

ACADEMIC BOARD PHASE THREE REVIEW

REVIEW TEAM REPORT

Faculty of Arts

2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION I: PREFACE

1. Background
2. The Review Process
3. Membership
 - 3.1 Review Team
 - 3.2 Senior Faculty Representatives
 - 3.3 Students

SECTION II: OUTCOMES

1. Introduction to Findings
2. Commendations
3. Affirmations
4. Recommendations

SECTION III: REPORT

1. Introduction and Faculty Profile
2. Leadership
3. Strategic Planning
4. Student Focus
5. Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management
6. Workforce Focus
7. Academic Process Management

SECTION I: PREFACE

(1) Background

The Academic Board reviews are intended to encourage in faculties an academic culture that values scholarship, free inquiry and intellectual rigour and honesty, supporting, in turn, the development and maintenance of high standards of teaching, scholarship and research.

In 2001, the Academic Board initiated a cycle of collegial reviews of the academic activities within faculties with a view to supporting faculties in developing effective academic quality assurance process. These were followed up in 2003 with a second phase of faculty reviews, which expanded the scope to include all elements within the University Strategic Plan.

The Phase 3 Review is based on the Faculty's Self-Evaluation Report (SER) which provides an overview of the Faculty's assessment of the culture which supports, and the processes that lead to, continuous quality improvement in the Faculty at the time of the Review. To guide the development of the SER, faculties were invited to address criteria adapted from the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence 2007.

(2) The Review Process

The Faculty presented its SER to the Academic Board on 10 November 2008 along with a number of supporting documents and relevant data. The Review Team met on 14 November 2008 to consider these materials.

The review visit took place on 9 December 2008. The key purpose of the visit was to enable the Review Team to assess the robustness and validity of the Faculty's judgements.

Implementation

Within six weeks of receipt of the Review Report, the Faculty is required to provide the Academic Board with a response to the Recommendations contained in the Report, indicating how the Faculty will build the Recommendations into Faculty planning processes

Twelve months after the date the Report was presented to the Academic Board, the Faculty is required to provide the Board with a progress Report responding to the Recommendations.

(3) Membership

3.1 Review Team

Professor Bruce Sutton, Chair
Professor Simon Chapman, Faculty of Medicine
Associate Professor Brett Hambly, School of Medical Sciences
Associate Professor Rosanne Taylor, Faculty of Veterinary Science
Professor Barbara Fawcett, Faculty of Education and Social Work
Professor Julie Stubbs, Faculty of Law

3.2 Senior Faculty Staff

Professor Stephen Garton, Dean
Dr Jennifer Barrett, Associate Dean, Postgraduate Coursework
Professor Geraldine Barnes, Head, School of Letters, Art and Media
Associate Professor Carole Cusack, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Matters, and Chair, Department of Studies in Religion
Associate Professor Tim Fitzpatrick, Acting Head, School of Social and Political Sciences
Mr Terry Heath, Academic & Planning Manager

Dr Chris Hilliard, Associate Dean, Library
Professor Duncan Ivison, Head, School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry
Mr Abed Kassis, Web & Information Systems Manager
Associate Professor Judith Keene, Associate Dean, Postgraduate Research
Mr Mark Leary, Executive Director (not present)
Professor Nerida Newbigin, Pro-Dean
Ms Naomi Ramanathan, Student Administration Services Manager
Professor Jeffrey Riegel, Head, School of Languages and Cultures
Dr Brigid Rooney, Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning
Dr Antonia Rubino, Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning
Ms Kate Walker, Marketing Manager
Professor Richard Waterhouse, Associate Dean Research
Dr Bronwyn Winter, Associate Dean, Undergraduate Matters

The Review team also met with other groups of staff, including early career researchers.

3.3

Students

The Review Team met with three groups of students: nine undergraduate students; eight postgraduate coursework students and ten research higher degree students (eight PhD; two master's).

The Review Team acknowledges the need to be careful about generalising the views of a small group of students to the whole student body.

SECTION II: OUTCOMES

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. It should be noted that, in addition, other favourable comments and suggestions for improvement are mentioned throughout the text of the Report. The Report draws on the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report as well as discussion with staff and students. In some places, text from the Self-Evaluation Report has been incorporated directly into the text of this Report.

(1) Introduction to Findings

The Faculty of Arts comprises four Schools, each with a varying number of departments, study areas and programs:

- School of Letters, Art, and Media
- School of Languages and Cultures
- School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry
- School of Social and Political Sciences

The Faculty structure also includes two Centres, two Institutes and the Arts Digital Unit.

The Faculty is recognised as one of the leading faculties of its kind in Australia and internationally.

The Review visit reinforced evidence presented in the Self-Evaluation Report (SER) of a successful, diverse and dynamic Faculty which also faces a range of significant challenges in ensuring its ongoing sustainability.

The SER and discussions with staff and students during the Review visit brought out a number of issues which are addressed further within this Report, as follows:

1. The quality of the student experience may be affected by the current organisational structure, which includes large numbers of small departments that may impede the development of a sense of academic community.
2. Opportunities for collaboration and interdisciplinarity may be constrained in the current organisational structure. At the same time, the importance of retaining disciplinary integrity is recognised.
3. The Faculty has serious infrastructure problems largely relating to insufficient teaching and administrative space, which adversely affects both staff and students. Research students in particular are very poorly housed in the Faculty.
4. While the Faculty has a range of effective communication strategies, its geographical scatter, size and diversity make it difficult to ensure that staff, students and stakeholders are kept well informed on Faculty issues. A more highly developed web presence may be very helpful in addressing this.
5. Student feedback is indicative of concerns with respect to overcrowding in tutorials and seminars.

