

COMMITTEE OF CHAIRS OF ACADEMIC BOARDS/SENATES OF UNIVERSITIES IN NSW AND THE ACT

Minutes of meeting (05/2) of the Committee of Chairs held at 9.30 am
on Thursday 9 June 2005 at the University of Wollongong.

PRESENT: Tony Baker (UTS) (Chair), Roger Bronks (SCU), John Carter (Sydney), Linda Connor (Newcastle), Anne Cusick (UWS), Tony Dooley (UNSW), Ruth Foxwell (Canberra), Majella Franzmann (UNE), David Griffiths (Wollongong) and Bruce Kercher (Macquarie).

George Cooney (Chair, Technical Committee on Scaling) attended by invitation, and Damien Considine (Deputy Chair, Academic Senate, University of Wollongong) attended as an observer.

IN ATTENDANCE: Des Petersen and Sita Chopra (UTS).

1. APOLOGIES/WELCOMES/FAREWELLS

Apologies were received from Peter Camilleri (ACU), Malcolm Gillies (ANU) and David Green (CSU).

Professor Gerard Sutton, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wollongong, welcomed members to the campus and spoke briefly about some of the major issues facing the sector. He spoke of the role that Chairs of Academic Boards and Senates could play in maintaining the collegial tradition and upholding academic values in a time of dramatic change. He wished members well for the meeting.

The Chair responded by thanking the Vice-Chancellor, and spoke positively of the spirit of collegiality within the group. He also thanked David Griffiths and Tori McLaughlin from University of Wollongong for hosting the meeting and providing all the necessary local support.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 7 APRIL 2005

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed, with the addition of Linda Connor to the list of Apologies.

3. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

Foundation Studies Programs

The Chair informed the Committee that he had reported the outcome of the previous meeting to the convener of the Project Group in Canberra, but the recipient was no longer attached to the project, and he was attempting to identify a new contact.

Aegrotat Awards

Members noted details of the Aegrotat policies at UTS, SCU, Sydney and UNSW, and discussed the range of approaches across members' institutions. In particular, Anne Cusick outlined a large increase in the number of cases at UWS, and the subsequent need to develop a defined approach. In a wide-ranging discussion, it was noted that:

- there are often two competing agendas, viz: the 'compassionate agenda', which leaned towards a sympathetic and flexible attitude, and the 'attainment agenda', which tended to focus attention on students achieving a level of academic achievement;
- there may be practical advantages in dealing with posthumous cases separately from cases of illness and incapacity;

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Aegrotat Awards (cont'd)

- in the New Zealand system, Aegrotat provisions allow a student to proceed to the next level of a course without having completed a particular subject at the previous level, because of illness;
- it is important to arrive at a clear definition of 'permanent incapacity', in relation to both physical and mental incapacity, and to define the period to be covered by the award (involving a definition of what is meant by 'the final assessment period', whether it is the final year or session);
- some institutions do not provide for Aegrotat awards in the research area, while others do and, in these cases, there arises a different set of problems in defining how a student has met requirements;
- it is necessary to consider culturally sensitive ways in which to administer Aegrotat awards.

Members agreed that it might be useful to the discussion to have a number of case studies that can be looked at in detail, with a sense of how they had been handled in light of the various institutional practices and policies. Members were requested to provide some case studies, together with details of their current Aegrotat policy (where not already provided) for discussion at a later meeting.

4. HSC CATEGORY A COURSES

4.1 Category A Reviews

The following documents were received for consideration:

- a checklist of all Category A subject review reports received to date;
- review reports for the following courses:
 - Ancient History
 - Biology
 - Chemistry
 - Earth and Environmental Science
 - Engineering Studies
 - Geography
 - History Extension
 - Industrial Technology
 - Legal Studies
 - Modern History.

It was noted that UNSW would also review Industrial Technology, and that the final decision would also take into account the previous discussion about Industrial Technology during the Category B reviews. Members were asked to ensure that, where several universities are considering a course review, they present a final report reflecting the consensus of the joint reviews.

It was agreed that any comments made by reviewers about the substance of particular courses (such as the syllabus and examination papers) should be forwarded to the Board of Studies for consideration in future curriculum changes.

In further discussion, it was agreed that those contributing to the reviews should be formally thanked by the Committee of Chairs. The Chair undertook to do this. Members also agreed that the

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4.1 Category A Reviews (cont'd)

Committee's report back to the Board of Studies should outline the review process adopted by the Committee, including a statement to the effect that a wide range of academic experts in the discipline areas and educationists with expertise in the HSC syllabi had been involved, and including a consolidated list of those of the experts who consent to the inclusion of their name.

It was agreed to hold over final consideration of the review reports to the next meeting.

