



## Academic Board Agenda

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### SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA for the meeting on Wednesday 27 May 2009

Pages

- ★ 1. **Apologies**  
Apologies have been received from:  
Professors T Aspromourgos, G Llewellyn, D Nutbeam, B Paltridge, C Rhodes, E Schwarz, J Trehwella and K Walker, Associate Professors M Boughton, M Fairskye, N O'Dwyer and H Zoellner, Drs J Callen, F Collyer, K Cramer, L Cutcher, S Ronaldson, L Scanlon, T Schofield and J Slapeta, Mr P Ball (Mr C Riley attending in his stead), Mr D Liu, Ms R Santos, Ms L-M Syron and Ms J Truman.
- ★ 6. **Report of the Chair**
- 6.2 **Honours and Distinctions** 3
- Recommendation*  
*That the Academic Board note the report of the Chair of the Academic Board on the honours and distinctions and congratulate the recipients, as set out in the report presented.*
- 6.3 **General Report**
- 6.3.1 **Doctorates and Graduate-entry Courses at the University of Sydney** 3
- Recommendation*  
*That the Academic Board note the report on doctorates and graduate-entry courses at the University of Sydney, as set out in the report presented.*
- 6.3.2 **Academic Board Membership for 2009** 3
- Recommendation*  
*That the Academic Board note and approve the nomination of Associate Professor Hans Zoellner as an academic staff representative of the Faculty of Dentistry, as set out in the report presented.*

**6.3.2 Academic Board Review**

3-9

***Recommendation***

*That the Academic Board note the report on the Academic Board Review, as set out in the report presented.*

**11. Report of the Learning and Teaching Committee**  
(Associate Professor Simon Barrie)

**Appendix F**

[Please note the amended resolution for this report below:]

**11.2 Report of the meeting held on 13 May 2009**  
**11.2.1 Academic Board Faculty Reviews**  
**(1) Sydney College of the Arts**

*F1-F2*  
*F1- F2*  
*F1*

***Recommendation***

*That the Academic Board note the Academic Board Review Phase Three Report for the Sydney College of the Arts as presented.*

## AGENDA ITEM 6 Report of the Chair

### 6.2 Honours and Distinctions

I am pleased to report the following honours and distinctions and recommend the Academic Board extend its congratulations to the recipients:

**Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte**, Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies  
Awarded a Clunies Ross Award from the Australian Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering for his critical role in raising the visibility of Australian robotics in government, industry, academia and the community.

#### **Recommendation**

*That the Academic Board note the report of the Chair of the Academic Board on the honours and distinctions and congratulate the recipients, as set out in the report presented.*

### 6.3 General Report

#### 6.3.1 Doctorates and Graduate-entry Courses at the University of Sydney

An oral report on this matter will be presented at the meeting.

#### **Recommendation**

*That the Academic Board note the report on doctorates and graduate-entry courses at the University of Sydney, as set out in the report presented.*

#### 6.3.2 Academic Board Membership for 2009

Ms Clare McNally is no longer an academic staff member of the Faculty of Dentistry. The Dean of the Faculty of Dentistry, Professor Eli Schwarz, has nominated Associate Professor Hans Zoellner to fill the resulting casual vacancy.

#### **Recommendation**

*That the Academic Board note and approve the nomination of Associate Professor Hans Zoellner as an academic staff representative of the Faculty of Dentistry, as set out in the report presented.*

#### 6.3.3 Academic Board Review

pages 4-9

Members will be aware that comments were sought on the Review of the Academic Board. Please find attached a summary of comments received to date.

#### **Recommendation**

*That the Academic Board note the report on the Academic Board Review, as set out in the report presented.*

**Summary of submissions received in response to the Chair of the Academic Board's request for comment circulated 4 May 2009 to Members of the Board, Members of Board Committees and Heads of Schools and Departments via the Dean of each Faculty. (attached, p.9)**

A total of 13 submissions were received in response to the Chair of the Board's request for comment.

Summaries of comments received relevant to each of the three specific questions asked by the Chair of the Board are provided below, along with a summary of other comments of interest under the heading 'Other issues raised in submissions'.

