



Learning and Teaching Committee Agenda

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Notice of Meeting

A meeting of the **Learning and Teaching Committee** will be held at **10.00am** on **Wednesday 11 February 2009** in the Senate Room. The Senate Room is in the Quadrangle Building on the Camperdown Campus, above the Ante Room which adjoins the Great Hall.

Members who are unable to attend are asked to notify Matthew Charet at the above address. Enquiries concerning this meeting may also be directed to Mr Charet.

Matthew Charet
for
M Edmond
Acting Registrar

5 February 2009

Agenda

1. **Welcome and Apologies**

Welcome new members Associate Professor Tessa Ho (Medicine), Drs Brigid Rooney and Natalya Lusty (Arts), Irena Koprinska (EIT) and Heather McKenzie (Nursing), Ms Rashmi Kumar (SUPRA), Mr Jonathan Saurine (CCE) and Mr Noah White (SRC), with thanks to those whom they are replacing.

Apologies have been received from: Professor D Armstrong, Associate Professors M Freeman and T Ho.

2. **Minutes of previous meeting**

(pages 4-6)

Recommendation

That the Learning and Teaching Committee adopt the minutes of the previous meeting held on 19 November 2008 as a true record.

3. **Business arising from Minutes (not dealt with elsewhere in the Agenda)**

4. Report of the Chair

Recommendation

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the report of the Chair.

5. Report of the Academic Board

(page 7)

Recommendation

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the report of the Academic Board meeting of 10 December 2008, as set out in the report presented.

6. Report of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)

In the absence of Professor Armstrong, this item will be held over to the next meeting.

7. Academic Board Faculty Reviews

7.1 Faculty of Medicine

([Appendix 1](#))

The Academic Board Review Phase Three Report for the Faculty of Medicine is attached as Appendix 1.

Note: This item was held over from the previous meeting.

Recommendation

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the Academic Board Phase 3 Review Report for the Faculty of Medicine.

7.2 Faculty of Pharmacy

([Appendix 2](#))

The Academic Board Review Phase Three Report for the Faculty of Pharmacy is attached as Appendix 2.

Recommendation

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the Academic Board Phase 3 Review Report for the Faculty of Pharmacy.

7.3 Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources

([Appendix 3](#))

An update report from the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources arising from the Academic Board Review Phase Three is attached as Appendix 3.

Note: This item was held over from the previous meeting.

Recommendation

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the update report from the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources.

7.4 Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies ([Appendix 4](#))

An update report from the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies arising from the Academic Board Review Phase Three is attached as Appendix 4.

Note: This item was held over from the previous meeting.

Recommendation

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the update report from the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies.

8. Ethical Principles Regarding Special Consideration (pages 8-13)

These were discussed at the last meeting of the Committee and were a focus topic at the Academic Board meeting held on 12 November, an extract from the minutes of which is attached.

9. Policy Updates and Reviews

10. General business

11. Next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled from 10am-12pm on Wednesday 25 March 2009, in the Senate Room.

Agenda Item 2 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

Minutes of the Learning and Teaching Committee meeting held on Wednesday 19 November 2008

There were present: The Chair (Associate Professor G Ryan) presiding, Professor D Armstrong, Associate Professors D Airey, S Barrie, M Boughton, C Collyer, M Freeman, P McCallum, P McGreevy, Drs S Cattle, D Collins, S Cumming, E Fonacier, P Gemeinboeck (for R Saunders), C Groenlund, J Jones, A Rubino, F Waugh, C Taylor, Mr A Cooper (for B Meikle), Ms J Gavan, Ms R Kumar and Ms K Laing. Mr M Charet and Ms A Griffiths were in attendance.

1. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from:

R Anderson, M Edmond, B Sutton, R Saunders.

2. **Minutes of the previous meeting**

The minutes of the previous meeting, held on 22 October 2008, were circulated.

Resolution 43/08

That the Learning and Teaching Committee adopt the minutes of the previous meeting held on 22 October 2008 as a true record.