A summary of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations follows. Note that these are not prioritised by the Review Team. They are listed below in the order in which the relevant issues appear in the SER.

(2) Commendations

Areas where the Academic Board commends the practices of the Faculty are as follows:

1. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for
 - (a) maintaining a very high international profile as a comprehensive Arts faculty;
 - (a) retaining the greatest range and diversity of humanities and social science disciplines in Australia; and
 - (b) sustained excellence and success in research.
2. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for achieving a broad range of intra-Faculty collaborations.
3. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for continuing to attract high quality students and retaining its leadership position in this respect within New South Wales.
4. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for successfully operating the largest student exchange program in the University.
5. The Academic Board commends the Faculty's initiative in developing a Sydney Writing Centre.
6. The Academic Board commends the Faculty's development of an equity website.
7. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for
 - (a) undertaking an overhaul and reform of its postgraduate coursework program; and
 - (b) developing professionally-based master's degrees, including the Master of Health Communication in conjunction with the School of Public Health.

(3) Affirmations

Areas where the Academic Board affirms the Faculty's identification of the need for improvements to its practices are as follows:

1. The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's intention to implement the findings of the 2007 Administrative Services Review to enhance Faculty-level capability and co-ordinate Faculty and School policies and processes. This will address concerns raised by students during the Review regarding access and service levels.
2. The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's aim to improve its infrastructure in order to meet the needs and expectations of staff and students and ensure the ongoing sustainability of the Faculty, while recognising that the University must also be involved in this process.
3. The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's intention to work with the External Relations portfolio to improve bequests and donations and to appoint a part-time development and alumni officer.

(4) Recommendations

Areas where the Academic Board recommends improvements to the practices of the Faculty are as follows:

1. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop a risk management strategy that identifies the limitations in a structure that includes small departments and the strategies to address them, including:
 - consideration of the balance between the academic value of small departments and the collegial benefits of operating within a broader administrative or discipline structure;
 - facilitating the delivery of a consistently high quality student experience across the Faculty;
 - ensuring continuity of supervision for research students;
 - providing opportunities for staff in small departments to take SSP;
 - management of the workload of Chairs of Department, some of whom may be at relatively junior levels of appointment.
2. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop web-based solutions that will facilitate communication with staff, students and stakeholders and provide them with ready access to all aspects of Faculty activities.
3. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty ensure that
 - (a) mechanisms are in place to facilitate the participation of staff in the development and deployment of strategy, including ensuring that staff are made aware of the implications for their own work of specific strategies; and
 - (b) its system of student representation facilitates student involvement in planning and ongoing decision-making within the Faculty.
4. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty implement strategies that will ensure that all students are provided with opportunities to participate in a consistent and coherent academic culture.
5. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty
 - (a) implement mechanisms to enhance the professionalism of first year tutors, in particular their training, induction, support and mentoring in taking up teaching roles, their skills in marking assessments and grading them consistently and their provision of feedback that is of high quality and timely for students; and
 - (b) consider how it can improve the overall levels of student satisfaction with the delivery of tutorials and seminars.
6. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how its Arts Network Mentoring program can be modified to include some academic mentoring and extended to later years.
7. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty improve the access of postgraduate coursework students to after-hours facilities, recognising that this is an issue in which the University as a whole should have an interest.
8. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it might best maintain core competencies among its staff to underpin curriculum delivery and provide a more formal system of staff mentoring, particularly for early career staff.
9. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty improve mechanisms for feedback from all students on the quality of their learning experience, including the encouragement of informal feedback where possible.
10. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty explore mechanisms for meaningful national and international benchmarking to drive improvements in both teaching and research.
11. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty give priority to the development of strategies that will facilitate cross-disciplinary research.

12. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty:
 - (a) coordinate the support available to research students through a formalised structure at either School or Faculty level;
 - (b) provide more opportunity for research students to engage in interdisciplinary activities;
 - (c) provide more opportunity for research students to develop professional skills relevant to future careers, including as academics.
13. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it can provide some flexibility in the cut-off date for PRSS applications.

SECTION III REPORT

(1) INTRODUCTION AND FACULTY PROFILE

The Faculty of Arts retains the greatest range and diversity of humanities and social science disciplines in Australia. In the THES-HS rankings for Humanities/Arts Faculties, it has been ranked in the top 20 for the past three years and in recent ARC grant rounds the Faculty has achieved the greatest number of grants and the largest dollar amount of any Faculty of Arts in Australia.

Commendation 1

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for

- (a) maintaining a very high international profile as a comprehensive Arts faculty;
- (a) retaining the greatest range and diversity of humanities and social science disciplines in Australia; and
- (b) sustained excellence and success in research.

Key themes emerging from the Review are the challenges that the Faculty faces in maintaining disciplinary and interdisciplinary diversity and in ensuring the sustainability of quality teaching in an environment of declining funding for teaching and specific, substantial infrastructure deficiencies.

Faculty and School cultures are driven largely by the management and organisational structure of the Faculty and its Schools. Within the four Schools of the Faculty, departments remain the focus of most of the curricula, teaching and learning and research and research training. The Faculty acknowledges that there are challenges in encouraging academics in different departments to cross departmental boundaries in search of opportunities for collaboration and cooperation.

A key focus of the Review Team was an exploration of the efficiency and effectiveness of the current structural model in enabling the Faculty to achieve its strategic goals and ensure sustainability.

1.1 Schools: Role and Structure

The Faculty has acknowledged that there is some ambiguity about Faculty and School roles, with decisions still to be made about what should be done locally and what can be done centrally. The Review Team noted that the Faculty has recently completed an Administrative Services Review, the focus of which was on the delivery of core administrative services in the Faculty Office and Schools and the coordination of Faculty and School policies and procedures. The Review report has indicated that the Faculty is looking to build on the strengths of the School model and identify processes, structure, roles and resourcing levels which will optimise services at both School and Faculty levels.

