developed by NZQA in an extensive and careful consultation process. Over the last two years NZQA, in conjunction with business representatives and academics, has developed a new version (Version 2) of the highly successful NZDipBus. This development process was in response to requests for curriculum update from higher education providers, the business community, the National Advisory Committee for Business Studies of the Institutes of Technology and the Polytechnics of New Zealand (ITPNZ) forum.

The aim of this paper is firstly to explore whether the graduate profile is appropriate for developing business graduates for the 21st century and secondly to evaluate whether the graduate profile is embedded into the curricula to ensure it will produce graduates with the capability of demonstrating the graduate outcomes.

The NZDipBus graduate profile while focusing on business skills and ethical awareness lacks focus in key areas. There is no specific acknowledgement of students need for knowledge to be of global use. The graduate profile does not address information and communication skills, personal development or reflective capacity or focus on developing

the international capabilities of graduates. The graduate outcomes need further explanation to guide curricula developers as to how knowledge, skills, attributes and values are to be integrated and developed within the teaching and learning environment. Overseas governments and higher education providers are well aware of the impact of these trends on the qualifications and are taking deliberate steps to include specific graduate outcomes in qualifications. The NZDipBus graduate programme designers appear to have missed a wonderful opportunity to re-vision the qualification for the 21st century by acknowledging and incorporating these important trends into a popular business qualification.

Curriculum developers have not embedded interpersonal and communication skills, ethical and cultural issues, working within teams into the curriculum of the courses reviewed. This is probably due to lack of direction from the programme developers. The curriculum appears to be almost singularly focused on knowledge and skills to the detriment of attributes and values. Furthermore, teaching and learning activities and assessment will not develop graduate outcomes unless there is a clear alignment between the graduate profile and the course learning outcomes. Essentially, the qualification is not delivering what is promised because of a lack of leadership and alignment.

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Introduction

"...higher and professional education is distinctively vested with the responsibility of teaching critical and systemic thought and initiating young lives into a responsible apprehension first of the realities and questions of a vast and mysterious universe and second of our participation within it. Higher education is intended to serve as a primary site of inquiry, reflection and cultivation of knowledge and understanding on behalf of the wider culture." Sharon Daloz Parks, (2000) Big Questions Worthy Dreams

In the above statement Sharon Daloz Parks sets a challenge for programme designers of the New Zealand Diploma in Business (NZDipBus). The challenge is to create a relevant and useful qualification that prepares graduates for life and work. Similarly, Fred Halliday (1999) wrote a paper based on a public lecture he gave on leaving the London School of Economics. He wrote, "*...the two things that will be most needed in the next century; to be self-critical and to be wise. These are qualities that come through real contact and intellectual discussion*". The programme designers have been set a difficult task to design a set of graduate outcomes that will serve graduates well into the 21st century and at the same time serve the local business community. This paper explores the background to the development of NZDipBus version 2, explores the appropriateness of the revised graduate profile and assesses the likelihood of the graduate profile producing the graduates the programme developers' desire. Finally, the paper reviews the implications of failing to immediate action, something that may cause the ultimate demise of the NZDipBus.

Background

The new NZDipBus is an interesting national qualification. Owned by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), it is not a unit standard based qualification, such as the National Diploma in Business nor is it grounded in any higher education provider as are business degrees. It is a stand alone qualification, not aligned to any specific institution or educational strategy. The graduate profile was developed by NZQA in an extensive and careful consultation process. Over the last two years NZQA, in conjunction with business representatives and academics, has developed a new version (Version 2) of the highly successful NZDipBus. This development process was in response to requests for curriculum update from higher education providers, the business community, the National Advisory Committee for Business Studies of the Institutes of Technology and the Polytechnics of New Zealand (ITPNZ) forum.