3. **Business arising from Minutes (not dealt with elsewhere in the Agenda)**

A list of invitees to the Heads of School Forum was circulated to the Committee. The Chair suggested that the process for determining representation and invitation to future forums needs to be examined in the New Year, as it was noted that (for example) Engineering had not been invited to the current Forum.

4. **Report of the Chair**

The Chair advised that the Learning and Teaching Strategy Group had not met since the last meeting but that the Governance Group would be meeting during the coming week. The Chair also informed the Committee that he was stepping down from the Committee at the end of the year and so noted that it would be necessary to appoint a new Chair for 2009. The Chair expressed his thanks to the Committee for its support during his tenure, and was thanked by acclamation for his work on the committee.

Resolution 44/08

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the report of the Chair.

5. **Report of the Academic Board**

A written report of the 12 November meeting of Academic Board had been circulated, and it was noted that the Principles for Special Consideration, formulated by the Assessment Working Party, had been the focus for lively discussion. It was noted that several suggestions to clarify the principles had been made, and that these were to be incorporated before the document was circulated more broadly for comment (with comments to be returned to Amy Griffiths) before discussion at the first Learning and Teaching Committee meeting for 2009. The outcome of the discussion would then be returned to the Assessment Working Party for further revision. It was emphasised that these principles were not policy, and that the next step would involve examining current policy and procedures in light of the principles.

Resolution 45/08

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the report of the Academic Board meeting of 12 November 2008, as set out in the report presented.

6. Report of the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)

The Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), Professor Derrick Armstrong, had circulated a written report, and spoke to the report. He noted that the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund Preliminary Outcomes 2009 had been calculated and represented a drop from the 2008 figure. He noted that the distribution was now based 50% on performance and 50% on improvement, in order to allow smaller providers to receive funding under this scheme. It was reported that the impact on the University of this change of method was not great, except to note that the Health cluster had received no funding based on performance but that they might receive some based on improvement. The Committee were informed that the University was at the top end for overall funding, and was in a creditable position in the Go8. It was suggested that internal distribution models would be examined further in 2009, with the identification of strategic priorities in learning and teaching. This idea had already received the support of the Deans and would involve wider consultation in the first half of 2009.

Resolution 46/08

That the Learning and Teaching Committee note the report of the Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education), as set out in the report presented.

7. Report of the Institute for Learning and Teaching

No report was given by the Institute for Learning and Teaching.

8. Academic Board Faculty Reviews

8.1 Faculty of Medicine

The Academic Board Review Phase Three Report for the Faculty of Medicine was circulated. As no representative from the Faculty of Medicine was present at the meeting, it was agreed that this item be held over to the next meeting, with an invitation extended to Medicine to speak to the item.

Resolution 47/08

That discussion of the Academic Board Review Report for the Faculty of Medicine be held over to 2009, with an invitation to Medicine to address the Teaching and Learning Committee in response.

8.2 Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources

It was noted that the Faculty of Agriculture had yet to prepare its written response, but that the Faculty had engaged a public relations firm to address some of the recommendations of the Academic Board review, specifically relating to student recruitment, course offerings, and the Faculty's operational goals. This firm was expected to return its report in the next week, and it was anticipated that this report would shape Agriculture's written response to the Academic Board review.

8.3 Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies

It was noted that the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies had yet to forward its response.

8.4 Faculty of Science

A written update, prepared by the Dean of Science, was circulated with no further comment offered by the Faculty.

Resolution 48/08

That the Teaching and Learning Committee note faculty responses to the Academic Board Reviews, as reported.

9. Ethical Principles regarding Special Consideration

This item was discussed at Item 5 above, and would be on the agenda for the first meeting of 2009.

10. Policy Updates and Reviews

It was noted that a document had been tabled at the October meeting, outlining policies falling under the responsibility of the Learning and Teaching Committee, and that a timetable for review of these policies had been developed. It was noted that the policy on Student Consultation had been approved at the 12 November meeting of Academic Board.