Affirmation 1

Academic Board affirms the Faculty's intention to implement the finding of the recent Administrative Services Review to enhance Faculty-level capability and co-ordinate Faculty and School policies and processes. This will address concerns raised by students during the Review regarding access and service levels.

1.2 Departments: Role, Size and Diversity

Departments in the Faculty operate in similar ways to disciplines in other faculties. They are academic groupings, with Schools responsible for all administration, including all aspects of student administration. The Faculty's reputation and standing are enhanced by small departments, such as Ancient Greek, which often attract some of the brightest students. There is general agreement within the Faculty that key small departments need to be sustained, even though this represents a financial penalty for the Faculty. The development of an adequate risk management strategy with respect to small departments, however, should take place in the context of the larger strategic plan initiative to review curriculum structure, with a view to reducing risks associated with small organisational units and shifting more towards a program-based curriculum in some areas of the Faculty's offerings.

The Review Team had some concerns about the risks to the Faculty and student body that could arise from a structure that includes a large number of small departments and also the academic management load of Chairs of Department, some of whom are at Level C and are developing their careers. The large number of departments and their level of autonomy in academic matters may impede the delivery of a consistently high quality student experience.

Recommendation 1

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop a risk management strategy that identifies the limitations in a structure that includes small departments and the strategies to address them, including:

- consideration of the balance between the academic value of small departments and the collegial benefits of operating within a broader administrative or discipline structure;
- facilitating the delivery of a consistently high quality student experience across the Faculty;
- ensuring continuity of supervision for research students;
- providing opportunities for staff in small departments to take SSP;
- management of the workload of Chairs of Department, some of whom may be at relatively junior levels of appointment.

1.3 Interdisciplinarity and Academic Coherence

The maintenance of disciplinary integrity through a departmental structure is regarded as of critical importance by the Faculty. The departmental structure does not necessarily impede interdisciplinarity although it may impact on the overall sense of academic community and coherence in the Faculty.

The current structure allows for innovation, with changing student requirements being met with the establishment of new program areas such as Digital Cultures and Performance Studies and opportunities for students to select interdisciplinary pathways at the postgraduate level. There are also some examples of joint appointments across Schools. The Review Team also noted that the recent Review of Honours in the Faculty had recommended the amalgamation of honours programs in small departments.

Commendation 2

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for achieving a broad range of intra-Faculty collaborations.

The Faculty has acknowledged that programs may appear to lack cohesion, overlap and duplicate one another. The Review Team explored how the Faculty is addressing this and the extent to which a collegial environment has been developed across the Faculty. Encouraging departments to function as discipline groups within Schools rather than autonomous academic units may be helpful in developing opportunities for collaboration in both teaching and research across the Faculty. As noted below, the development of academic coherence and collaboration is further impeded by the poor state of the Faculty's infrastructure, where departments and staff are often scattered across a range of buildings.

The Review Team formed the view that better use of technology could be very helpful in creating a sense of academic community for both staff and students. Web-based solutions might be used more effectively to keep students and staff informed on cross-Faculty teaching and research issues. It is noted that Arts Digital has been established to, amongst other things, enhance and support the Faculty's web presence (see Recommendation 2 below and Section 5 Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management). Nonetheless the Review Team acknowledges that there are resource constraints in developing an adequate web communication system and the Faculty may not be in a position to do all it would like in this area given the significant costs involved. Moreover extensive work needs to be undertaken to ensure that any move to a shared services model does not worsen the ICT infrastructure and services for the Faculty.

1.4 Other Key Challenges

The Faculty has drawn attention to a number of other challenges, including:

(a) Competition for students

The Faculty can demonstrate success in improving its position in attracting high quality undergraduate students. The Faculty is the first choice for arts students in New South Wales, a position it has held through brand and reputation and by continuing to offer high-quality degrees and teaching and an excellent reputation in research.

Commendation 3

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for continuing to attract high quality students and retaining its leadership position in this respect within New South Wales.

The loss of income from local fee-paying students will have a significant financial impact on the Faculty. The Faculty will take the CSP places on offer, but there will still be a significant financial loss, along with downward pressure on the UAI. In order to address this deficit, the Faculty will focus on offering more local postgraduate and international places. There is significant national and international competition in the postgraduate market. The Faculty has a range of strategies in place to address this challenge, including:

- offering professional applied degrees (see Commendation 7);
- conducting a survey of current North American students to assist in developing strategies to attract international students;
- developing programs that are international in their content;
- fully integrating with and utilising University marketing and recruitment facilities.

Issues relating to the experiences of postgraduate coursework students, which are relevant to the Faculty's aim to increase enrolments, are also raised in Section 4 Student and Stakeholder Focus and Section 7 Academic Process Management. More cohesive leadership and attention to marketing, recruiting, enrolling and supporting postgraduate coursework students, as well as changes to academic programs, should help to drive improvements.

The Review Team explored with the various student groups the reasons why they had chosen this Faculty. Their decisions were strongly influenced by the Faculty's reputation and international ranking. This issue is explored in further detail in Section 4 Student and Stakeholder Focus.

(b) Infrastructure

The provision of adequate infrastructure is essential to the effective performance of the Faculty and its future growth. The Faculty faces significant challenges in inadequate infrastructure and lack of space. Departments and staff are scattered across a wide range of buildings. This creates administrative problems; affects the student experience; makes it difficult to develop a coherent academic culture and impedes a culture of collaboration. Staff and research students are inadequately housed and research students find it difficult to engage in a research culture when staff and students are in separate buildings.

