

University of New South Wales

Academic Board

External Review, Conducted 25-26 August 2009

Report of Review Panel

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Executive Summary

The Academic Board at the University of New South Wales has a long and proud history. It fulfils significant roles in academic planning and quality assurance and provides independent advice to the Vice-Chancellor and the University Council about academic matters. The Board also provides a forum where the diversity of staff and students at UNSW has a voice. The Review Panel found much to commend, including the efficient program approval process, the work of the Pre-University and Alternative Education Committee, the initiation of “hot topics” to enhance the discussion of strategic issues, the efficient work of the UNSW Secretariat and Board Executive Officer, the surveys of Board members about its functioning, and the dedication of student members.

The Academic Board has undergone incremental change over time, with each President working to improve the Board’s processes and bring them up to date with the changing internal and external environments. Our recommendations endorse continuing this process. The Review Panel made 20 recommendations. Many of them had a central focus on clarifying the role of the Academic Board and its officers, particularly with respect to its key roles in strategic planning and of monitoring of academic standards and quality (Recommendations 1-7, 12-13). We concluded that the Academic Board could have a larger, timelier, and more central role in strategic planning and review through more focused discussion and more follow-through in its function of review.

In order to play this role, we found that some Board Standing Committees and processes need to be streamlined or rethought (Recommendations 2, 7-13). In particular, the necessity for the Academic Services Committee was not clear. The role and functions of the Committee on Research (and its role in research training) and the Policy Advisory Committee need to be considered carefully.

Finally, the Review Panel noted the necessity for more systematic monitoring by the Academic Board of its own performance, through priority setting and the development of clear performance indicators (Recommendations 14-16). This can only be done once the role and functions of the Board are clarified. We also recommended that communication between Council and the Board (and the key role of the President in this process), as well as between the Board and its constituencies could be improved through streamlined reporting, electronic delivery of papers, and better channels for communication with the wider university community (Recommendations 17-20).

Terms of Reference

The Academic Board was established in accordance with the *University of New South Wales Act* 1989 and is governed by the *University of New South Wales By-Laws* 2005 and the *University of New South Wales Rules* 2008¹. The Academic Board is authorised to carry out functions specified by the By-Laws as well as those delegated by the University Council².

The Review Panel is asked to examine:

- whether the Academic Board and its Standing Committee structures, procedures and composition provide the best means for ensuring business is conducted efficiently and effectively.
- whether the Academic Board and its Standing Committees have demonstrated mechanisms for monitoring committee performance.
- whether the communication channels between the Academic Board and other University bodies and officers allow the Board to fulfil its role and function effectively.

Specifically, the Review Panel is to prepare a report for the President of the Academic Board on the following questions:

1. Does the Academic Board fulfil its duties and obligations as specified by legislation and Council delegations?
2. Is the Academic Board doing what it should be doing?
3. Are Academic Board functions carried out with sufficient effectiveness and efficiency?
4. Are there processes in place to monitor the Academic Board's performance?
5. Do stakeholders have sufficient input and are decisions promulgated to stakeholders?

¹ See http://www.unsw.edu.au/about/pad/secretariat_services.html

² See http://www.unsw.edu.au/about/pad/register_of_delegations.html

Membership of the Review Panel

External Members:

Professor Cindy Gallois (Chair)
Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences
The University of Queensland

Professor Hilary Winchester
Pro Vice Chancellor & Vice President: Strategy and Planning
University of South Australia

Internal Member:

Associate Professor Michael Walpole
Associate Dean (Education), Australian School of Taxation
University of New South Wales

Secretariat:

Ms Lynda Ho
Executive Officer, Academic Board

Ms Roanna Gonsalves

Summary of Commendations

Commendation 1

The Review Panel commends the Academic Board for initiating and maintaining discussions of “hot topics,” as an innovative way to introduce and discuss important and emerging issues of general interest.

Commendation 2

The Review Panel commends the Academic Board and the Undergraduate Studies and Postgraduate Coursework Committees for thorough and efficient processing of program approvals.

Commendation 3

The Review Panel commends the Pre-University and Alternative Education Committee for its effective review of academic standards, scope, and relevance of the university’s offerings in these areas.

