

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

Minutes of meeting (05/3) of the Committee of Chairs held at 9.30 am
on Thursday 11 August 2005 at the University of New England, Armidale.

PRESENT: David Griffiths (in the Chair), Roger Bronks (SCU), John Carter (Sydney), Anne Cusick (UWS), Chris Daly (UNSW), Majella Franzmann (UNE), Bruce Kercher (Macquarie) and Erica Smith (CSU).

Geoff Masters and Margaret Foster (ACER) attended by invitation for item 8.4. Eilis Magner (UNE) attended as an observer.

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

CHAIR In the absence of the Chair, David Griffiths was elected by the members present to chair the meeting, in accordance with Standing Orders.

1. APOLOGIES/WELCOMES/FAREWELLS

Apologies were received from Tony Baker (UTS), Peter Camilleri (ACU), Linda Connor (Newcastle), Tony Dooley (UNSW), Ruth Foxwell (Canberra), Malcolm Gillies (ANU), Andrew Goodyer (BOS), David Green (CSU) and Gordon Stanley (BOS).

The Chair welcomed Chris Daly (for Tony Dooley, UNSW) and Erica Smith (for David Green, CSU) to the meeting.

VARIATION OF ORDER OF BUSINESS

The order of business was varied to enable the Committee to meet with Geoff Masters and Margaret Foster from ACER, but the minutes are recorded in the order of the agenda.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 9 JUNE 2005

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed.

3. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

3.1 Foundation Studies Programs

Copies of the emails between the Chair and DEST were noted.

3.2 Aegrotat Awards

Members noted details of the Aegrotat policy at Newcastle and several members indicated that their Universities were now progressing policy in this area.

3.3 Role and Purpose of Academic Boards/Senates

Anne Cusick tabled a paper containing observations drawn from a survey of most Australian universities' web sites on the role and purpose of Academic Boards/Senates. In general, most Academic Board/Senate web sites are located in the 'governance' section of the institutional web sites, with most at least 4 or 5 clicks from the home page. It was noted that some sites are not user-friendly, and require a knowledge of the institutional structure to find material related to the Academic Board/Senate.

cont'd/-

3.3 Role and Purpose of Academic Boards/Senates (cont'd)

Anne Cusick undertook to revise the paper to highlight the main trends, and to make it available for the national meeting in October. A copy of the paper would also be provided to the Secretary for electronic distribution to members and inclusion in the Committee of Chairs web site. Anne Cusick asked that members using the paper acknowledge its source.

In further discussion, the usefulness of most universities' search engines was questioned, particularly as most seem to need better filtering of responses.

Members also canvassed the role of Academic Boards/Senates in reviewing academic areas such as Faculties or Schools. There is Academic Board/Senate involvement in such reviews at several universities. Even when the Academic Board/Senate is not the primary driver of the review, it is usually involved either as a party to the review process, or as a recipient of the final review report (on which it may choose to comment).

The role of Academic Boards/Senates was also discussed in relation to their involvement in strategic planning, including measuring performance against the strategic plan.

It was agreed that the most pressing ongoing issues facing Academic Boards/Senates are the promulgation and uptake of academic policy, monitoring of progress and review of outcomes. From a risk management perspective, the main risks faced by Academic Boards/Senates are the uptake of academic policy and the application of policy across the institution.

Bruce Kercher informed members that a simple but effective communication measure that has been introduced at Macquarie is to email a one-page summary of Academic Senate decisions to all members and staff after each meeting. He would provide a sample for distribution to all members of the Committee. Several members commented on similar actions at their own universities.

4. HSC CATEGORY A COURSE REVIEWS

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:
 - Aboriginal Studies
 - Agriculture
 - Ancient History
 - Biology
 - Business Studies
 - Chemistry
 - Design and Technology
 - Earth and Environmental Science
 - Economics
 - Engineering Studies
 - English (Advanced) and English (Extension)
 - Food Technology
 - Geography
 - General Mathematics
 - History Extension
 - Information Processes and Technology
 - Industrial Technology

cont'd/-

4.1 Category A Reviews (cont'd)

- Legal Studies
- Mathematics and Mathematics (Extension)
- Modern History
- Physics
- Senior Science
- Society and Culture
- Software Design and Development
- Studies of Religion
- Textiles and Design
- review reports for the following language courses:
 - Arabic
 - Chinese
 - Classical Hebrew
 - French
 - German
 - Indonesian
 - Italian
 - Japanese
 - Korean
 - Modern Hebrew
 - Spanish.