This issue is also raised in other sections of this report, including Section 4 Student and Stakeholder Focus and Section 7 Academic Process Management. The Academic Board agrees that resolving the infrastructure crisis should be a high priority for infrastructure planning within the University and will make its representations and contributions to the appropriate bodies to help achieve this end.

Affirmation 2

The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's aim to improve its infrastructure in order to meet the needs and expectations of staff and students and ensure the ongoing sustainability of the Faculty, while recognising that the University must also be involved in this process.

(c) **Recruitment of high quality staff**

The Faculty is conscious of the need to ensure its future academic workforce and the importance of producing a local workforce. One way of addressing this has been to encourage students to enrol in Honours and then complete PhDs with the aim of attracting graduates into the Faculty as academic staff. This issue is also addressed in Section 6 Workforce Focus and Section 7.2.2 Research Training.

The Faculty has indicated that the lack of coursework in the current PhD structure may place it at a disadvantage in relation to other international models in developing PhD graduates able to work collaboratively and with broader interdisciplinary expertise. In discussion with research students, the Review Team formed the view that the Faculty could provide more opportunities for research students to engage in interdisciplinary activities and develop professional skills relevant to their future careers (see Recommendation 12).

(2) LEADERSHIP

2.1 How Senior Leaders Lead

(a) Vision and values

Leaders in the Faculty operate within a complex environment in which there are two significant leadership structures:

- The Faculty governance structure, which allows for participation, discussion and development of Faculty policy and values. This structure involves a network of committees and sub-committees, both academic and management, that develop proposals for consideration by the Faculty Board:
 - Dean's Executive Committee
 - Faculty Management Advisory Committee
 - Policy and Review Committee
 - Committee of Chairs (all Chairs of Department)
 - Library Committee
 - Academic Committees: Postgraduate Matters; Research; Teaching and Learning; Undergraduate Matters.
- Informal personal and professional leadership.

Associate Deans and Heads of School undertake significant roles in articulating the vision and values of the Faculty and building a cohesive environment.

The Review Team formed the view that the Faculty's leadership structure was working well at the senior levels. The Faculty's senior leadership, particularly the Dean, instil confidence and have played a significant role in creating the bright future before the Faculty. They operate effectively; have the confident support of staff and students and project optimism and an energetic engagement with the Faculty's future.

As addressed elsewhere in this report, the effectiveness of leadership across the whole Faculty may be adversely affected by the multiplicity and complexity roles and responsibilities inherent in the current structural model.

(b) Communication and Faculty Performance

While the Faculty has a range of processes in place to facilitate communication, its structure, size and diversity continue to present challenges. A significant component of communication takes place through the Committee structure outlined above. This has the advantage of taking issues out of individual areas, and fostering debate on Faculty-wide issues.

Heads of School are responsible for ensuring the flow of communication to departments and there was evidence that the mechanisms to facilitate this work effectively. Other key communication strategies include: the Dean's newsletter; School executive meetings; and departmental staff meetings which operate differently across the Faculty. Key strategies for communication on research activities include: the research component of the Faculty's website; research performance days; and research clusters.

The Review Team has some concerns with the effectiveness of the communication across the Faculty. Of major concern is the inadequacy of the Faculty's website as a mechanism for communication with staff, students and stakeholders. This matter was raised by all groups. It was noted that the formation of Arts Digital would commence the process of addressing this. The Review Team acknowledges the resource constraints involved in solving all these issues. It also acknowledges that the Faculty has to ensure that any shift to shared services does not threaten potential improvements to this system.

Recommendation 2

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop web-based solutions that will facilitate communication with staff, students and stakeholders and provide them with ready access to all aspects of Faculty activities.

2.2 Social responsibilities

2.2.1 Ethical Behaviour and Corporate Social Responsibility

Ethical behaviour is promoted effectively through the Faculty's culture. The Review Team noted the importance of ensuring awareness of the code of conduct by all staff.

The Review Team was concerned to note that first year undergraduate students felt that their work was unlikely to be checked for plagiarism. This may relate to the training of tutors (see Recommendation 5). Students were all aware of University policies in this respect.

2.2.2 Support of Key Communities

The Faculty has a range of engagements with the community many of which are discipline specific. They include relationships with high schools, public lectures and community and cultural activities. While there is evidence that these relationships are operating effectively, the Review Team has noted that many contacts are personal and episodic and it was not clear how their value to the Faculty as a whole was evaluated. The Review Team formed the view that the Faculty would benefit from a more coordinated and strategic approach to the development of relationships with key communities.

(3) STRATEGIC PLANNING

3.1 Strategy Development Process

(a) **Faculty level strategic planning process**

The Dean's Executive Committee is a key focus for strategic planning in the Faculty. The Faculty is reviewing its strategic planning process in order to allow for 'bottom up' development and to make the plan more inclusive.

The Review Team explored with staff and student groups the effectiveness of Faculty mechanisms to obtain involvement in and understanding of the Faculty's strategic priorities, their development and deployment. There was some concern expressed by students that the student representative process may not be working effectively and that it was difficult for student representatives to communicate with the wider student body.

(b) **School/departmental level strategic planning process**

While Schools have no formal strategic plans, Heads of School have responsibility for ensuring that the Faculty's strategic priorities are disseminated to staff. Individual Schools adopt various strategies for this process.

The Review Team explored the mechanisms for ensuring the integration of the strategic planning process at Faculty/School/Department levels. It was acknowledged that there have been inconsistencies across the Faculty in ensuring that Faculty-level planning is integrated into activities across Schools and Departments.

It was not clear that there were robust processes in place across Schools to enable staff to be aware of the implications of strategic plans for their own work or for students to have some representation in the strategic planning process.