Commendation 4

The Review Panel commends the Academic Board for initiating and conducting regular surveys of Academic Board members on Board and Standing Committee performance.

Commendation 5

The Review Panel commends the UNSW Secretariat on the efficiency and speed with which it produces large volumes of paperwork (often in both hard and soft copy) for the effective functioning of the Academic Board and its Standing Committees.

Commendation 6

The Review Panel commends the student members of the Academic Board for their enthusiasm, commitment, and communication between students and the Board.

Summary of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board and all its committees find ways to bring academic issues of strategic relevance through to recommendations on principles which will lead to new policy and procedure.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel recommends that the new online forms for program approval be made available as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel recommends that the University reconsider the issue of systematic program reviews and analysis of them, at minimum by specifying them in the academic delegations and by Faculties reporting them to Academic Board.

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board systematically monitor the impact of program approvals on the University's overall program offerings.

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel recommends that the Board clarify the roles of the President, Deputy Presidents, and Chairs of Board Standing Committees, so that each role has distinctive functions and an appropriate workload.

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel recommends that, consistent with Academic Board rules, the President nominate the Chairs of Standing Committees after consultation with relevant members of the University's senior executive and Board officers, subject to the approval of each Committee.

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board consider carefully the role and added value of Faculty Presiding Members and, unless a clear role that is reasonably consistent across Faculties is specified, replace this category of members on the Board with additional elected members (using the current election procedures).

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board consider meeting less frequently, say eight or nine times each year, with consideration for peak periods for course and program approvals.

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel recommends that all Academic Board Standing Committees review the frequency of their meetings, and meet only as often as necessary (this need not be the same for all committees or for every part of the year).

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Services Committee be disbanded and its academic functions distributed to other Academic Board Committees (such as the Committee on Education and Committee on Research).

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel recommends that the Policy Advisory Committee be reconstituted and merged with the Agenda Committee (along the current lines), and the resulting committee appropriately renamed, with a brief to consider issues (including hot topics) to bring to the Board and priorities for the Board and its Standing Committees in the near term (e.g., 12 months), as well as current agendas and starrng.

Recommendation 12

The Review Panel recommends that the Committee on Research, in line with its brief to advise on strategic issues and planning in research, develop a clear process for addressing research issues of strategic importance at an early stage and bringing to them to the Academic Board for discussion and appropriate action.

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board constitute a new Higher Degree Research Committee, with a brief to deal with policy, procedures and matters of strategic importance concerning research students. This committee should include at least HDR student members, the Dean, Graduate Research School, and the Associate Dean or Director of Postgraduate Research responsible for HDR student matters in each Faculty.

Recommendation 14

The review panel recommends that the Academic Board establish clear annual priorities and indicators for monitoring performance.

Recommendation 15

The Review Panel recommends that Academic Board Standing Committees establish clear annual priorities and indicators for monitoring performance, in line with those of the Board itself.

Recommendation 16

The Review Panel recommends that during 2010, the (renamed) PAC set a limited number of performance indicators in relation to the agreed functions of Academic Board and initiate a process of self-assessment against these indicators.

Recommendation 17

The Review Panel recommends that the President, in his or her report to the Academic Board, regularly bring a summary of Council decisions and matters of relevance and interest from the Executive Team and Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee.

Recommendation 18

The Review Panel recommends that the Secretariat move to the provision of electronic copies of Academic Board and Standing Committee minutes and agendas.

Recommendation 19

The Review Panel recommends that the minutes of Standing Committees be supplemented by an executive summary, drafted by the Chair of each committee for the next Academic Board meeting, which highlights important issues, decisions, and actions.

Recommendation 20

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board facilitate a medium of communication for elected members to communicate with their constituencies and report back after every meeting of the Academic Board on the issues considered by the Board, indicating the direction being taken by the University on important issues.

Introduction and Methodology

The President of the Academic Board conducted consultations with relevant University officers, and it was decided that an external review of the Academic Board would be timely. Terms of Reference were drawn up with reference to the relevant parts of the UNSW By-Laws and Rules. A committee of two external members and one internal UNSW member was invited to conduct the review.