***Question 1. Considering the current membership of the Academic Board, are all constituencies adequately represented and what, if any, changes to the membership of the Board are required?***

A key point of distinction raised in submissions centred on the issue of whether members of the Academic Board should mostly be elected or appointed because of their position within the University, their academic standing or particular skills relevant to the Board's purposes.

One submission suggested that ensuring the Board's membership enables it to fulfil its principal functions was more important than it being a broadly representative body. Another also questioned whether the Board needed to be 'democratic', suggesting that its membership should reflect the finest minds the University has to offer. A third argued that the collegial nature of the Board required that its membership comprise representatives from as many parts of the University community as possible.

One submission argued that Associate Deans should have greater representation on the Board as they are centrally involved in many day-to-day learning and teaching activities, as well as strategic planning and overseeing the implementation of those plans. Another suggested that there may be value in admitting all Professors to the Board so that they are better informed and able to influence decisions on the promotion of scholarship.

Two submissions directly addressed the issue of greater representation of Heads of School on the Board, suggesting there would be value in doing this. Both submissions raised concerns, however, that the heavy workloads of Heads would limit their capacity to participate fully in the Board's activities and suggested that they be permitted to send deputies on occasion.

The President of SUPRA argued that there was a need for greater representation of elected students on the Academic Board, with a need for a wider range of student voices than currently. She recommended some specific amendments to the Academic Governance Rule to increase the number of elected student members of the Board from each faculty. She suggested also that there was a need for greater involvement of students on Academic Board working parties and recommended the development of guidelines covering the formation of Board working parties, reviews and other subsidiary groups, which make clear provision for the involvement of student representatives.

**Question 2.a. Following the establishment of the Senior Executive Group (SEG) and its various advisory committees what activities & purposes should the Academic Board focus on?**

Comments received relevant to this question indicated a diversity of views about the purpose and function of the Academic Board. A number of respondents argued that the core purpose of the Board was to ensure quality assurance of academic programs within the University. For example, one submission suggested that the Board should set rigorous curriculum standards and prevent course proliferation and duplication for financial reasons. Another argued, however, that quality assurance should not be the principal concern of the Academic Board, that the focus in Australian higher education institutions on ensuring minimum standards was unfortunate because it caused them to lose sight of the importance of achieving outstanding outcomes with the brightest students. This same submission argued that the Board's core role should be to discuss and set policy on Academic issues of teaching and learning, research and membership of the University's academic community, with the SEG responsible for implementing policy and feeding suggestions to the Academic Board for changes to academic policy.

One submission argued that the Academic Board should be focused on operational matters and act as a review body for any policy initiatives which are developed by the Senior Executive Group (SEG) and its various advisory committees. Another argued, however, that the respective roles of the Board and SEG need to be clearly defined to ensure that the Academic Board plays a quality assurance role while the SEG concentrates on management decision-making.

A number of submissions argued that the Board plays an important role as a collegial forum for debate on pressing academic issues of the day. For example, one submission argued that the Board should be the heart and soul of the University's scholarship and the guardian of its academic standards—a place for stimulating leadership of the academy. This submission expressed concern that Board meetings were too often focussed on processing technical recommendations, with insufficient room provided for lively debate about the major academic issues of concern to a modern university. Another submission suggested that invariably it was only those Board members with a direct interest in a matter that would engage in the discussion, when there was often a need for a whole-of-university perspective to be taken. This submission suggested selecting discussion leaders on a rotational basis for important issues as one way of involving people who attend Board meetings but rarely participate.

Two submissions stressed the need for a more broad-ranging review of the Board than the exercise for which these comments were sought. One suggested that the Board was in need of total reform in light of reconsidered objectives. It suggested that a full internal review of the Board's objectives, operation, membership, committees, relationship to the Senate and Faculties, be undertaken by a small working party. A second submission suggested that there remained a pressing need for an independent review conducted in accordance with contemporary governance principles.

The President of SUPRA expressed concern at a lack of engagement or input from elected student members at Board meetings. She suggested that greater input from students would be achieved by increasing their representation on the Board's Advisory Committees, reviews and working groups.