3.1.2 Strategic Academic Objectives

The Faculty's strategic academic objectives for Research and for Learning and Teaching were noted. The Review Team also noted that considerable work had been undertaken by the Faculty to develop, disseminate and implement policies in these areas. Having worked hard to establish good structures and processes the Review Team believe the Faculty should now concentrate more of its energies on developing a stronger emphasis on quality and quality assurance.

3.2 Strategy Development and Deployment

Action plan development and deployment

The SER indicates that the Faculty achieves strategy deployment through its leadership and governance structures, with senior staff taking responsibility for achieving specified goals and actions. To ensure deployment and integration throughout the Faculty these are developed and implemented through the various representative bodies.

Tracking, measurement of outcomes and performance planning is achieved through mechanisms such as KPIs and the budget process.

Recommendation 3

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty ensure that

- (a) mechanisms are in place to facilitate the participation of staff in the development and deployment of strategy, including ensuring that staff are made aware of the implications for their own work of specific strategies; and
- (b) its system of student representation facilitates student involvement in planning and ongoing decision-making within the Faculty.

(4) STUDENT AND STAKEHOLDER FOCUS

4.1 Student, Stakeholder and Market Knowledge

The Faculty has initiated a number of strategies to inform its knowledge of students. They include:

- market research on the possible introduction of a new degree: the Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Science, aimed at identifying students who might be attracted to this degree;
- survey of students who participate in the mentoring program, examining student expectations prior to commencing university;
- follow-up survey of students who did not take up offers.

Undergraduate students

The Faculty has a wide range of degrees, including combined and advanced degrees, and has the largest and most diverse undergraduate cohort in the University. There is evidence that the Faculty has been able to respond flexibly to changes in student demand, with the introduction of interdisciplinary program areas such as Digital Cultures.

The Review Team explored the reasons why students had chosen this Faculty. It found that students valued the University's reputation, and the reputation in humanities, high international ranking and diversity of choice offered by Faculty. Extracurricular activities were also of considerable importance.

A further strength in the Faculty's undergraduate program is that it has the largest student exchange program in the University. This has the added advantage of allowing the Faculty to establish research links with other universities.

Commendation 4

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for successfully operating the largest student exchange program in the University.

Postgraduate coursework students

There has been a significant increase in the numbers of postgraduate coursework students in the past four years. Students confirmed that their choice of the University of Sydney was driven by the reputation of both the University and the Faculty and in some cases because this was the only University in Australia offering a particular course. As noted elsewhere in this report, the Faculty has recently undertaken an overhaul and reform of its postgraduate coursework program.

Postgraduate research students

Postgraduate research students indicated that they were attracted to study in the Faculty either to work with a specific staff member, or because of the research excellence and reputation of the School in which they wished to work.

International students

The Review Team explored the Faculty's processes for attracting international students.

The Faculty has indicated that it will be introducing postgraduate international scholarships to attract the best overseas students as recommended by the previous Academic Board Review.

4.2. Student and Stakeholder Relationships and Satisfaction

4.2.1 Building relationships with students and stakeholders

The Faculty has a wide range of strategies to enable it to build relationships with students and stakeholders. The Review Team explored the evaluation mechanisms the Faculty has in place to test the effectiveness of these strategies.

(a) Relationships with Students

Undergraduate students

The size and diversity of the Faculty can present difficulties in providing advice to students on degree requirements and the choices available for the structure of their programs.

The Review Team found that undergraduate students were somewhat dissatisfied with the availability of support from the Faculty Office. Both prospective and current students would like to see longer opening hours and better telephone access.

There was evidence that mechanisms for communication with undergraduate students are not working as well as the Faculty would wish. Students indicated, for example, that there was little advice available to them regarding additional lectures and seminars that might be of interest to them. There was some concern expressed that the Faculty was using the Arts Society to provide information to students through its weekly newsletter, when the Faculty should be contacting students directly.

Postgraduate Coursework students

The Faculty is aware of the need to develop a more effective community for postgraduate students and this is addressed in Section 4.2.2 (b) Retention and Support. There are significant concerns with access to facilities after-hours. Students' key relationships are with their departments and there is evidence that effective strategies are in place to establish and maintain good relationships with many of the postgraduate coursework students who met with the Review Team. There are, however, inconsistencies across the Faculty.

Recommendation 4

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty implement strategies that will ensure that all students are provided with opportunities to participate in a consistent and coherent academic culture.

(b) Relationships with High Schools

The Faculty has an effective Schools Liaison Program specifically aimed at the undergraduate market. Its activities aim to foster good relationships with key feeder schools and associated stakeholders and to raise the Faculty's profile.

(c) Relationships with Alumni

The Faculty has been supporting the Arts Association in an effort to build a greater alumni base, and has revived its program of inaugural lectures, but recognises the need to be more proactive in this area. The Faculty has a range of processes that facilitate the maintenance of intellectual relationships with its alumni, including through its internship program.

Affirmation 3

The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's intention to work with the External Relations portfolio to improve bequests and donations and to appoint a part-time development and alumni officer.

The Review Team explored the broader purpose of the Faculty's goals in seeking better interactions with its alumni and the mechanisms that it currently has in place to foster those relationships. The Review Team suggests that the role of the proposed development officer

needs to be broader in its scope than the improvement of bequests and donations and that it also focus on building relationships with alumni and other stakeholders.

(d) Relationships with other stakeholders

This issue is also addressed in Section 2.2.2 Support for Key Communities.

The Faculty has a significant role in public debate, with a wide range of stakeholders, including community organisations, cultural institutions, local communities, Consuls-general and diplomatic missions. Links with industry groups are mainly in professional areas such as media and public relations. The external advisory boards of professional faculties are not appropriate generally in this Faculty although an industry advisory group in politics and international relations is being formed. There is also a major focus in international collaborations. Many of the contacts are, however, personal and episodic and it was not clear to the Review Team how the Faculty evaluated the effectiveness of these relationships and how they might benefit the Faculty as a whole, rather than individual discipline areas. (See also Section 2.2.2 Support of Key Communities).