After preliminary discussions by email and telephone, and considering surveys of the Board, sample Board papers, and a written submission, the Review Panel conducted interviews with University officers and staff and student members of the Board on 25 and 26 August 2009. A list of interviewees, by category, is presented in Appendix 4. Detailed notes of the interviews were taken and made available to the Review Panel.

Extra information requested by the Review Panel was provided promptly, and extra interviews were arranged as needed. The Review Panel thanks Professor Janet Chan, Ms Lynda Ho, Ms Lorraine Orfanidis, and Ms Roanna Gonsalves for their assistance. In addition, the Review Panel is grateful to interviewees and those who provided other material for their comprehensive and frank information and comments.

Context

The Academic Board at the University of New South Wales is the principal academic body of the University responsible for approving academic proposals and for providing advice on academic policy, academic strategy and academic standards. The Board comprises 56 members, including the Chancellor, Deputy Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor, members of the Executive Team, Deans and Faculty Presiding Members, 24 members elected from the academic staff and four from the student body. Membership also includes 'such other persons' approved by Council.

The Academic Board advises the Vice-Chancellor and Council on matters relating to teaching, scholarship and research and takes decisions on delegation from Council. Its purpose is to provide advice on academic policy, approve courses and programs, further and co-ordinate the work of the Faculties and other academic units, and support teaching, scholarship and research.

The Academic Board at UNSW has a long history, and has been a central part of the governance structure, under the aegis of the University Council, from the beginning. Over the past few years, successive Presidents of the Board have taken initiatives to enhance the Board's efficiency and effectiveness in a changing environment. As the current President is halfway through her term, a review of the Board structures and activities was timely.

In recent years, the context of higher education has changed significantly in response to increased financial and other external pressures, as well as requirements for reporting and compliance. Along with other universities, UNSW has strengthened its approach to corporate

planning and management; the positive impact of these changes is attested by the outstanding performance in research, teaching and learning, and external engagement.

Despite these changes, it is essential to retain and harness the creativity and expertise of the community of scholars that constitute UNSW in the development of university goals, objectives, policy and procedures. In the current context, university Councils rely strongly on Academic Boards to provide independent advice on issues affecting the academic life of the university. In order for the Board to play this and its other roles successfully, members and senior management must share an understanding of the policy context and major issues facing the university. Furthermore, the structures and practices of the Board need to be sufficiently flexible, timely, focused, and effective to maintain the impact of the collective voice of the university in developing new policy.

Term of Reference 1

whether the Academic Board and its Standing Committee structures, procedures and composition provide the best means for ensuring business is conducted efficiently and effectively.

Role and Functions of the Academic Board

Interviewees agreed about two key functions of the Academic Board: (1) to approve and assure academic standards for new and revised programs; and (2) to provide a forum where university members, both academic staff and students, who are not in management have a voice. The Delegations of Authority also specify a third function, to formulate policy and recommend it to the Vice-Chancellor for approval and implementation. These three functions all implicate the review and streamlining of academic policy, rules, and procedures, as well as the discussion of principles pertaining to academic matters. The third function in particular requires the Board to be active at all stages of strategic planning, so that the diversity of opinion in the university is expressed and taken into account.

In line with these functions, many interviewees expressed the wish that the Academic Board provide a forum for discussion about the strategic directions of the university, as they pertain to research, teaching and learning, and external engagement. Many people praised the “hot topics” initiative because it allows free discussion of issues at an early stage. This is clearly a popular initiative by the Board, and appears to have lifted the quality of meetings. Two suggestions about hot topics were made. First, it is important for all hot topics to be salient issues relevant to the strategic direction of the university in the short or medium term – the comment was made that some recent hot topics have not met this criterion. Secondly, the Academic Board should develop mechanisms to follow up discussions of hot topics, so that these discussions can influence policy and strategic planning. The President’s report (see later sections under ToR 3) might provide a way of reporting on the outcomes of hot topic discussions.

Interviewees explained that recent changes to delegations have clarified the Board’s policy-making powers as the power to formulate and recommend policy, procedures and guidelines to the Vice Chancellor, as well as the power to establish degree rules and

requirements and English language requirements. This clarification seemed to have been positively perceived by all but a few interviewees. Overall, however, there appears to be a lack of clarity among members about the role of the Academic Board, beyond the program approval process. There is a need for the Board to develop its role in relation to the functions described above. In doing this, the Board should develop ways of engaging fully with strategic planning at UNSW and ensuring that its discussions and decisions are well aligned with the university's strategic plan.

