



Academic Board Minutes

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Minutes of the special meeting of the Academic Board held at 2 pm on Tuesday 10 March 2009 in the Eastern Avenue Lecture Theatre

There were present: the Chair (Professor B Sutton) presiding; the Chair of the Graduate Studies Committee (Associate Professor P McCallum); Professors D Armstrong, T Aspromourgos, D Day, S Garton, C Murphy, B Paltridge, J Trehwella, G Triggs, K Trigwell and J White; Associate Professors C Collyer, M Fairskye, A Fekete, D Hibbs, A Jamalipour, T Masters, S Newberry, N O'Dwyer, G Ryan, A Twomey, M Walton and S Willcock; Drs K Cramer, S Cumming, L Cutcher, J Hanrahan and S Ronaldson; Mr P Ball, Mr D Brooks, Mr W Chan, Ms J Gavan, Ms R Kumar, Mr D Liu, Ms J Henderson, Ms P Kamvounias, Ms J Mooney, Ms R Rodney, Ms M Stephens, Mr A Thomas and Mr N White.

Also present: Secretary of the Academic Board (Dr M Edmond, Acting Registrar).

Present as observer: Ms Megan Kemmis (Acting Executive Officer to Senate).

In attendance: Mr M Charet (Committees Officer, Secretariat).

1. Apologies

The Board noted that apologies had been received from: the Vice-Chancellor and Principal (Dr M Spence); Professors M Adams, C Armour, B Bennett, A Boyd, A Coats, G Hancock, G Llewellyn, R Magnusson, D Nutbeam, I Ramzan, C Rhodes and P Wolnizer; Associate Professors E Blignaut, M Boughton and A Holland; Drs J Callen, F Collyer, S Cox, D Higgins, R Gibson, B Jones, K Nelson, T Schofield, and R Stanton; Mr J Conomos, M Kalonikos, Ms C McNally, Mr J Quilty, Ms L-M Syron and Mr G Weary (Ms J Gavan attended in stead).

The Chair open to the meeting by noting that all items on the current agenda had been starred for discussion at the meeting on 25 February 2009. The current special meeting had been convened to deal specifically with the items that were not discussed at the previous meeting, and it was noted that no new material had been presented for discussion. He informed the Board that the minutes for both the current meeting and that of 25 February would be presented to the Board for approval at its next regular meeting on 15 April.

2. Review of Academic Board

In the light of recent changes to the senior management structure of the University, a proposal was circulated by the Chair suggesting that the Academic Board commission a review of its structure and operations, to better align both with its role

and the other portfolios in the University. The revised draft terms of reference, including a suggested list of review team members, was circulated.

The Chair suggested that discussion of the conduct of a review and the composition of the review panel was urgently needed if any of the review's recommendations needed to be ratified by Senate, especially if changes to the Academic Governance Rule were indicated. With elections to the Board due to take place later in the year, it was suggested that any changes to the Board's membership or structure arising from the review would need to be approved at the Senate meeting of 3 August at the latest, or the Board would effectively need to wait two years for the next opportunity to change its structure and membership. In order to meet this Senate deadline, any changes would need to be discussed and approved at the Board meeting of 1 July at the latest, so in order to allow time for the review to proceed and to provide opportunity for consultation with the members of the Board and other interested parties, it was anticipated that the review will need to provide a report by the end of May. It was noted that the idea for a review of the Board had emerged in conversations with the Vice-Chancellor during February, and that if the matter was not resolved at the present meeting it would provide the review panel with too little time to conduct an effective investigation. The Chair cautioned that it was therefore of some urgency if the review was to proceed in a timely and effective fashion that the suggestion of review be discussed and the constitution of the review panel be established and approved at the current meeting.

The idea of review was supported by the Board, with several members offering suggestions as to the membership of the review panel. Mr White asked the Chair for clarification regarding the appointment of student members onto the review committee and whether or not there had been a consultation process. The Chair responded to this question by providing a sketch of the background of each of the people whom he had put forward to serve on the review panel, noting that all of the participants were either are currently associated with the Board or had a previous association. It was likewise pointed out that the student members of the review panel as put forward for discussion were drawn from the student members of the Board, and had therefore been elected by the faculties from which they came and nominated by the other student members of the Board, and could therefore be considered to adequately represent the student population. The Chair informed the Board that his idea in assembling the panel was to find an aggregate breadth of skills and background to cover in-depth the task to be undertaken. While it would be possible to come up with alternative names to each of those suggested by the chair, Professor Sutton believed that the people he put forward should be able to undertake the task at hand. The proposed composition of the panel had been largely put together by the Chair, in consultation with the Vice-Chancellor and Associate Professor McCallum.