As part of the regeneration of the NZDipBus, a new graduate profile was developed. This new graduate profile is more condensed and focused than the previous one. (A copy of the graduate profile is attached in appendix one.) The graduate outcomes are simply stated without additional explanation. The graduate outcomes are aligned to the employers' expectations of graduates similar to those identified by Hodges et. al. (2004), and Hodges and Burchell (2003). The focus of the graduate profile is on developing a range of generic outcomes that could be found in a range of undergraduate qualifications. Further, graduate outcomes should align with government policy, institutional objectives and industry needs. (Bowden and Marton, 1998) The programme designers have sought to draw all these influences together to ensure the graduate profile focuses on meeting the needs of business and the new economy of the 21st century.

A number of higher education institutions have also developed generic capabilities for all their undergraduate programmes. In March 2003, the University of Auckland Senate approved a generic graduate profile for undergraduate degrees. (University of Auckland, 2007) The profile focuses on specialist knowledge, general intellectual skills and capabilities and personal qualities. The University is committed to developing both professional and personal qualities in undergraduates. At the University of South Australia (1995) a list of graduate qualities is available for programme developers to embed into curricula. For example some of the qualities desired in graduates include a body of knowledge, pursuit of personal development and excellence in professional practice, problem solving, autonomous and collaborative work, ethical action and social responsibility.

The programme designers have faced an additional challenge to embed the graduate profile within curricula. A graduate profile framework is grounded in the idea that curricula should be designed to enable students to develop and demonstrate desired graduate outcomes before completing their programme of study. These desired graduate outcomes are embedded within the professional education and disciplinary fields to integrate knowledge, skills, attributes and values across programmes. To successfully develop graduate outcomes into a study programme requires constructive alignment between the graduate profile, course aims and subject objectives, teaching and learning activities and assessment. (Biggs, 2003). The success of the programme will ultimately depend on how well these graduate outcomes are developed throughout the students' study programme and what knowledge, skills, attributes and values they demonstrate on completion.

If no coordinated approach is taken to the graduate profile and the curricula of the NZDipBus there is little likelihood that the graduates of the programme will demonstrate

the outcome specified in the graduate profile. The funding providers will not have the graduates needed for the new economy, higher education providers will be falling short of their responsibilities to funding providers and students will not receive the education they have paid for and deserve. With most stakeholders dissatisfied with the performance of the NZDipBus it is unlikely to survive in the long term. Urgent action is needed now.

Issues

The new NZDipBus graduate profile is an acknowledgement that there are new emerging needs for graduates of business programmes. Some of the old graduate profile and curricula have remained relevant and necessary but clearly there is a need for reframing and re-visioning of the NZDipBus. The new qualification will respond to the new skills and knowledge that will be required of graduates in the future. Over the next 10 years the new graduate profile will be the standard against which the success of the programme will be measured. The aim of this paper is firstly to explore whether the graduate profile is appropriate for developing business graduates for the 21st century and secondly to evaluate whether the graduate profile is embedded into the curricula to ensure it will produce graduates with the capability of demonstrating the graduate outcomes.

Is the NZDipBus graduate profile appropriate?

There are a number of interesting themes affecting the NZDipBus that have become more prevalent in undergraduate education programmes and these are impacting on the development of the new graduate profiles. Firstly, there is an evolution to a mass higher education system. Secondly, there is a developing global knowledge based economy. Also

there are strong influences in undergraduate education from information and communication technologies and the internationalisation of education. Lastly there is a desire of governments to demand greater accountability for their funding contribution.

The challenge for the NZDipBus to create a system that allows students to clearly identify their capabilities and these will need to be relevant to business in the 21st century. In Australia, higher education institutions are charged with being "relevant" and "useful", producing graduates that can contribute to the nation's economic, social and cultural development. (MacIntyre, 2001) Similarly, the West Review in Australia concluded that "providing high quality learning experiences should be at the heart of university endeavour". (1998, p. 16) The New Zealand Tertiary Education Advisory Commission, (2000) recommended that "the learning needs of learners should be recognised as central to the design of the tertiary education system."