11. General Business

A schedule of meetings dates for 2009 was circulated and noted by the Committee. It was suggested that the size and effectiveness of the Committee be reviewed in 2009, noting a suggestion that the group had become less effective as it had grown in size.

The Chair invited members to a half-day educational symposium being held in the Faculty of Pharmacy from 9:30am to 1pm on 3 December 2008. Members were advised that Information about this symposium was available from the Pharmacy website, and that those interested could register online.

Members leaving the Committee:

The Committee was informed that it was the last meeting for longstanding members Associate Professor David Airey from the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies and Dr Diane Collins from the Conservatorium of Music. The Committee thanked Associate Professor Airey and Dr Collins for their long service to the Learning Teaching Committee.

Associate Professor Greg Ryan also informed the Committee that it would be his last meeting as Chair. On behalf of the Committee, Associate Professor Barrie thanked Professor Ryan for his work as Chair.

Resolution 49/08

That the Academic Board recognise and thank Associate Professors Greg Ryan and David Airey and Dr Diane Collins for their exemplary service on the Learning and Teaching Committee.

12. Next meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting was scheduled from 10am to 12pm on Wednesday 4 February 2009, in the Western Tower Room.

Agenda Item 5 Report of the Academic Board

Report of the Academic Board meeting held on 10 December 2008

The agenda for the meeting of the Academic Board on 10 December 2008 may be accessed on the web: <http://www.usyd.edu.au/su/ab/>

5.1 Institute for Teaching and Learning 2007 Annual Report

The Academic Board noted the 2007 Annual Report from the Institute for Teaching and Learning.

5.2 Academic Board Phase Three Faculty Reviews

The Academic Board noted the Progress Report from the Faculty of Science.

5.3 Proceedings of the Committee

The Academic Board noted the proceedings of the Learning and Teaching Committee meeting held on 19 November 2008.

5.4 Report of the Chair of the Academic Board

The Academic Board, in relation to items in the report of its Chair:

- approved and noted the membership of the Academic Board for 2009;
- noted the meeting dates for the Academic Board in 2009; and
- approved a minor amendment to the Academic Board policy on Student Appeals against Academic Decisions.

5.5 Other matters

The Academic Board also:

- discussed and commented on revisions to the Academic Board policy on Advanced Standing, Credit and Exemptions;
- discussed and commented on the proposed Postgraduate Coursework Rule;
- noted responses to questions regarding the Bachelor of Psychology (honours) and the report of the 2008 Winter School raised at the previous meeting;
- noted the report of the Vice-Chancellor on Triple Bottom Line Reporting and the Professional Services Stakeholder Survey and Staff Engagement Survey;
- approved amendments to the Senate Resolutions relating to the Governance of Faculties, Colleges, College Boards, Departments, Schools and Committees;
- recognised the NUS High School Diploma program for the purpose of admitting international students to the University and amended the Academic Board policy on Admission to Undergraduate Courses;
- approved amendments to the Academic Board policy on the Cotutelle Scheme;
- co-opted Ms Beth Anderson as a member to the Academic Staffing Committee;
- noted the reports of academic staff promotions to Level E; and
- noted with condolences the passing of Emeritus Professor Hans Freeman, Faculty of Science.

Agenda Item 8

Ethical Principles Regarding Special Consideration

*Extract from the Minutes of the meeting of the Academic Board
held at 2 pm on Wednesday 12 November 2008 in the Professorial Board Room*

★ 5. Discussion Topic

5.1 Principles for Special Consideration

The Chair advised members that he was looking for ways to improve the quality of discussion at the Academic Board's meetings. Today's discussion topic was one model that could be used, where papers would be brought forward for discussion rather than presentation. He added that the Board's standing committees often grappled with large and complex issues, and that it would be useful to obtain the Board's feedback on such issues before finalising any policy proposals.

With regard to the principles for Special Consideration, the Chair stressed that this was not a policy document. He added that he was seeking feedback from Board members as to whether or not the Assessment Working Party was heading in the right direction with the drafting of these principles. The Working Party would then use the feedback from the Board to develop policy based on the principles. He suggested working through each principle in the document.

