

FACULTY OF MEDICINE
RESPONSE TO RECOMMENDATIONS
ACADEMIC BOARD VISIT

Wednesday 6 November 2002

The Faculty thanks the members of the Academic Board Review Team for their helpful feedback, notes the many areas of commendation and provides the following responses to the recommendations:

Recommendation 1

That the Faculty consider ways of addressing the inconsistency in the quality of teaching, especially in relation to visiting lecturers and PBL tutors.

Quality of teaching has been, and continues to be, a central Faculty concern. In the USydMP, feedback from students to lecturers and PBL tutors is regular and timely. Smaller classes in Masters programs and individual research supervision enable more individualized feedback and improvement to occur, provided that a culture of open communication is fostered.

During 2003 the Department of Medical Education (DME) assumed responsibility for PBL tutor allocation, in consultation with each School and discipline, and has further developed and refined the system. PBL tutors receive a Certificate of Accreditation following attendance at introductory and continuing PBL tutor workshops and a similar system is now in place for re-accreditation at continuing PBL tutor workshops. On-line student feedback to PBL tutors continues to be collated and forwarded to each tutor, and the global ratings for each tutor are now forwarded to respective Heads of School and disciplines. The DME continues to offer a guidance/support/re-training service for tutors who have experienced poor student ratings. Student on-line feedback to lecturers is also collated and sent on to the individual lecturer concerned. The de-identified feedback information is also considered at a subsequent Block Review and decisions made about follow-up action. Minutes of the Block Reviews are now posted on the student website.

In 2004, the Faculty's Graduate Program in Medical Education will accept its first students. A Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma and Master of Medical Education will be offered, in collaboration with the Faculty of Health Sciences and the Faculty of Education and Social Work. It will be particularly relevant to Faculty members, and will further promote quality in teaching and learning within the Faculty of Medicine. A Teaching Infrastructure Fund grant has enabled the DME to appoint a Project Officer to assist with the development of this program and is further evidence of the Faculty's commitment to the success of this initiative.

Recommendation 2

That the Faculty develop strategies to increase the number of indigenous students in the USydMP

In response to this recommendation, a discussion paper was prepared for the Faculty Education Committee by Associate Professor Jill Gordon, based on her experiences at the University of Newcastle, and outlining a range of preparatory, transition, academic and social support strategies needed to recruit and retain indigenous medical students. The discussion paper provided the basis for a successful grant application to an outside organization (that wishes to remain anonymous) to create an academic position and an administrative position to carry out the recommendations of the report. The positions will be complement and extend College-wide initiatives. An Advisory Committee will oversee this process. A Project Officer Indigenous and Rural Support has been appointed.

Recommendation 3

That the Faculty be particularly vigilant in monitoring and engaging in forward planning to ensure that there is sufficient resource support for programs where there is rapid growth in student numbers (as for example with the Master of International Public Health).

The Faculty is currently reviewing its postgraduate coursework programs, and is considering the benefits and opportunities of a coordinated approach to postgraduate coursework development and delivery. A Working Party has been established and a Project Officer has been appointed to undertake this review and provide recommendations to Faculty. Part of this review will focus on income distribution to ensure that income from Masters programs is used to provide support for rapidly growing programs.

In April 2003, the Combined Board of Postgraduate Studies for the Faculties of Dentistry, Medicine and Pharmacy was restructured and two sub-committees of equal standing were established. These two sub-committees are the Postgraduate Research Sub-Committee, which will deal with matters relating to research degrees, and the Postgraduate Coursework Sub-Committee, which will deal with matters relating to coursework degrees. The new structure has allowed for a better streamlining of processes and has already improved the efficiency and workflow of the administration and care of postgraduate candidatures. In addition, it has allowed the Board to consider issues relating to the quality and delivery of coursework programs in an effective forum, promoting the development of consistent practices across the three Faculties.

The Academic Board Review noted particularly the rapid growth of the Master of International Public Health (MIPH). To help ensure improved forward planning, the international student application process is currently under review by the Dean of Graduate Studies. The Faculty of Medicine will have input into this process with a view to implementing better systems and improved communication, to ensure the earliest possible advice of take-up numbers into a particular course. The growth in the MIPH has made the School of Public Health financially stronger; it has not drained resources from the School. In response to specific issues raised during the Board Review, a successful Teaching Infrastructure Grant application has enabled us to establish a website that will help us to achieve the following objectives:

- to improve the overall learning experience of international coursework students in the Faculty of Medicine, including basic training in generic skills and key information and resources required for successful completion of coursework programs.
- to provide a “one-stop shop” learning resource site for the rapidly expanding Masters of International Public Health course

Recommendation 4

That although generic attributes are embedded into course outlines, the Faculty consider making them more explicit to students, particularly at the postgraduate level.

The Faculty is developing web pages that contain information for staff and students on generic attributes in the USydMP and in its postgraduate programs.

The Board of Postgraduate Studies will review course documentation to ensure that the generic attributes are more explicitly described and integrated with specific program goals. An example of how this is being achieved at postgraduate level is available on the website for the Graduate Program in Medical Education at:

<http://www.dme.med.usyd.edu.au/mmeded/index.html>

Recommendation 5

That the Faculty consider ways of providing students with opportunities to receive more comprehensive and timely feedback on their level of understanding and performance.