The key to producing relevant and useful graduates is the generic capabilities of the graduate profile. "Graduateness", can be described as attributes, capabilities or skills which students possess at the end of their study programme. A complete graduate profile has graduate outcomes that include knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. An appropriate graduate profile is crucial to the success of a study programme. Sylvester and Hunter-Reid (1996) explain the process of designing good programmes for student success. They guide programme designers to international, national, local and personal forces which shape programmes. As part of their design model they suggest course designers undertake a situational analysis to explore the present learning context and consider future needs.

It is one of the stated aims of the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) (2007) to increase mass participation in the higher education sector. In the Investment Guidance 2008-10.2007, TEC states (TEC, 2007, p. 12) that there are to be a number of priorities for Institutes of Technology and Polytechnics in the next funding phase. These include increased achievement in technical and professional qualifications, extending the reach into high levels of learning informed by an understanding of advanced practice, and in some cases, also by applied research. This is similar to developments in Australia (DETYA, 2001; DEST 2002), in European Union countries (Guena, 1999, p. 3) and in the higher education systems of most developed countries (International Labour Office, 2000). With increased participation in higher education the NZDipBus is likely to serve a more diverse and dispirit student base than in the last twenty years. It is therefore important that NZDipBus graduates are able to work in diverse work environments. This is acknowledged in the revised graduate outcomes, which state that, students “in a range of diverse and changing organisational settings, effectively be able to: work...within teams of diverse people”.

Higher education is no longer the domain of the academic elite but rather an up-skilling of the general population to increase the overall capacity. However, an education system with greater participation is very different from the old elite education system. The NZDipBus is a fine example of an undergraduate programme suitable for both the 18-24 years olds and adult learners seeking qualifications to match their work experience. With more students undertaking higher education the NZDipBus as a two year programme is very attractive to those seeking a fast track business qualification. The graduate profile should acknowledge diversity and provide graduate outcomes that meet the needs of a range of student ages, backgrounds, education experience, languages and ethnicities. However, the

five main graduate outcomes are somewhat limited and have no additional information to explain how graduates should demonstrate knowledge and skills in variable contexts.

Another key theme is the development of the revised NZDipBus is the developing global knowledge based economy. As New Zealand develops into a knowledge society there is a need for more graduates with multiple and transferable skills and knowledge for the new economy. (CDEST, 2002). The need for new skills and knowledge drives adults back to higher education or to a first experience of higher education. The UK Dearing Committee has identified that individuals need to 're-equip themselves, as new knowledge and new skills are needed for economies to compete, survive and prosper'. (NCIHE, 1997, 1.12). With an increased number of private training establishments providing business education opportunities the traditional university or polytechnic no longer has a monopoly over the provision of business education. The NZDipBus must produce graduates who are capable of competing, surviving and prospering in an increasingly competitive business environment. There is no specific mention of the global knowledge base in the graduate outcomes. Although global knowledge will be found in curriculum, the specific focus should be identified in the graduate outcomes and filtered into specific courses.

New Zealand is well placed to take advantage of the impact of information and communication technologies. Business graduates will find themselves working in a growing digital economy. For the NZDipBus student information and communication technologies affect not only how they acquire knowledge but also what they learn. The ability to be able to communicate online and to trap and interpret data electronically will be key skills in the future. It will also strongly influence how students analyse and solve business problems. (CDEST, 2002). The graduate outcomes do not specifically address

information and communication technologies either as part of the teaching and learning experience or as part of developing a range of business skills.

There is a strong international interest in the NZDipBus and the internationalisation of higher education is a powerful trend. The internationalisation of higher education is fundamental to the social, cultural and intellectual development of New Zealand. It provides a strong base for the economic and strategic engagement of New Zealand with the rest of the world. Business students require an international curriculum, and to be prepared for participation in an international labour market. Other governments have identified the "internationalisation" (CDEST, 2002) of their own students as worthy of government and institutional focus. The European Union has established ERAMUS, which promotes the mobility of students and scholars within Europe. Students are supported to spend 6-12 months living, working and studying in another country. The NZDipBus currently has little flexibility for students to study overseas and little in the way of international focus beyond discipline or subject knowledge.