Principle 1: Assessment is solely of student achievement of designated learning outcomes.

Associate Professor Fekete expressed concern that this principle effectively made the timeliness of submitting assessments, and thus the granting of extensions to students, a non-issue. He warned that this could create problems. The Chair countered that this principle sought to describe the academic purpose of assessment.

Principle 2: The purpose of Special Consideration is to provide a process to students who have experienced a limitation on their ability due to illness or misadventure, that allows them, when they are fully capable, to demonstrate achievement of designated learning outcomes.

Professor Bennett questioned the phrase "fully capable", asking when this would occur if the student had a chronic illness. The Chair advised that this was covered under principle 11.

Principle 3: We assume that students making claims for Special Consideration are of good intent and the process is to support them. We assume that any students seeking to gain an unfair advantage at any assessment will not succeed.

Associate Professor Masters suggested that the second sentence should be considered in terms of the implications for how academics deal with Special Consideration claims.

Principle 4: We identify the existence of both major and minor claims for Special Consideration. We define minor claims as

being related to assessment worth 10% or less of the total value of the unit and it not being the final assessment.

Associate Professor Boughton advised that the Faculty of Nursing and Midwifery had discussed this proposed principle in depth, and that the Faculty argued against the use of percentages to determine the division between major and minor claims. The Chair asked whether the Faculty was uncomfortable with recognising minor claims or the use of percentages, and was advised that both issues were of concern. Mr White advised that the SRC supported this principle. He noted that Principle 5 clarified the situations in which a claim would be major rather than minor, and might replace the need for a percentage value.

Members debated the percentage value, with some arguing for a higher value to encourage matters to be dealt with informally, and others arguing that all applications should be dealt with centrally to help identify students having problems. The Chair noted that Principle 12 recommended linking regular requests for Special Consideration to the Board's policy on students at risk. Members also discussed cases involving final examinations and barrier assessments, with Associate Professor Collyer pointing out the Assessment Working Party had agreed that such assessments would be excluded from minor claims.

Principle 5: Minor claims requiring Special Consideration:

The claim is established by agreement with the lecturer associated with the assessment. The basis of the request needs to be presented responsibly and with as much independent evidence as possible provided. The claim may be initially negotiated verbally but, to be valid, the agreement of both parties must be recorded, for example, by exchange of emails. The correspondence requesting the consideration must contain the case for consideration.

An important element is that other students are not to be disadvantaged by the approval of this request.

In general the consideration given will be an extension of up to one week. If longer extensions are necessary, the request will be treated as a major claim. If a minor claim is not accepted by the lecturer, the student can submit a major claim.

Professor Fekete suggested that records should be saved centrally, particularly emails and the Chair agreed, adding that emails could be saved to files on the University's records system, TRIM. The Vice-Chancellor raised the issue of a student making minor claims with a range of faculties or academics, and asked how the University could ensure such students received consistent responses to their claims. The Chair advised that Principle 12 would apply in such cases.

Professor Bennett argued against introducing too much paperwork for minor claims, adding that academics could identify cases where a student's request is likely to have an impact across a range of units of study. She supported the concept of an holistic approach. The Chair added that workload and privacy issues would need to be considered. Members also discussed how the informal manner of dealing with minor claims would be balanced with formal processes and how the University would

deal with student perceptions that some students received better treatment (in relation to minor claims) than others. The Chair clarified that this principle acknowledged there were cases that could be dealt with on a one-to-one basis, with a simple record kept of any agreement. Mr Greenland expressed support for this concept, noting that one faculty had introduced mandatory paperwork for all claims, with students complaining the process was unnecessarily formal for simple requests, such as an extra day for submitting an assignment.