Mr White expressed concern with the way in which the review panel had been selected, and suggested that as a general principle administrative officers are not best placed to choose student representatives to such bodies. Whilst making it clear that he had no immediate issue with the student representatives who had been selected, on principle it was suggested that the student representative bodies were much better placed to recommend appointment of student representatives to committees and review panels. The Chair rejected this assertion, reiterating that the student members suggested for the review panel had been drawn from the student members of the Board, and were therefore elected by the student body to represent student interests on the Board. Associate Professor McCallum sought clarification as to what it was that the student organisations desired in this matter, questioning the implied necessity of clearing all student representation across the University with the student organisations. The observation was made that one of the purposes of the Board was to debate who might be an effective representative for any particular constituency throughout the University, with the caution that if the student

organisations need to be consulted about every matter involving student representation, a precedent would be set whereby any appointment requiring representation from a particular constituency (eg Deans) would need to be approved by a representative body (such as the Committee of Deans) and so on throughout the entire University. Associate Professor McCallum advised that it is ultimately the Board's decision as to whom will represent particular constituencies, and that any channelling of the board's decision-making process through other organisations would inhibit the decision-making process.

It was questioned why the suggested review panel included only two external members, both with experience of the operation of the Board and the University generally, with the recommendation that the review may be more effectively undertaken if further external reviewers were included on the panel. The Chair informed the Board that he had considered this and felt that to ensure the usefulness of the review, the participants on the review panel should ideally be familiar with what the University does and the way in which the Board works. It was observed that previous reviews had been largely external, and that the findings of these reviews were not taken up as the recommendations were not seen by the Board as appropriate or workable to the local situation. It was therefore suggested that the panel would work best if its members were familiar with the University and the Board. The Chair also noted that the person he suggested to lead the review had wide experience with the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and would therefore be able to bring a depth of experience and wider multi-institutional knowledge to the review process. It was also contemplated that the review would consult broadly both outside the Academic Board and within its membership, and the Vice-Chancellor had expressed support for the review and would be able to provide any resources required for its effective undertaking. These issues were discussed by the Board and it was suggested that a further external reviewer be included on the review panel, subject to a suitable nominee being found.

The Board in discussion suggested that the participation of the Chair of the Board as part of the review panel may represent a conflict of interest. The Chair replied that the Vice-Chancellor had suggested that both the Vice-Chancellor and the Chair of the Board be members of the review panel, hence the recommended membership. In conversation it was observed that the review panel would be much more effective if it did not have the Chair as a member, and the Board supported this suggestion and resolved that the Chair be removed from the review panel's membership list.

It was questioned whether the review panel would be open or closed, to which the Chair suggested that whilst it would be up to the Chair of the review to decide on its operation, it was anticipated that there would be wide consultation across the University which would be open to all, but that the discussions of the review panel would be likely be closed to allow frank and uninhibited discussion.

Resolution 23/09

That the Academic Board approve the formation of a team to review the Academic Board's structure and operations with draft terms of reference and composition as amended.

3. Academic Board Membership for 2009

The Academic Board was informed that since its meeting in December 2008, a number of amendments have occurred to the membership of the Board, as follows:

- Professor Jill Trehwella has been confirmed as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research);
- Professor Scott Kable is now an academic staff representative for the Faculty of Science, taking up the vacancy created by Professor Trehwella's appointment;

- Associate Professor Nicole Gurrán will be on leave for 2009, and her position as an academic staff representative for the Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning will be filled by Professor Alan Peters; and
- Associate Professor Tania Gerzina has transferred to the Institute for Teaching and Learning, and her position as an academic staff representative for the Faculty of Dentistry will be filled by Associate Professor Elaine Blignaut.

The Board noted these changes in appointment, and unanimously approved the appointment of two new student representatives, namely Mr James Quilty from the Faculty of Agriculture, Food & Natural Resources, and Mr Danny Liu from the Faculty of Science, with effect until 31 December 2009.

Resolution 24/09

That the Academic Board:

- (1) note the report on the membership of the Academic Board for 2009; and
- (2) approve the nominated student members from the faculties as set out in the report presented.

4. Action taken by Chair since 10 December 2008 meeting

The Chair reminded the Academic Board that at its December meeting it had given him authority to act on its behalf during the period between the final meeting of 2008 and the first meeting of the New Year. Professor Sutton advised the Academic Board that he had acted on its behalf in one item relating to admissions at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. The Chair advised that this matter would be reported in full to the Admissions Sub-Committee in due course.

Resolution 25/09

That the Academic Board note the report of the Chair of the Academic Board on action taken since the meeting of the Academic Board held on 10 December 2008.

5. Position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)

The Academic Board was informed that due to restructuring of some senior portfolios within the University it had become necessary to update the terms of reference of Standing Committees of the Academic Board to reflect the change from the previous position of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) to the new position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education). The Academic Board was also asked to approve the nomination of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) to membership on the Research and Research Training Committee, as the restructure of that portfolio now encompassed oversight of research training. The recommendation was unanimously approved.