4.2.2 Determining student and stakeholder satisfaction

(a) Feedback

The Faculty has a range of mechanisms to capture student and stakeholder feedback. These include USE, SCEQ and other formal teaching evaluation mechanisms. The Faculty is aware that the most significant cause for complaint from students relates to infrastructure and comments made to the Review Team indicated that overcrowding in both lectures and tutorials was a problem for students.

The Faculty acknowledges the importance of providing more feedback on assessment and explanation of marking outcomes to students. Students indicated that they do not always receive adequate feedback on what is required in assessments. Standards may not be made clear and there can be a considerable degree of variation in assessment requirements in first year in particular.

Recommendation 5

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty

- (a) implement mechanisms to enhance the professionalism of first year tutors, in particular their training, induction, support and mentoring in taking up teaching roles, their skills in marking assessments and grading them consistently and their provision of feedback that is of high quality and timely for students; and
- (b) consider how it can improve the overall levels of student satisfaction with the delivery of tutorials and seminars.

Issues relating to feedback in respect of coursework are addressed in Section 7 Academic Process Management.

**(b) Retention and support
Undergraduate Students**

The key retention and support program offered by the Faculty is the Arts Network Mentoring Program which provides a range of support programs for first year students. This program has been systematically evaluated and has resulted in a program that is responsive to students' diverse needs.

Other retention and support mechanisms include:

- E-newsletter for undergraduate students;
- support for oral and written presentation skills, which includes the planned creation of a Writing Centre;
- programs aimed at improving learning opportunities for disadvantaged students, including an equity website.

While students appreciated the mentoring program, there was some evidence that students would like to see a greater focus on academic matters and for a mentoring program to be extended to later years. Students would, for example, welcome more advice on assessment and essay writing in first year. The size and diversity of the Faculty make it difficult for students to obtain relevant information and access avenues of support.

Recommendation 6

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how its Arts Network Mentoring Program can be modified to include some academic mentoring and extended to later years.

Commendation 5

The Academic Board commends the Faculty's initiative in developing a Sydney Writing Centre.

Commendation 6

The Academic Board commends the Faculty's development of an equity website.

Postgraduate coursework students

Key concerns for the retention and support of postgraduate coursework students relate to the lack of access to facilities in the evening, which is when many of them attend the University. Offices and whole buildings are closed, there are no catering facilities, and there is no access to specialised libraries. The Faculty had recently conducted a survey of postgraduate coursework students which, along with the implementation of the findings of the Review of Administrative Services, would form the basis of improvements to services. The issue of the student experience in the evening, however, is also a matter of wider University concern as it concerns students in a number of faculties. This is an issue that the Academic Board should bring to the attention of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education) and the University of Sydney Union, to ensure that a whole of University approach is developed that will facilitate the achievement of the aims of the Faculty to improve services and facilities for these students.

Recommendation 7

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty improve the access of postgraduate coursework students to after-hours facilities, recognising that this is an issue in which the University as a whole should have an interest.

(5) MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

5.1 Selection and use of information and data

The Review Team noted the Faculty's summary of the data used to measure performance and support Faculty decision making.

The Faculty maintains an active scheduled program of departmental reviews to ensure that academic and administrative units maintain high standards of performance. These reviews include external members.

5.2 Management of information and knowledge

The Faculty acknowledges that there could be improvements in the management of information and knowledge. There are two key factors in this regard:

- (a) Inconsistency across the Faculty in the control and management of units of study and curricula. Non-core units of study are developed based on individual research and discipline, although this is part of the Faculty's effort to be innovative in terms of research-led teaching practices in the University. Nonetheless there are no mechanisms for ensuring the continuation of a unit of study following the departure of the relevant staff member.
- (b) Arts Digital was formed in 2008 to enable and enhance plans for the present and future of digital media and technology-based services in the Faculty. A key part of Arts Digital's responsibilities is the Faculty web presence.

These issues are addressed in more detail in other sections of this report with relevant recommendations.

(6) WORKFORCE FOCUS

6.1 Workforce Engagement

6.1.1 Workforce enrichment

Key to the Faculty's achievement of international excellence in teaching and research is the appointment of and support for research active staff and staff who have proven research potential. The challenge for the Faculty is to sustain research while at the same time ensuring high quality teaching.

The Review Team explored the mechanisms within the Faculty to better support all levels of staff, in particular early career staff, to achieve an appropriate balance of teaching, research and administration. It was noted that the Faculty is planning to increase research support for new Level B & C appointments from \$5,000 to \$10,000-\$15,000.

6.1.2 Workforce and leader development

(a) Performance Management and Development

PM&D

The University's PM&D program is a key tool for academic staff development in the Faculty. There are, however, inconsistencies in how this program is managed across the Faculty and evidence of some levels of dissatisfaction. There was some concern that using PM&D for ratings limited the effectiveness of the process as a developmental tool. It could be seen as a mechanism for dealing with underperformance rather than encouraging and rewarding good performance.

Special Studies Program

The Faculty has effective processes in place to consider applications for SSP. There is, however, some concern that opportunities might be impeded in very small departments.

Tutor Development Program

The Faculty runs a tutor development program in the early part of semester one each year. This program was implemented following a recommendation made by the previous Academic Board Review and is operating effectively.

(b) Workforce Planning

The Faculty has indicated that it has some difficulty in attracting high quality academic staff and will have large numbers of staff leaving in the next five years as they reach retirement age.

Mechanisms to address this include encouraging students to undertake PhDs and move into academic careers and increased international recruitment.