It was agreed that the Secretary would again send Board website details to Committee members who would pass these on to colleagues they were asking to undertake reviews.

The checklist was updated as follows:

- UNSW to review Dance and Modern Greek
- Wollongong to review Drama, Visual Arts and Senior Science (as a second opinion)
- UWS to review Music 1 and 2, and Russian
- Sydney to review Agriculture and Arabic (as a second opinion)
- UNE to review Classical Greek and Latin
- CSU to review English Standard and ESL (as a second opinion)

The Committee agreed that, in any case where a course is recommended to be changed from Category A to Category B, or where there is some doubt about the categorisation or the course (for example, if the categorisation is marginal), a second opinion from a different institution would be obtained.

The committee agreed that in those cases where a clear opinion had been expressed and there was no dissent within the committee, there was no need to obtain a second opinion.

It was agreed that all outstanding review reports must be submitted to the Secretary by 12 September.

5. FINANCIAL STATEMENT

Members were urged to ensure that any outstanding subscriptions are paid. It was agreed that at the first meeting for 2006, the Committee should undertake a routine review of the level of subscriptions.

6. 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, and the discussion paper provided by Tony Dooley.

The Committee endorsed the proposal that its members work with groups of participants, and suggested that the groups be identified by coloured name tags. It would also be helpful if the groups could be set up before the meeting, and provided with the papers prepared by Tony Dooley and Anne Cusick (see item 3.3).

7. AUQA AUDITS

This matter was deferred to a future meeting.

8. OTHER BUSINESS

8.1 Board of Studies Decisions

Summaries of Board of Studies decisions for meetings held on 3 May, 14 June and 26 July 2005 were noted.

8.2 Articulation of TAFE Awards

This matter was deferred to a future meeting.

8.3 Meeting Dates 2006

The proposed schedule of meeting dates and locations for 2006 was adopted, with actual campus details to be notified in due course by each institution.

8.4 Australian Certificate of Education

The Chair welcomed Geoff Masters and Margaret Foster (ACER) to the meeting for this item. They had provided the Committee with a discussion paper which included four possible options for an Australian Certificate of Education, and sought the Committee's views on these or any other options they might like to suggest. Geoff Masters briefly outlined the background to the matter, in that the ACER had been successful in being selected by DEST to review the options for an Australian Certificate of Education.

In discussion, the Committee noted that, of the three options, 1, 2 and 4 are add-ons to the existing State-based system, and that as such they could be a significant imposition on poorly funded schools. The Committee felt that the resource implications at the school level must be seriously considered. Option 3 (a national certificate which evolves from the existing State and Territory SSCEs) is the only one of the four that does not impose a separate, parallel system on schools.

Further, a national certificate would appear to improve consistency and comparability around Australia, have more international appeal than separate State-based certificates, and improve confidence in standards. It was felt that, even if the process of evolving State-based certificates to a national certificate is not fully realised, the process itself would be beneficial in providing a basis on which the issues can be discussed. Nevertheless, any national certificate must be able to ensure that students can articulate readily into university courses, and while addressing issues of consistency it must also address the issue of the diversity of student needs. One possibility is to have agreement on standards, but flexibility in content. This may be a useful approach, given that state contexts have become hardened over the years. The development of an Australian version of the IB was seen as being counter-productive.

8.4 Australian Certificate of Education (cont'd)

Geoff Masters undertook to explore the possibility of Tony Baker being invited to attend the ACER meeting in Sydney in November. The possibility of Geoff Masters attending the national meeting at UNSW in October would also be explored. Members thanked the ACER representatives for giving them the opportunity to comment on the options.

8.5 Student Progression

Bruce Kercher sought members' views on the handling of student progression. When there are rules in relation to progression, there are often many appeals, and the system can become unwieldy. If on the other hand there are no rules, there will be many students with very unsatisfactory progress rates. In discussion, it was noted that some universities apply very strict progression parameters and very detailed rules. HECS places are seen as being highly valuable, and there needs to be a way of avoiding HECS places being occupied by students making very little progress in fulfilling the requirements of the course. Further, the HESA legislation requires universities to make a very accurate prediction of annual load. Anne Cusick gave the example of UWS, which has approximately 37,000 students, about 3,300 student suspensions/exclusions, and about 330 appeals of which about half are upheld. It was agreed to discuss this matter at the next meeting, with examples of institutional policies and practices.

APPRECIATION

On behalf of the Committee, the Chair thanked the staff of UNE and UTS for the hospitality, support, and arrangements made for the meeting, which was greatly appreciated by the group.

CLOSURE

The meeting closed at 12:20 pm.