**Question 2.b. Following the establishment of the Senior Executive Group (SEG) and its various advisory committees what changes, if any, to the structure and membership of the Board's standing committees, would enable the Board to fulfil its role most effectively in this new operating environment?**

Comments received relevant to this question touched on issues including: the desirability of aligning Academic Board committees with SEG committees; the need for clearly defined roles and relationships between Board and SEG committees; the important roles played by the Board's operational committees; the specific role of the Board's Learning and Teaching and Academic Staffing committees in light of the establishment of the SEG committees; and some concerns about the extent to which the Academic Board's committees are fulfilling their specific quality assurance roles.

One submission argued that there should be some alignment between Board and SEG committees. It suggested that the Board could have separate and equal committees for Research Training and for Research (like SEG), instead of treating PhD awards as subsidiary to research. It suggested one way of dealing with concerns about the overlap of membership would be to merge the relevant Board and SEG committees and have their recommendations go both ways—to the Board and to the SEG. This submission also argued that the Board needs to maintain its Undergraduate and Postgraduate coursework committees, to deal with the volume of detailed proposals. It suggested also that the staffing committee is essential to the Board, and that SEG should consider adding such a committee to its structure. Another submission argued, however, that there should be separate reporting lines for SEG and Board committees, but close communication between related committees to ensure they do not operate in isolation from each other.

One submission argued that the Board's committees should not duplicate the SEG sub-committees and that the Academic Board's membership structure needs to be differentiated from SEG subcommittees reflecting the specific outcomes for the Board and SEG. It suggested that the number of Academic Board committees should be reduced to facilitate the overseeing of decisions made at SEG rather than duplicating the roles of SEG or its committees. Another argued that the operational Academic Board Standing Committees should continue their important primary functions, and assume enhanced review roles as an efficient means to improve governance and to enhance the consultative nature of the Academic Board.

Detailed comments were provided regarding the future role of the Learning & Teaching Committee of the Board, with a submission provided on behalf of members of that committee suggesting that it should retain roles including: scrutinising and decision-making as well as participating in collegial decision-making about teaching and learning matters in the University; ensuring the maintenance of standards - both in teaching and learning policy formulation and its implementation; informing future Academic Board quality assurance and enhancement processes - for instance in analysis and interpretation of teaching and learning quality data, and on subsequent follow-through of responses to teaching and learning quality processes across the University. The submission suggested also that its membership might require review to reflect an enhanced quality assurance role. Another submission argued, however, that the Board's Learning & Teaching Committee should be disbanded, with recommendations of any new policies regarding Higher Education generated through the Education Committee of SEG, to be referred to the relevant Academic Board Standing Committees and where necessary to the Academic Board.

Another submission commented that the role of the Board's Learning and Teaching Committee could be enhanced if it were empowered to make substantive recommendations regarding

resourcing and quality assurance around learning and teaching outcomes within Faculties, particularly as a more formal part of the Board's Faculty reviews.

One submission dealt specifically with the role of the Academic Staffing Committee following the establishment of the SEG and its committees. It noted that there is no SEG committee primarily devoted to academic staffing matters, with responsibility for matters of human resources resting with the SEG Operating and Resources Committee. It suggested that consideration could be given to formally constituting the Academic Staffing committee as a joint committee of both the SEG and the Board.

One submission raised concerns about the extent to which the Board's processes underpin quality. In particular, concerns were raised about the tendency of the Board to approve significant matters previously dealt with by committees without adequate scrutiny.

### ***Other issues raised in submissions***

Some respondents included in comments in their submissions, which while not directly relevant to the three specific questions asked by the Chair of the Academic Board, may still be of interest and relevance to Board members.

For example, one respondent argued that the real problems the Academic Board faces are not going to be addressed by changes to membership rules. It suggested that the key problems are that most academic staff are not aware of the Board's role or activities, that many academic staff have little interest in university-wide policy, and that not enough people want to be Members of the Board or engage with its processes.