Resolution 26/09

That the Academic Board note the replacement of references to Pro Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching) with Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) in terms of reference for Standing Committees of the Academic Board and the addition of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) to the membership of the Research and Research Training Committee.

6. Academic Board Policy on Advanced Standing, Credit and Exemption

At its meeting of 10 December 2008, the Academic Board considered and discussed amendments to the Academic Board Policy on Advanced Standing, Credit and Exemption. The issues raised at this meeting and earlier meetings of the Graduate Studies Committee, and responses received from various sections of the University,

fed into a revised version of this document, and the latest version of the policy was submitted to the Academic Board for approval.

The Chair invited Associate Professor McCallum to speak to the item. Associate Professor McCallum noted that the version of the policy contained in the current agenda was an earlier iteration, and that the agenda papers for the February meeting contained the updated text for which the Academic Board's approval was being sought. The Academic Board was verbally informed by Associate Professor McCallum of the minor modifications which had been included in the policy as presented at the last Academic Board meeting, noting that 5.4.3 had been changed at the request of some faculties to allow up to one half of a program to be derived from credit, and that the definition of the term 'waiver' had also been changed. It was also noted that the text of 5.9 relating to prior learning had been modified to incorporate both previous study and prior learning, including professional experience and the like which is outside the scope of the more limiting definition of 'previous study'. In consultation with faculties it was determined that the policy needs to allow for both prior learning and previous study, but the Academic Board was informed that it is not necessary that all faculties allow recognition of both prior learning and previous study in all of their programs.

The Academic Board sought clarification of item 5.4.2 relating to postgraduate coursework and the embedded programs therein, suggesting that the proposal be revised to read "to be the equivalent of such embedded programs" to remove potential confusion. Discussion of the matter of granting credit for embedded programs had been wide-ranging, and Associate Professor McCallum observed that the point as it is currently proposed captures the balance of the discussion. He noted that the discussion had agreed that it was acceptable to provide a waiver of the various course requirements on the basis of equivalent undergraduate study, but that it had been broadly agreed that credit for such study should not be granted. Ms Kumar questioned the application of this idea to situations of co-teaching, in which students in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes were co-taught the same lecture material in a unit of study but were completing different assessment tasks. It was observed that faculties need to ensure that postgraduate study is of a different style and standard from that presented to undergraduates, and that whilst the lecture material can be substantially the same at both levels, the assessment and outcomes from study should distinguish between postgraduate and undergraduate students. As assessment and outcomes are distinctive, the granting of credit from undergraduate study toward postgraduate programs should not be entertained.

It was questioned whether granting credit from other institutions took account of academic standards at those institutions, noting that the University's own standards were high, with the further enquiry as to what processes were in place to look at the standards of programs at other institutions, especially relating to the question of embedded credit. Associate Professor McCallum noted that this was not a straightforward question as several faculties (notably Law, Engineering and Pharmacy) offer both graduate and undergraduate entry for some of their programs and this had led to some commonality of material and content if not outcome. He noted that the Graduate Studies Committee was in the early stages of developing a Working Party to look at this issue and was currently formulating terms of reference.

It was observed that the difference between undergraduate and postgraduate study was not so much one of content but in the nature and style of learning inherent in both of those degrees. It was further noted that the information provided was not always more developed at postgraduate level as many undergraduate students (especially in their senior year) are very able and engage with the material in a very effective manner. It was also observed that when postgraduate units of study are designed to provide a basic level of information (for example, with degrees designed to re-skill students from a different discipline), the information imparted in the unit of

study can be at a level equivalent to that of an undergraduate program. It was suggested that as such students have no or little background in the subject in question, it is not entirely reasonable to expect more from such postgraduate students than from undergraduate students undertaking an equivalent unit of study. It was agreed in discussion that postgraduate programmes provide accelerated learning, so that even if the material presented is identical to undergraduate, the intended outcomes and expectation of postgraduate students is of a different type.

Professor Day questioned the location of honours in this undergraduate/postgraduate breakdown, with the observation that some schools (eg Information Technologies) required their students to undertake postgraduate unit of study as part of the undergraduate honours program. Professor Day also noted that advanced honours candidates in some disciplines were undertaking more advanced work than many postgraduate coursework programs would provide, suggesting that the issue needed to be more closely examined. It was agreed that the Working Party would consider this issue in its discussion.

Associate Professor McCallum noted that versions of the policy had been discussed at Academic Board on several occasions last year, with suggestions returned to the Graduate Studies Committee for refining and further discussion by the Academic Board, and that in each forum the proposed policy had received majority support. The Academic Board unanimously agreed to approve the proposal.

Resolution 27/09

That the Academic Board approve the revisions to the policy on Advanced Standing, Credit and Exemption, with effect from 1 July 2009, as set out in the report presented to the Academic Board at its meeting of 25 February 2009.

The meeting closed at 1:42 p.m.

Signed as a correct record

Chair

Date