5. PRESENTATIONS

5.1 The International Baccalaureate (IB) and the UAI

Professor George Cooney briefed the Committee about the history of the International Baccalaureate (IB), current trends and how the IB is treated in calculating the UAI.

He outlined the increasing popularity of the IB, although in NSW the number of IB candidates is about 80. One of the reasons that the IB is favoured in some quarters is that about 20% of candidates fail (ie. achieve less than 24 out of 45 points), and this creates the perception that it must be rigorous. A Fail in the IB means a UAI of zero. He illustrated the comparison between IB results and a UAI in 2004 in the following table:

45 points in the IB is equivalent to a UAI of 99.95
44 points in the IB is equivalent to a UAI of 99.85
40 points in the IB is equivalent to a UAI of 99.15
35 points in the IB is equivalent to a UAI of 96.2
30 points in the IB is equivalent to a UAI of 90.4
24 points in the IB is equivalent to a UAI of 78.85

He also explored the issue of whether there should be national or state-based tables of equivalencies. Both NSW and Victoria were positive about a national approach, but South Australia was not. A table based on the weighted averages of NSW and Victoria schedules was being developed.

In response to questions, his understanding was that the IB examinations are robust, and that there is a moderation process in place.

Discussion then ranged over the following areas:

- the accuracy of the HSC versus the IB as a predictor of success in university study
- top end and lower end calibration (with there being some crowding at the top end for IB students, and some crowding at the lower end for HSC students, with about 20% of HSC candidates getting a UAI of less than 40)
- the UA Rank compared with the UA Index (noting that the UAR is largely institution-specific, and the outcome may vary from one university to another)
- the calculation of equivalencies with TAFE qualifications (done at an institutional level)
- the risks in responding to DEST requirements by publishing a low, universal UAI.

The Chair and George Cooney would collaborate in preparing an issues paper for a later meeting of the Committee of Chairs, taking into account the matters raised in the present discussion, and outlining any specific aspects needing the Committee's attention.

6. FINANCIAL STATEMENT

A current financial statement, with estimated expenditure to the end of June, was endorsed. Membership subscription renewals would be issued during June.

7. CONFERENCES AND MEETINGS

The Committee noted the draft program for the national meeting of Chairs and Presidents of Academic Boards and Senates at UNSW on Thursday 13 and Friday 14 October 2005.

Tony Dooley informed members that one of the main intentions is to achieve a practical outcome to the conference, in the form of a statement of the role and purpose of Academic Boards/Senates. He expressed the wish that members of the Committee of Chairs would be available to collect from broader groups of participants the points needed for the statement on Academic Board/Senate roles.

In this connection, it was agreed to list on the agenda for the next meeting of the Committee of Chairs the matter of the role and purpose of Academic Boards/Senates. It was noted that Anne Cusick would provide members with the report of the terms of reference of all Academic Boards/Senates collected during a recent survey.

8. DUTIES OF CHAIRS/PRESIDENTS

A brief analysis of the completed surveys of Chairs/Presidents was noted. The Committee recorded its thanks to Sita Chopra, who had compiled the report.

9. OTHER BUSINESS

9.1 Academic Impact of VSU Legislation

This matter was noted.

9.2 AUQA Audits – Update and Discussion

The Chair informed members that he was compiling a listing of the themes emerging from AUQA Audit reports, as they relate to Academic Boards/Senates. So far, the main themes appear to be the need for Boards/Senates to be able to demonstrate how they maintain oversight of the quality of the academic operations of the universities, for example in such areas as teaching and learning; the communications processes and relationships between Boards/Senates and their stakeholders, particularly Councils; and maintaining academic standards across campuses, including remote campuses within Australia and offshore. The Chair agreed to provide a detailed summary of the AUQA report themes to a future meeting.

9.3 Information for Members (Information Kit)

A draft Information Kit, which assembles a wide range of material relating to the Committee of Chairs, was noted. Members thanked the Secretary for preparing this kit, which would be particularly useful for new members.

9.4 UDBEC Nomination

The Chair informed members that he had received three nominations to replace Gail Huon. His recommendation that Dr Stephen Ralph from University of Wollongong be the nominee on the UDBEC Appraisal Panel was endorsed. The other nominees were thanked for their interest.

9.5 Use of e-Papers for Boards/Senates

In response to a general question, members shared information on the extent to which universities had moved towards the use of electronic agenda papers for their Boards/Senates. The general trend was towards maintaining a despatch of hard copy agenda papers to members and a small number of additional key personnel, with the balance of papers being made available on-line for general 'For Information' usage. The consensus was that this format was likely to continue for the foreseeable future, and that entirely electronic communication of papers was some way off.

CLOSURE

The meeting closed at 12:50 pm.