Commendation 1

The Review Panel commends the Academic Board for initiating and maintaining discussions of "hot topics," as an innovative way to introduce and discuss important and emerging issues of general interest.

Recommendation 1

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board and all its committees find ways to bring academic issues of strategic relevance through to recommendations on principles which will lead to new policy and procedure.

Program Approval

The Academic Board and the Standing Committees handling approvals of programs and program revisions have developed an eight-week plan to move proposals through the approval process. This time is very impressive, and the Review Panel heard few complaints about timeliness. On the other hand, the forms made available to us were bulky and did not include key issues for quality assurance and strategic alignment (e.g., duplication of new programs with existing ones, appropriate expertise, pedagogical foundations, adequacy of resources, etc.). We were told that a new streamlined online form that gathers this information has been developed, but that there has been a delay in making the form available. It is important for the new form and online process to be made available and used by the Board as soon as possible.

Program Review and Monitoring of Academic Quality and Standards

The National Protocols for Higher Education, which can be found at http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/MCEET_YAS/, specify a key role for Academic Boards (and institutions as a whole) in monitoring academic standards and quality. In particular, the National Protocols specify that "each institution has a properly constituted academic board or equivalent whose membership provides the institution with the expertise to ensure that standards are maintained at the level of Australian universities (16.1.1);" and that the Academic Board should play "an active role in the approval and review of the institution's courses (16.1.2)," as well as "in the development, dissemination and monitoring of academic policies related to academic standards (16.1.3)." (National Guidelines for Higher Education Approval processes. Guidelines for establishing Australian Universities. MCEETYA, October 2007). This means that the Academic Board must be able to demonstrate (particularly in the context of an AUQA audit) that among other things it contributes to the monitoring of academic

operations, participates in the collection and consideration of feedback from students and staff with a view to making improvements, and plays a role in benchmarking the academic performance of the University against other universities to identify areas in need of improvement.

At present, the Academic Board plays a significant role in the quality assurance of new programs. However, it pays less attention to their systematic review and withdrawal. As such, its role in program quality assurance risks being only partial. There is no mention of program review in Section 7 (Academic Authorities and Functions) in the Delegations of Authority. This appears to be an omission in the University's Delegations which is worth further attention. The panel heard that although there is a policy of a five-yearly program review cycle, reviews are sometimes undertaken at longer and more intermittent intervals (one period as long as 17 years was mentioned, but the panel did not investigate this). Program reviews appear to be undertaken at the discretion of Faculties, but we did not find evidence of systematic monitoring of program reviews or systematic analysis of them in reports to the Academic Board. Such systematic monitoring and reporting to the Board would minimise any perception of the lack of a complete review process by UNSW.

Similarly, although the Academic Board approves many individual programs, it does not appear to be involved in the systematic analysis of the impact of those approvals on the overall suite of the University's program offerings, despite the cross-referral requirement intended to discourage duplication by Faculties of programs in other Faculties. Such systematic analysis would add value to the approval process by examining the number and range of programs, areas of duplication and redundancy, and trends over time, and is consonant with the role of the Board in academic standards and benchmarking.

Commendation 2

The Review Panel commends the Academic Board and the Undergraduate Studies and Postgraduate Coursework Committees for thorough and efficient processing of program approvals.

Recommendation 2

The Review Panel recommends that the new online forms for program approval be made available as a matter of urgency.

Recommendation 3

The Review Panel recommends that the University reconsider the issue of systematic program reviews and analysis of them, at minimum by specifying them in the academic delegations and by Faculties reporting them to Academic Board.

Recommendation 4

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board systematically monitor the impact of program approvals on the University's overall program offerings.

Role of Academic Board Officers

It is essential for Board officers (the President and the two Deputy Presidents) to have clear and distinct roles. There appeared to us to be some duplication of functions at present, with all three officers serving on several committees as *ex officio* members. Because the Deputy Presidents are not seconded full-time, this situation can potentially lead to work overload (and to conflicts of interest), especially if they have other key administrative roles. There is also some indication that at present these officers may not have allowed sufficient time to carry out their Academic Board roles adequately. There does not appear to be a clear specification of the duties and responsibilities of the Deputy President roles, so that it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of these roles.