Finally, the NZDipBus graduate profile does not include any personal development of the student or reflective capacity. These are elements that are crucial to becoming self-critical and wise. While the graduate profile does specify problem solving with initiative and judgement, that emphasis appears to be on organisational settings rather than in personal engagements. Ursula Lucas (2006) is currently undertaking a large study into reflective capacity in undergraduate students. She notes, "...there is a growing emphasis by professional bodies on the development of reflective capacity to support professional judgement. Consequently, the need to develop reflective practice...is an integral part of the ...learning frame work both in higher education and professional training."

The NZDipBus graduate profile while focusing on business skills and ethical awareness lacks focus in key areas. There is no specific acknowledgement of students need for knowledge to be of global use. The graduate profile does not address information and communication skills, personal development or reflective capacity or focus on developing the international capabilities of graduates. The graduate outcomes need further explanation to guide curricula developers as to how knowledge, skills, attributes and values are to be integrated and developed within the teaching and learning environment. Overseas governments and higher education providers are well aware of the impact of these trends on the qualifications and are taking deliberate steps to include specific graduate outcomes in qualifications. The NZDipBus graduate programme designers appear to have missed a wonderful opportunity to re-vision the qualification for the 21st century by acknowledging and incorporating these important trends into a popular business qualification.

Will the graduate profile succeed?

Graduate outcomes need to be embedded into the curricula. Further they need to be assessed and recorded to evidence to funding providers, higher education institutions and students that the programme of study is delivering what was promised in marketing and promotional materials. To achieve this, a process of auditing or mapping of the curriculum is required to determine whether graduate attributes are being addressed or developed within a particular course. There was no formal process for assessing and monitoring the success of the old NZDipBus programme and to date there appears to be no formal process for mapping the NZ DipBus graduate profile in the new version 2 curricula.

Graduate outcomes should be clearly stated and assessable. (Watson, 2002). Barbara Gross Davis (2002) suggests that the process of designing a course, teachers establish both the content and non content goals, ensuring that skills, attributes and values are ingrained into the overall course design. To achieve this Paul Watson, from Sheffield Hallam University in the United Kingdom developed a unit guide model for mapping the graduate outcomes in the degree courses in construction and built environment. The model accurately records where and how the graduate outcomes are developed and assessed in each course/unit in the programmes. The model provides a useful overview of the programme of study and how graduates are developed over the three years of study.

As part of the research for this paper, the author conducted a review of the NZDipBus graduate profile part one. The review did not include part two, as this standard is difficult to define and therefore identify in the text of the prescriptions. Part 2 refers to appropriate skills but does not define them. Further Part 2 includes research abilities but does not specify whether these are to be information literacy skills, qualitative or quantitative research skills. Due to the lack of definitive criteria Part 2 is difficult to critique.

The review of Part 1 included the seven core courses of the new NZDipBus and three elective courses from level 6 of the qualification. The results of this review can be found in appendix 2. These courses were selected on the basis that most students will complete six of the seven core courses and take two level 6 electives. The level 6 courses should extend students knowledge and skills acquired at level 5 and demand greater analysis, synthesis and evaluative skills from students.

The review focused on analysing the text of the learning outcomes to determine whether there was direct reference to the definitive criteria found in the graduate profile, such as “ethics” and “culture”. The review analysed the tasks students were required to undertake seeking to match learning outcomes with the definitive criteria. For example where students required to “evaluate”, “problem solve” and “demonstrate” this is a clear link to “apply critical problem solving skills using initiative and judgement”. From the review results it is apparent that curriculum developers have focused on developing business skills and knowledge. There is less emphasis on interpersonal and communication skills, critical problem solving and working independently and within diverse teams. There are few examples of embedding ethical issues, and little attention to cultural issues in decision making.