The Review Team explored the impact of the Faculty's structural model on academic planning. The Faculty indicated that it endeavours to look at the School as a whole rather than at individual departments in order to achieve academic coherence and there can be some resistance to this. The Faculty is conscious of the need to develop a workforce that can respond to future requirements. Succession planning is acknowledged as a weakness in the Faculty and is particularly difficult for small departments.

The Review Team suggests that the Faculty may benefit from developing a whole-of-career planning approach to supporting staff to effectively fulfil their teaching, student support and teaching leadership roles. There appears to be a variation between disciplines as to how this is currently managed.

(c) **Mentoring**

The Faculty has a number of strategies that support mentoring, although across the Faculty mentoring is informal. Early career staff indicated that they were satisfied with the mentoring support provided to them, particularly for teaching. Mentoring was also available for research grant applications, but there was some evidence that the competitive nature of the research academic culture could militate against the success of this.

In discussion with staff, the Review Team formed the view that a more formal mentoring system could be introduced by the Faculty. The PM&D process could be utilised more proactively as a source of mentoring.

Recommendation 8

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it might best maintain core competencies among its staff to underpin curriculum delivery and provide a more formal system of staff mentoring, particularly for early career staff.

(d) **Recognising and rewarding staff**

The Faculty has a range of strategies to recognise staff achievements. The Faculty has annual teaching awards and intends to offer a monetary prize with the award in the future, in order to enhance participation in this scheme.

6.2 Workforce Environment

Workforce capability

The Faculty has drawn attention to the tensions between research excellence and commitment to teaching, particularly since ARC grants are frequently in the form of teaching relief.

The Review Team explored the Faculty's mechanisms for determining academic staff workloads and how it manages the workforce environment to ensure outcomes for staff are achieved in teaching and research. The structure of the Faculty, with many small departments, presents some specific challenges in this respect, although Schools try to ensure equity and there was some evidence that workloads were generally managed effectively. It was noted that control of curriculum, which is a departmental responsibility, is an essential component of workload distribution.

Early career staff indicated that the support mechanisms available in their departments generally worked very well, with the provision of mentoring, flexibility in use of start-up funds and appropriate management of workloads.

Staff welcomed the support which technology could provide for teaching, particularly the growth in WebCT, and the back-up provided by Arts Digital through, for example, podcasts. As mentioned elsewhere in this report, the Faculty's website has significant shortcomings which are being addressed through a current working party.

The Review team also noted restricted budgets are frequently managed through the use of a casual workforce. This, along with increasing class sizes, has an impact on student satisfaction.

(7) ACADEMIC PROCESS MANAGEMENT

7.1.1 Core competencies

Core competencies are designed to ensure the cultivation of skills in research, critical analysis, imaginative but disciplined thinking and high level skills in written and oral communication, and, for postgraduate students, specific skills and professional competencies.

The Review Team found that students valued highly the generic skills they obtained from their degree programs.

7.1.2 Coursework program design

The Faculty's strategic aims are to maintain excellence in and secure resources to support the maintenance of the current breadth and diversity of academic programs. Some degree programs focus on maximising choice while others offer structured pathways, for example the Bachelor of Socio-Legal Studies.

Undergraduate

The Faculty has an ongoing program of monitoring and reviewing its programs to ensure that they meet student and community needs. A current example is the market research undertaken in conjunction with the Science Faculty in developing the Bachelor of Liberal Arts and Science. The Faculty is aware of the need to conduct appropriate market research in designing its courses. Its breadth and depth of choice are significant strengths.

The Review Team found that students were generally very satisfied with the design of their courses.

Postgraduate

The Review Team noted that the Faculty has undertaken an overhaul and reform of the postgraduate coursework program. This had focussed on the ability of the Faculty to respond to changes in market demand in a timely manner (e.g. accelerating the cycle for review and approval of programs), as well as improving the postgraduate experience for students. The Faculty has responded to student demand for postgraduate degrees that will provide them with employment opportunities by developing professionally-based master's programs, for example the Master of Health Communication in conjunction with the School of Public Health.

The postgraduate coursework students interviewed by the Review Team were generally very satisfied with the design of their courses. Some concerns were raised in relation to specific courses: in one case that there should be scope for additional flexibility in choice of units of study, and in another that the course was too vocational with insufficient theoretical academic content.

Commendation 7

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for

- (a) undertaking an overhaul and reform of the postgraduate coursework program; and
- (b) developing professionally-based master's degrees, including the Master of Health Communication in conjunction with the School of Public Health.

7.1.3 Coursework Delivery

(a) Formal and Informal Feedback

Student satisfaction is measured through the formal evaluation mechanisms of USE, CEQ and SCEQ as well as other mechanisms as set out in Section 4 Student and Stakeholder Focus. Issues relating to student feedback are also addressed in Section 4.

Undergraduate students confirmed the Faculty's statement that there were problems in respect of timely feedback because of workload pressures on staff. Students also indicated that there was inconsistent solicitation of feedback and that they would appreciate the opportunity to provide more informal feedback. Students were aware of changes made on the basis of feedback, including mid-semester changes.

Postgraduate coursework students indicated that they were generally satisfied with opportunities for feedback. Museum Studies students in particular felt confident that their feedback would be taken into account and students were involved at an early stage in how units are run.

Recommendation 9

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty endeavour to improve feedback mechanisms from all students on the quality of their learning experience, including the encouragement of informal feedback where possible.

(b) Benchmarking

The Faculty has no formal system for benchmarking. There has, however, been some benchmarking of specific areas and the utilisation of external examiners for honours provides continual benchmarking of that program.

While acknowledging the complex nature of benchmarking, the Review Team formed the view that the Faculty could make better use of national and international benchmarking data to drive improvements in both teaching and research.