Principle 6: Major claims requiring Special Consideration:

- 6.1 Adequate supporting written evidence is required.
 - 6.1.1 Not all applications for Special Consideration require a medical certificate. These should be sought only when a definitive identification of a health issue and its impact on the student can be provided by the health professional.¹
 - 6.1.2 Medical Certificates will be issued in accordance with the guidelines of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) and the NSW Medical Practitioners Board.²
 - 6.1.3 In the case of an illness or other misadventure which cannot be attested to by a health professional, a Statutory Declaration should be provided by the student.
 - 6.1.4 In other cases, appropriate documentation may suggest itself.
 - 6.1.5 An academic in the Faculty will make a judgement as to whether the evidence provided by the student indicates that the student's ability to complete that assessment was impaired.

The term assessment includes not only the submission of a completed work or the completion of an exam, but the ability to prepare for it immediately beforehand.

- 6.2 There should be a period in which the completed Special Consideration claim should be submitted.

¹ Medical certificates are legal documents. Medical Practitioners who deliberately issue a false, misleading or inaccurate certificate could face disciplinary action under the relevant Medical Practitioners' Act (or its equivalent). Medical practitioners may also expose themselves to civil or criminal legal action. Medical practitioners can assist their patients by displaying a notice to this effect in their waiting rooms. [No 5: *The Responsibilities of Medical Practitioners*, AMA Position Statement: Certificates Certifying Illness – 1998]

² Certificates must be dated on the day on which they were written. Under no circumstances can this be breached. There may be medical conditions which enable the medical practitioner to certify that a period of illness occurred prior to the date of examination. Medical practitioners need to give careful consideration to the circumstances before issuing a certificate certifying a period of illness prior to the date of examination, particularly in relation to patients with a minor short illness which is not demonstrable on the day of examination and add supplementary remarks, where appropriate, to explain any discrepancy. [No 9.1 *Date of Certificate*, AMA Position Statement: Certificates Certifying Illness – 1998]

If a medical practitioner cannot demonstrate any clinical evidence of the condition with which the patient claims to have suffered, the practitioner should consider completing a letter of support. [No 9.1 *Date of Certificate*, AMA Position Statement: Certificates Certifying Illness – 1998]

The student may seek to have that period extended and the Faculty will not unreasonably deny that claim for extension so that both parties have a responsibility for managing that extension.

- 6.3 When Special Consideration is granted, in most cases the appropriate action is to allow another attempt at the assessment. The Faculty shall be responsible for setting the date of any subsequent attempt of the assessment. The student may seek to have that date amended and the Faculty will not unreasonably deny that claim for amendment so that both parties have a responsibility for managing that amendment.
- 6.4 For successful claims during semester, there may be circumstances where an extension of time to submit work is appropriate but this extension must not provide an unfair advantage over other students.

The Chair particularly drew members' attention to 6.1.3 adding that this principle acknowledges that a medical certificate may not always be the appropriate documentation. He also highlighted 6.1.4 which adds that other forms of documentation may be appropriate in some cases.

Professor Fekete highlighted the reference to "the faculty" in both Principles 6 and 10 and suggested this be further defined as "the faculty where the relevant unit of study is taught". He agreed that there should be consistency of approach within units of study but questioned whether it was possible or desirable to attempt consistency across all units of study.

With respect to 6.1.3, Professor Masters suggested it be reworded to ensure that statutory declarations were not used in place of more appropriate documentation. Concern was expressed by some members that students could use statutory declarations in preference to seeing a doctor, with the Vice-Chancellor pointing out that a good health professional can identify and assist students with emotional and other problems. Mr Greenland argued in support of the clause, adding that there are a variety of reasons why students can not visit a doctor, and that this was a useful fall-back position. Mr White argued that the principle should be considered in conjunction with Principle 3, and that academics should also be involved in identifying students with ongoing problems. The Chair undertook to take this back to the working party for further work.

Professor Bennett also suggested combined 6.3 and 6.4, with extensions to be the desired outcome wherever possible.

Principle 7: For successful claims made prior to, during or immediately after an end-of-semester assessment, typically an examination, a further assessment counts as though it were the first attempt and the original attempt is discarded.

A student may withdraw such a claim up until the release of the results for that assessment. The student may seek academic advice regarding this but not from any academic associated with the assessment.