Without integration of the graduate outcomes into curricula it is unlikely graduates of the NZDipBus programme will develop and demonstrate the specified outcomes. Curriculum developers have not embedded interpersonal and communication skills, ethical and cultural issues, working within teams into the curriculum of the courses reviewed. This is probably due to lack of direction from the programme developers. The curriculum appears to be almost singularly focused on knowledge and skills to the detriment of attributes and values. Furthermore, teaching and learning activities and assessment will not develop graduate outcomes unless there is a clear alignment between the graduate profile and the course learning outcomes. Essentially, the qualification is not delivering what is promised because of a lack of leadership and alignment.

Implications

There is a need for urgent action from NZQA as the owner of the NZDipBus qualification to take responsibility for the graduate profile. Firstly, the graduate profile should be revisited to ensure major international trends are acknowledged and incorporated into the graduate profile. If graduates are to be of value to business and the national economy they need to have more than knowledge and business skills. Graduates need a range of generic skills to contribute positively to the world of work.

NZQA should supervise curriculum development to ensure graduate outcomes are embedded into the curriculum, this includes, knowledge, skills, attributes and values. This will mean that course curricula will need to be extended beyond the traditional knowledge and skills based curricula. NZQA should establish a quality management process at the curriculum development stage and through the moderation to ensure teachers are developing graduate outcomes in the classroom and in assessment tasks. There are good examples of curriculum mapping currently being undertaken in Australian universities to ensure that higher education providers are building the knowledge, skills and attributes specified in graduate outcomes into curriculum. This process is being driven by the Australian government, who as funders, want to ensure higher education providers deliver what was promised. The University of New South Wales website presents a wide range of information and advice on curriculum mapping and course design.

(http://www.ltu.unsw.edu.au/content/course_prog_support/whatmap_grad_atts.cfm?ss=0).

NZQA as owners of the NZDipBus should provide a coordinated approach to curriculum design, including curriculum mapping of the graduate profile. Without strengthening the quality assurance processes in the NZDipBus there is little likelihood that the graduates of the programme will demonstrate the outcome specified in the graduate profile. The

funding providers will not have the graduates needed for the new economy, higher education providers will be falling short of their responsibilities to funding providers and students will not receive the education they have paid for and deserve. In the long term, with most stakeholders dissatisfied with the performance of the NZDipBus, it is unlikely to survive. Urgent action is needed now.

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Appendix 1: New Zealand Diploma in Business – Graduate Profile.

Graduate Profile

A graduate of the New Zealand Diploma in Business will:

1. in a range of diverse and changing organisational settings, effectively be able to:
 - add value by applying specific business skills
 - apply a range of interpersonal and communication skills
 - apply critical problem solving skills with initiative and judgement
 - recognise ethical and cultural issues inherent in decision making
 - work independently and within teams of diverse people
2. have appropriate skills, research abilities and knowledge to pursue further study and professional development.

<http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/qualifications/tertqual/dipbus/index.html#qaanddipbus>

Appendix 2: Audit of New Zealand Diploma in Business Graduate Outcomes.

Course	400 Accounting Principles	510 Introduction to Commercial Law	520 Economic Environment	530 Organisation and Management	541 Fundamental of Marketing	550 Business Computing	560 Business Communication	601 Financial Accounting	635 Employment Relations	636 Applied Management
1. in a range of diverse and changing organisational settings, effectively be able to:										
add value by applying specific business skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
apply a range of interpersonal and communication skills							✓			
apply critical problem solving skills with initiative and judgement	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
recognise ethical and cultural issues inherent in decision making				✓			✓			
work independently and within teams of diverse people				✓			✓			✓
2. have appropriate skills, research abilities and knowledge to pursue further study and professional development.										