Recommendation 10

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty explore mechanisms for meaningful national and international benchmarking to drive improvements in both teaching and research.

(c) Research on learning and practice

The SER advises that research-led teaching is a key principle of the Faculty. Units of study are frequently developed on the basis of a staff member's particular research interests. The Review Team was concerned that this could impede flexibility across the Faculty and affect strategic planning, although any response to these concerns needs to ensure that research-led teaching remains an integral part of the Faculty's offerings.

(d) Delivery of high quality academic programs

The Faculty has a range of mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of its programs. This includes the Teaching and Learning Network; Teaching and Learning Committee workshops; consultation guidelines for course and unit development, as well as use of teaching evaluations.

The Teaching and Learning Committee investigates the results of teaching evaluations, identifies strengths and has disseminated the results. The Teaching and Learning Committee is aware that USE results need to be complemented by other lenses such as a peer observation pilot. The relationship between all sets of data is recognised so that the overall quality of teaching in the Faculty can be improved. USE results are reviewed to establish benchmarks for appropriate levels of performance. Information is fed back to Chairs and is addressed tactfully in PM&D.

The Review Team found that the processes are in place to ensure teaching quality across the Faculty generally work effectively. Undergraduate students' main concerns relate to the overall resourcing of tutorials and seminars. Overcrowded seminars and tutorials significantly detracted from the quality of students' learning experiences.

7.1.5 Honours

The Faculty has a significant interest in maintaining strong Honours programs, from which the best students are encouraged to undertake PhDs, providing a basis for the future academic workforce.

The Faculty has acknowledged the difficulty for small departments in maintaining Honours programs and one of the recommendations of a recent Review of Honours has been the amalgamation of programs in small departments. Recommendations from the review are in the process of being implemented. The Review Team considers that this is an area where a School approach would be beneficial in decreasing the duplication of administrative effort across departments and promote more cross-disciplinary interaction.

7.2 Research and research training

7.2.1 Research

(a) Excellence in research/research productivity and quality

The Faculty has a number of mechanisms to support researchers to achieve and sustain their research potential including travel grants and teaching relief for early career staff who are close to finalising a research project.

The Review Team explored the success of these strategies with staff. There was a general view, both from early career and other staff that the strategies were working and the Faculty felt positively about its success in research outcomes. While the Faculty had a strong record in research grant funding, the importance of scholarly research for staff as opposed to research funded by grants, and difficulties in fitting into national priorities for research funding are acknowledged. Of specific concern is the extent to which structural issues and Faculty culture impede collaboration across the Faculty.

Recommendation 11

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty give priority to the development of strategies that will facilitate cross-disciplinary research.

Benchmarking research

The Faculty has only undertaken limited benchmarking for research productivity. The view was put that the University might need a revised definition of research-active staff. The Faculty found it difficult to measure research activity across the University because of lack of access to relevant data.

(b) Transferring benefits to key communities

Awareness of research activities is achieved through a range of approaches. It was not clear how the effectiveness of these approaches was measured.

7.2.2 Research Training

The Review Team noted that there had been a steady decline in research student enrolments (from 456 PhD students in 2005 to 436 in 2008). There was, nevertheless, significant continuing demand for places. The Review Team was advised that the Faculty had become more careful in its selection of students and completion rates had improved, which would have an impact on total enrolments.

Support mechanisms for research students include:

- proposed introduction of teaching fellowships in 2009;
- twice-yearly orientation and welcome for students;
- seminar programs.

Research Supervisor Connect allows students to discover the research activities of staff and assists them to select a supervisor.

Key issues for research students centred on facilities, recognition for teaching, opportunities for coursework and the need for greater integration across the Faculty. Research students indicated that they would appreciate more opportunity for interdisciplinary studies, and Faculty-level seminars to consider methodology. While they did receive some advice on activities in other departments, opportunities for attendance at collaborative seminars or Faculty-wide events was very limited, and they were very much contained within their own disciplines. The Review Team would have liked to have seen more opportunities for research students to be exposed to academic activities such as grant-writing, and for them to be more actively involved in a Faculty-wide research community.

Research student coordination is currently undertaken within departments, unlike the coordination of other student groups, which has a more formal structure at the School level. The level of support for individual students is very much dependent on their supervisor and there is a strong case for implementing a more formalised structure at School level, if not Faculty level, to support the activities of research students.

Research students are particularly concerned with the poor quality of the infrastructure available to them. Problems relating to infrastructure are common across all staff and student groups but are particularly acute for research students. It is a testament to the high standing of the Faculty that this lack of facilities has not affected the desire of students to undertake their research degrees in the Faculty.

The Review Team explored the opportunities the Faculty provided for doctoral students to develop skills required for the workforce. It found a level of dissatisfaction with opportunities for career development. The Faculty is intending to introduce postgraduate teaching fellowships which would give some additional financial support to selected PhD students and encourage their pursuit of academic careers. This will help to address the Faculty's concerns about the recruitment of academic staff in the future.

Recommendation 12

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty:

- (a) coordinate the support available to research students through a formalised structure at either School or Faculty level;
- (b) provide more opportunity for research students to engage in interdisciplinary activities;
- (c) provide more opportunity for research students to develop professional skills relevant to future careers, including as academics.

Another key concern for research students is the timing of PRSS grants. It is clear that the current cut-off date for applications is creating difficulties for many students.

Recommendation 13

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it can provide some flexibility in the cut-off date for PRSS applications.

7.2.3 Research Supervision

Students are generally very happy with the quality of their research supervision. There are, however, issues that need to be addressed in respect of continuity of research supervision in small departments if a supervisor leaves the employment of the University (see Recommendation 1).