Another argued that too much of the work of the Academic Board meetings is taken up with discussion and approval of committee reports and related items—limiting in the time available for engagement with and discussion of key strategic issues within the University. This submission expressed a preference for the Academic Board becoming a significant venue for SEG to engage with the broader academic community over issues of strategic importance within the University. It suggested that would be value in the Board exploring ways to ensure that Board Members have an opportunity for input and comment on reports of the Committees, while simultaneously streamlining the Board meetings.

The same respondent argued that a lack of workload recognition for participation on central management and Academic Board committees results in staff carrying these responsibilities on top of regular teaching and other administrative loads in the Faculty. It suggested that the absence of formal recognition of University-level activities does little to encourage staff to participate in University activities.

The President of SUPRA raised concerned that the Senior Executive Group is further removed from the student population than the Academic Board. She argued that the SEG is characterised by a lack of student involvement, and although consultative processes have been put into place, consultation must coexist with participation and representation for decision-making and policy implementation to be effective, comprehensive, and to avoid major adverse consequences.

SUPRA stressed also that there was need for more targeted training and resources to induct new student representatives onto the Board and enable them to participate more fully in its activities.

Another submission raised concerns about the transparency and consistency of elections for student Board positions between faculties. It argued that the process and criteria for election to the Board are not standardised across Faculties, and that the level of involvement of the Board's student members in their respective faculties seems rather variable, which impacts upon each student member's ability to validly represent and adequately understand their faculty and his or her peers.

Another submission asked a number of very specific questions including: does the Academic Board (AB) receive the accreditation reports of the Federal Accrediting Boards /Councils, e.g. Veterinary Science, Dentistry, Medicine, Dietetics, Education and others, and if so, how does it follow-up on concerns/recommendations raised in these reports; what does the Academic Board do about low and declining trends in annual CEQ and SCEQ ratings; and what authority/obligation does the Academic Board have when Faculties/Schools fail to comply with recommendations?

**Chair of the Academic Board's email requesting comments from Board members and other key stakeholders**

Dear members of the Academic Board

As you are aware, there has been some discussion at our recent meetings concerning a proposed self-review of the Academic Board. At our meeting of 10 March 2009, the Board approved terms of reference for a proposed review panel (**see attachment**). I outlined at our meeting of 15 April 2009 the reasons why this panel could not now meet. We discussed a number of ways to proceed, and it was agreed that the Vice-Chancellor would prepare a discussion paper for the Board's consideration.

To assist the Board in its deliberations, we agreed that members' comments would be sought, particularly with regard to the issues of Board membership and the structure and function of the Board's standing committees. The following questions may help you to frame your response, but should not act as a restriction on any views you wish to express:

1. Considering the current membership of the Academic Board (**see attachment**), are all constituencies adequately represented and what, if any, changes to the membership of the board are required?
2. Following the establishment of the Senior Executive Group (SEG) and its various advisory committees (**see attachment**):
  - a) what activities & purposes should the Academic Board focus on; and
  - b) what changes, if any, to the structure and membership of the Board's standing committees (**see attachment**), would enable the Board to fulfil its role most effectively in this new operating environment?

Members should forward their responses by COB Monday 11 May 2009 to Dr Bill Adams, Secretary to Senate: [w.adams@usyd.edu.au](mailto:w.adams@usyd.edu.au). Bill will collate the responses and forward them to both myself and to the Vice-Chancellor, to assist him in the drafting of his paper. If requested, these comments will be treated as confidential, and will be forwarded without attribution.

As the Academic Board has invited the Vice-Chancellor to prepare a white paper on the issues being put before you, it clearly makes sense to ensure he is available to speak with the Academic Board on these matters. Unfortunately, he is unable to attend the next Board meetings in May and July, but I would like to propose the following timetable as a compromise.

At our meeting of 27 May there will be discussion of the issues arising from members' responses. We are also planning to arrange a workshop for members and other interested parties in June – further information will be circulated when details are available. It's also proposed that a special meeting of the Academic Board be held on Friday 26 June to focus solely on any recommendations to amend the membership of the Board.

My thanks to you all in advance for your assistance.

Professor Bruce Sutton,  
Chair, Academic Board  
4 May 2009