Academic Board Standing Committees elect their chairs from the committee membership. In order to be effective in their roles, committee chairs need to have the confidence of the Academic Board and the relevant members of senior management, as well as of their committees. It was not clear to the Review Panel that every committee chair could depend on this support, although most interviewees praised the efforts of the committee chairs. We concluded that the President should be active in consulting with the Board Standing Committees and also with the senior executive to nominate the people who can be most effective as chairs and to make sure that chairs have a clear understanding of their role, including a clear set of expectations and performance indicators.

Recommendation 5

The Review Panel recommends that the Board clarify the roles of the President, Deputy Presidents, and Chairs of Board Standing Committees, so that each role has distinctive functions and an appropriate workload.

Recommendation 6

The Review Panel recommends that, consistent with Academic Board rules, the President nominate the Chairs of Standing Committees after consultation with relevant members of the University's senior executive and Board officers, subject to the approval of each Committee.

Role of Faculty Presiding Members on the Academic Board

UNSW has a set of elected positions in the Faculty Presiding Members, which appears to be unique among Australian universities. Interviewees diverged in their views about the role and usefulness of these positions. In some Faculties, the Presiding Members had clear roles chairing certain committees, providing independent advice and voice for staff, and bringing sensitive issues to the attention of the Dean at an early stage. Some Faculties also saw the Presiding Member role as an apprenticeship for more senior Executive roles and as a useful career development opportunity. In other Faculties this was not the case, and Presiding Members and Associate Deans were not clear about the overlaps and distinctions in their roles and duties. The role played by these people appears to be negotiated on an individual basis, and depends on the goodwill of particular incumbents. Most interviewees agreed on the value of the functions above, but did not agree about how they should be fulfilled.

This lack of consistency across Faculties has the consequence that Faculty Presiding Members are not always the best-placed people to bring academic matters forward to the Academic Board. Indeed, the Deans and Associate Deans are doing this through their

membership of the Board and of relevant committees, particularly the Committees on Education and Research and the Undergraduate Studies and Postgraduate Coursework Committees.

It is beyond the scope of this review to make recommendations about Faculty positions and thus on the role of Presiding Members within Faculties. The Review Panel concluded, however, that given the lack of clarity in their roles, Faculty Presiding Members are not adding significant value to the Academic Board itself at the present time. Unless a clear, reasonably consistent, and distinct role attuned to the present circumstances of the university can be developed for them, Faculty Presiding Members might best be replaced on the Board (acknowledging that this would require a change to the By-Laws in the NSW statute by the State Government) by increasing the number of members elected from their constituencies. In this way, the pathway for bringing academic matters from Faculties to the Academic Board would be clear, and the proportion of elected to non-elected members would remain the same.

Recommendation 7

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board consider carefully the role and added value of Faculty Presiding Members and, unless a clear role that is reasonably consistent across Faculties is specified, replace this category of members on the Board with additional elected members (using the current election procedures).

Frequency of Meetings

Interviewees commented that the monthly meetings of the Academic Board were not always necessary. It has proven difficult to find “hot topics” of genuine relevance every month. While at some times in the year there is ample business and a degree of urgency (e.g., for program approvals), at other times the Board has less to do. Many interviewees suggested that eight or nine meetings per year are probably sufficient for the Board to do its business, including initiating and continuing discussions of important issues for the university.

The adherence to monthly meetings whether they are necessary or not is probably not the best way to schedule Board meetings. We concluded that, while it is probably a good idea to schedule monthly meetings in the university’s calendar, the Board could usefully aim for fewer meetings. Academic Board Standing Committees might also consider meeting less frequently, in line with the amount of business they need to do in a given period.

Recommendation 8

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board consider meeting less frequently, say eight or nine times each year, with consideration for peak periods for course and program approvals.

Recommendation 9

The Review Panel recommends that all Academic Board Standing Committees review the frequency of their meetings, and meet only as often as necessary (this need not be the same for all committees or for every part of the year).

