

**Discussion paper for Armidale Meeting**  
**National Meeting of Chairs of Academic Boards and Senates**  
**UNSW October 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> 2005**

*Rationale*

At a time when the place of managerialism within universities is under challenge from academics and, simultaneously, Government is demanding an increasingly higher level of accountability from the Higher Education sector, Academic Boards and Senates can and should play a crucial role in universities. A national statement on the role of Boards and Senates, endorsed by the combined chairs, will help to define and strengthen their roles within the various institutions and within the community.

*Aim*

The conference will aim to produce a national statement identifying the principal roles of the Board within institutions.

The statement will be instructed by views from Professor Di Yerbury, Chair of the AVCC, from Mr Graham Cooke, the Deputy Secretary of DEST with responsibility for Higher Education, and Professor Michael Barber, Deputy Chief of CSIRO and panel member of the Research Quality Framework working party. Such a statement will, in some way, respond to a challenge thrown down by Gavin Moodie in 2003, who is leading a discussion on the topic.

However, the major contributors will be the conference participants.

*Process*

A session is programmed on the Friday afternoon when this document will be put together, fine-tuned and, I hope, endorsed by the meeting. However, much of the work will need to be done earlier in the conference.

I would like to enlist the help and support of colleagues from the NSW & ACT chairs to help with this process. I am proposing that the conference participants be split into groups of around 4 or 5 people, each shepherded by a NSW/ACT chair, whose role it will be to gather the collective views of the group, expressed as a series of dot points. This will need to be done by lunchtime on the Friday. By the start of the final session, the dot points will have been amalgamated into a power point display which will form the starting point for the final document. Participants will surely arrive at the conference with ideas thought out in advance, so I believe that a strong and effective document can be created in a relatively short space of time.

*Structure*

As an initial proposal, I suggest the following four broad headings: Governance, Maintenance of Academic Standards, Communication within the Institution, and Relationships with External Stakeholders. I would like to hear commentary on whether these are appropriate, and whether there are important areas not covered by these headings. I suppose that we might be able to get 5-10 areas of responsibility under each of these headings, as things that are nationally agreed as the role of an Academic Board.

### *Preliminary Ideas*

Here is a preliminary list of some of the issues which could be addressed under each heading. Further suggestions would be welcome.

#### **Governance**

This section will deal with the Board's policy making role. It will be necessary to delineate the relationship between Boards, Councils and Senior Management. Such issues as Board input to strategic planning, appropriate input to the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor on key academic issues need also to be addressed. Care will be needed in the separation of academic decisions from financial decisions, which are not generally within the sphere of Boards and Senates.

#### **Maintenance of Academic Standards**

Here we can point out the key role that Boards and Senates have in course approvals, admissions, processes for higher degree candidatures, academic appointments, discipline reviews, overseas delivery of courses, e-learning etc.

#### **Communication within the Institution**

The Board not only makes policy, but is an important communicator of policy, created by the Board itself, or by Council, Senior Management, even Government. It can play a key role as a channel of communication between Council, Senior Management, academics at the coal-face of teaching and research and to the student body.

#### **Relationships with External Stakeholders**

The Board also has a role in upholding academic standards for the external community, for students and increasingly for Governments. The Board can also have an important place in commenting on proposed Government policy, and in implementing enacted Government policy.

*Tony Dooley*  
*August 2005*