Clearer definitions of performance criteria for both written and clinical formative assessments are gradually being developed. For example, in the 2003 USydMP written formative assessments, prompt feedback has been provided to students that details performance criteria in terms of unsatisfactory, borderline and satisfactory categories. Assessment items and instruments are currently being mapped within each curriculum Theme across each stage of the USydMP in order to align assessment to the level and breadth of knowledge and skill required.

Current developments in improving the quality and promptness of performance feedback with regard to both written and clinical formative assessments should result in enhanced student satisfaction. For instance, it is expected that a newly developed electronic form of our Modified Essay Question (MEQ) assessment will lead to more prompt and detailed feedback from Faculty content experts.

A process of review and improvement of the quality of assessment items and feedback in the USydMP's online assessment system is currently underway. This project also involves adding high quality items from an international consortium's item bank and responding promptly to comments and queries posted by students. It is expected that this project will directly lead to improvements in feedback on students' levels of understanding and performance.

Recommendation 6

That the Faculty consider ways of improving the support and monitoring of international students, particularly postgraduate students

There have been further improvements both in the quality and efficiency of the services provided to students and in the administrative processes of the Postgraduate Student Administration Unit. The Institute for Teaching and Learning, in its SCEQ questionnaire of postgraduate students, reported an increase in the overall student satisfaction level with the quality of student support and administration services.

Further refinement of the Postgraduate Student Filemaker Pro-based database has facilitated better tracking of progression through all phases of a student's candidature and improvements to the reporting functionality of the Unit.

The Postgraduate Student Administration Unit has launched a purpose-built website designed to be a resource for people interested in taking up

postgraduate study through the Faculties of Dentistry, Medicine and Pharmacy, and for students already enrolled in a coursework or research course. The website can be found at:

<http://www.pg.chs.usyd.edu.au/pg/>

Included in the site are specific course information and research programs on offer. There are contact details for those administering these programs, details on how to apply and practical information on all aspects of candidature. As well there is more general information of relevance to both local and international students, with many links to other useful sites.

The website is fully integrated with the Postgraduate Student Administration Unit Filemaker Pro database and has details for 90 courses and over 500 units of study offered throughout the Faculties of Dentistry, Medicine and Pharmacy.

There are many links to areas of interest and a dedicated section on University and Faculty policies, such as Special Consideration, Academic Honesty, issues relating to Intellectual Property and other important policies. The site also covers all areas of a student lifecycle, from general inquiries at pre-admission, through to progression, the examination process and graduation and is also proving a useful resource for academic and general staff.

Specifically in relation to international students enrolled in the USydMP, a liaison officer has been appointed to offer support and guidance throughout their enrolment. The appointee is collecting information to assist students' re-integration into the medical system of their country of origin on completion of studies here.

Recommendation 7

That the Faculty consider ways of improving the postgraduate research experience, particularly in terms of support, isolation, and initial training.

See earlier comments in relation to Recommendation 6.

In addition, the Combined Board of Postgraduate Studies in Dentistry, Medicine and Pharmacy recognises that probation could be a useful mechanism for identifying those research candidates who are at risk of non-completion or failure, sooner rather than later in their candidature. A paper was developed and approved by the Research Sub-Committee and will be implemented from semester 1, 2004. The paper aims to provide candidates, their supervisors and postgraduate coordinators with guidelines for probationary acceptance, assessment of satisfactory progress and outcomes of the process. The guidelines have been presented to the Academic Board's Graduate Studies

Committee for further consideration and with a view to ratification as University-wide guidelines.

As mentioned earlier, in relation to Recommendation 6, a new postgraduate student website has been created that will be particularly useful for research students. For example:

- The site includes a comprehensive list of Frequently Asked Questions that aims to provide information to current students, potential students and members of staff. It is continually updated.
- The site has a web-based searchable database that enables potential students to view "Recently Published Theses" as a means of determining areas of research productivity as well as identifying potential supervisors. There is both a keyword search and a search for published these within a particular discipline or unit.
- The website also links to the postgraduate student database on courses and units of study, so that a student can not only obtain detailed information about a particular course, such as course aims and objectives, but is able to drill down to unit of study level with unit of study outlines and information about classes and assessments.

The Research-Sub-Committee of the Combined Board of Postgraduate Studies has discussed ways of addressing the sense of isolation experienced by many postgraduate students. The possibility of developing a mobile seminar series is being explored.

The Central Clinical School continues to offer workshops all year round on various relevant topics ranging from basic research methods to emerging fields in research. All current postgraduate students are informed of these workshops which are well attended by students (and potential students) from all campuses.

The Dean has met with postgraduate students and has offered some financial support to re-activate the Faculty of Medicine Postgraduate Society. The purpose of the Society would be to bring together students from all campuses in social and recreational activities.

Recommendation 8

That the Faculty consider ways in which the high level of quality will be sustained, particularly in relation to support and encouragement of RHD students.

This has been noted by the Board of Postgraduate Studies, and will receive careful consideration as part of on-going quality assurance processes.

Recommendation 9

That the Faculty consider ways in which communication of Academic Board policies to students may be improved.

The Faculty web pages are being reorganised to make Academic Board policies more accessible for staff and students in the USydMP and in Masters level programs. (See earlier comments in relation to Recommendations 6 & 7).

Electronic bulletins will be issued to students biannually, drawing their attention to relevant Academic Board policies.

Faculty of Medicine
20 November 2003.