Academic Board Standing Committees

Committee on Education; Undergraduate Studies and Postgraduate Coursework Committees

As we noted above, the program approval processes managed by these committees is to be commended for timeliness and efficiency. Interviewees also commented that these committees are working well. There appears to be good communication between Faculties and the Board through the membership of the relevant Associate Deans on these committees. In addition, the relationship between them and the university's senior executive appears to be working well. The three committees are the logical place for reports of program reviews (see Recommendation 3 above) to be located. Overall, the Review Panel endorses the functioning of these committees.

Pre-University and Alternative Education Committee

The Review Panel heard positive comment from many interviewees about this committee. Bringing together the pre-university and non-award offerings by UNSW under a single umbrella has added value, and this committee has been efficient and effective in its functioning. The committee has taken a strategic approach which has been very helpful in formulating policy and procedures, particularly around the academic standards and quality of the offerings falling within its terms of reference.

Commendation 3

The Review Panel commends the Pre-University and Alternative Education Committee for its effective review of academic standards, scope, and relevance of the university's offerings in these areas.

Academic Services Committee

Interviewees agreed that the relationship of academic services to the core business of teaching and learning, research, the student experience, and external engagement is extremely important. The Academic Services Committee, however, does not currently appear to be effective in achieving good academic outcomes in these areas. Discussion with members of the committee, including the chair and former chairs, and with university management, did not point to any ways that the committee could be restructured to make it more effective. Furthermore, some academic services (e.g., research services) are already considered by the Committee on Research; it seems logical that academic services such as teaching space, educational technology, and library should be considered by the Committee on Education.

Many interviewees commented on the importance of an effective mechanism for adequate consideration of the academic requirements for Information and Communications Technology and for building infrastructure (e.g., equipment in teaching spaces, e-mail lists, AV provision in classrooms); IT services are a key service provider to the academic enterprise of teaching and research. There is also a clear need for clarity and transparency of IT capital planning and expenditure. Much of this is a matter for university management, but there is a need for high-quality advice about functionality for academic purposes, and the Academic Board should be in a good position to provide it.

The Review Panel concluded that on balance, the Academic Services Committee does not appear to be effective in fulfilling its functions. The relationship between university services and academic matters is probably better dealt with by the committees concerned with teaching and learning, research, and university policy more generally.

Recommendation 10

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Services Committee be disbanded and its academic functions distributed to other Academic Board Committees (such as the Committee on Education and Committee on Research).

Policy Advisory Committee

The Policy Advisory Committee is charged with providing general policy advice and oversight to the Vice-Chancellor. With the recent changes in delegations and the role of the senior university executive, however, this role is probably best served by the full Academic Board. In response to these changes, the current President has included the chairs of all Board standing committees on the PAC, and this committee has replaced the Agenda Committee in putting together the agenda and starring sheet for Academic Board meetings. While some members of the senior executive team regularly attend meetings, others do not.

The Review Panel concluded that the current changes in membership and function provide a useful role and function for the PAC. Indeed, the agenda function could be expanded to include setting yearly priorities for the Board, choosing topics of relevance for discussion and hot topics, and the like. Thus, the PAC could be merged with the Agenda Committee and renamed to capture its current functions more accurately. The steering and monitoring role could make this committee function as a Board Executive Committee. Its membership should include at least the chairs of all Board standing committees, as well as the President and Deputy Presidents.

Recommendation 11

The Review Panel recommends that the Policy Advisory Committee be reconstituted and merged with the Agenda Committee (along the current lines), and the resulting committee appropriately renamed, with a brief to consider issues (including hot topics) to bring to the Board and priorities for the Board and its Standing Committees in the near term (e.g., 12 months), as well as current agendas and starring.

Committee on Research

The Committee on Research has a brief that is as critical to the university's functions as that of the Committee on Education: providing academic oversight and advice about research and research training at UNSW. At present, this committee provides a good venue for provision of information about external priorities and pressures on research, including research performance, funding, and national initiatives like Excellence in Research for Australia. Interviewees agreed that the committee is functioning less well in providing policy advice, particularly in response to external demands which often have short lag times.