Recognising that a claim for Special Consideration does not guarantee that the claim will be accepted, general advice to students able to attempt the assessment is to do so, irrespective of whether a claim is lodged.

Professor Fekete suggested there could be problems with the application of this principle. He advised that the School of Information Technologies had amended its local policy to stop students from submitting Special Consideration claims if they had already sat the relevant examination. The Chair advised that this was not in line with the Board's policy, and also expressed concern that the local policy implied that all claims submitted by students who did not sit the examination would be approved by default. Professor Masters added that this would force academics to make a medical judgement, one they were not necessarily qualified to make. Professor Fekete advised that the policy had been introduced to address the problem of large numbers of students submitting claims following examinations simply because they felt they had not prepared enough for the examination. Dr Auld clarified that this was not the policy of the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technologies in general, only of the School of Information Technology.

With regard to replacement examinations, Dr Cramer brought up the issues faced in the School of Languages and Cultures. Language units of study, in particular, used a system of continuous assessment. The current policy's emphasis on providing replacement test papers was creating workload issues for academics in this School, and she asked if any thought was being given to finding other solutions. The Chair advised that the Assessment Working Party was looking at workload issues and would take this into account.

Members also discussed the provision for students to withdraw a claim. Mr Greenland pointed out that the Working Party had deliberated included "up until the release of the results" to discourage students from waiting to see how they had done at their first attempt before making a decision to withdraw their claim. The Vice-Chancellor expressed concern at the amount of stress making such a decision might place on students.

Principle 8: Replacement exams should assess the same skills and knowledge, with appropriate preparation, irrespective of the form of assessment.

Members noted this principle without further comment.

Principle 9: If a student, with good reason, is unable to complete a second assessment, there must be some further assessment process, with the limit that the taking of further assessment does not negatively impact on the subsequent semester's instruction and study.

With respect to Principles 8 and 9, we recognise that there may be circumstances where third or subsequent attempts at assessment will not be viable, due to, for example, barrier considerations or the inability of the Faculty to construct a valid form of assessment.

The Chair added that he was not sure how the University could address this issue, with Professor Fekete suggesting that Principle 8, as well as 9, should apply to all assessments, not just examinations.

Principle 10: All claims for Special Consideration should be managed in the same manner, so that students are assured of a consistent response to claims across the university.

The Chair noted that Principle 10 had previously been discussed.

Principle 11: Students with persistent illness or other problems should be managed through Disability Services, whose judgement will form the basis of an assessment process that provides an assessment effectively on the same basis as for unaffected students. There is no prohibition on a student registered with Disability Services from making a claim for Special Consideration appropriate to the circumstances.

The Chair added that students should be encouraged to register with Disability Services where appropriate, and invited Dr Edmond to speak further on this point. Dr Edmond clarified that Disability Services specifically deals with students who have a disability as defined under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, and recommended the principle be amended to include this information. She stressed that staff and students needed to be clear about the circumstances under which Disability Services will register a student, and that students need to provide adequate documentation to support registration. She further advised that Disability Services consults in depth with academic staff to identify reasonable ways in which course requirements can be amended to take into account students' disabilities, and where core requirements might reasonably be beyond the capacity of any given student with a disability.

The Vice-Chancellor queried how such arrangements worked with progression rules, and at what point would the University have to say that no further special consideration could be provided to a student. Dr Edmond agreed this could be a problem, particularly where students received DNFs (Discontinued – not to count as failure) rather than Fails. She recommended taking a pastoral approach, and acknowledging there are times when it is not helpful to allow students to continue their studies if they have little chance of succeeding.

Principle 12: A consistent pattern of claims for special consideration, both minor and major, may be an indicator of a student at academic risk.

The Chair noted that Principle 12 had previously been discussed, but pointed out the useful connection to the Board's policy on students at risk.

Professor Masters asked that, when the principles and draft policy returned to the Academic Board, a statement be provided on the hierarchy of the various rules, regulations and policies related to Special Consideration.

The Chair thanked members for their input and advised that further information on this issue would be submitted to the Board in 2009.