With respect to research training, the Committee on Research brings forward policy advice and provides oversight about procedures and guidelines for higher degree research student matters. Many Faculties, however, separate the roles of research management and

research training management, with different Associate Deans (or others) in these roles. The membership of the Committee on Research, therefore, means that the most relevant people in Faculties for research training are not consistently present for discussions about higher degree research matters. Many universities in Australia have separate Academic Board committees for these functions, and this appears to be a good idea for UNSW as well. A new committee with oversight for HDR matters would need to include at least student members, the Dean of the Graduate Research School and the Faculty roles with responsibility for research training. This would also mean that the (smaller) Committee on Research could concentrate specifically on research matters of strategic importance.

Overall, interviewees praised the efforts of the present chair but nevertheless noted that the committee is not functioning effectively. A need for separate meetings between the DVC (Research) and the Associate Deans (Research), as is already the case for the DVC (Academic) and the Associate Deans (Education), was also expressed. There is a clear need for the Committee on Research, in consultation with the DVC (Research), other members of the senior executive and the Associate Deans, to develop a process for bringing discussion of strategic matters to the committee at a stage early enough to provide useful and timely advice, if necessary by means of extraordinary meetings, or use of default meeting dates (as has been practice in the past) or similar arrangements. At the same time, it may be that the committee could meet less frequently, at least for part of the year, if there is insufficient business.

Recommendation 12

The Review Panel recommends that the Committee on Research, in line with its brief to advise on strategic issues and planning in research, develop a clear process for addressing research issues of strategic importance at an early stage and bringing them to the Academic Board for discussion and appropriate action.

Recommendation 13

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board constitute a new Higher Degree Research Committee, with a brief to deal with policy, procedures and matters of strategic importance concerning research students. This committee should include at least HDR student members, the Dean, Graduate Research School, and the Associate Dean or Director of Postgraduate Research responsible for HDR student matters in each Faculty.

Term of Reference 2

whether the Academic Board and its Standing Committees have demonstrated mechanisms for monitoring committee performance

Surveys of Academic Board and Standing Committee Members

The Academic Board has instituted consistent regular surveys of the Board and its sub-committees to obtain opinions from the membership. This is a commendable practice which should be continued and expanded. Over time, in order to obtain maximum value

from these surveys in line with each committee's brief and priorities, the surveys need to be customised for each committee.

Commendation 4

The Review Panel commends the Academic Board for initiating and conducting regular surveys of Academic Board members on Board and Standing Committee performance.

Monitoring and Indicators of Academic Board Performance

The Review Panel noted that the Academic Board and its committees annually establish a program of work. In spite of this, it was difficult for us to glean a clear set of priorities for the full Board and Standing Committees. The surveys of Standing Committees indicated that many members did not believe that annual priorities were set. Given this situation, it is difficult to establish appropriate indicators and mechanisms for monitoring performance. At present the surveys provide some limited information on performance, but their use appears to be mechanistic rather than nuanced. The interview process also elicited strong and divergent views about the performance of the Academic Board from interviewees.

The Academic Board needs to define its role more fully (see Term of Reference 1 and Recommendation 1) and then establish a clear agenda of priorities on an annual basis. It is suggested that the renamed PAC should fulfil this role of setting strategic priorities and indicators, where necessary seeking the advice of the relevant Standing Committees.

Recommendation 14

The review panel recommends that the Academic Board establish clear annual priorities and indicators for monitoring performance.

Recommendation 15

The Review Panel recommends that Academic Board Standing Committees establish clear annual priorities and indicators for monitoring performance, in line with those of the Board itself.

Recommendation 16

The Review Panel recommends that during 2010, the (renamed) PAC set a limited number of performance indicators in relation to the agreed functions of Academic Board and initiate a process of self-assessment against these indicators.

Term of Reference 3

whether the communication channels between the Academic Board and other University bodies and officers allow the Board to fulfill its role and function effectively.

President's Report to the Academic Board

The President's report to the Academic Board, along with the Vice-Chancellor's verbal report, is an important way to inform the Board of activities and decisions by Council, the senior management team, and external bodies. In this way, the Board is a major forum for transmission of information to the wider university community. Furthermore, the President has a good opportunity through this report to encourage discussion and independent advice about important issues. The Review Panel concluded that more could be done to bring this information to the Board. We noted that some parts of the President's report included celebration of successes by the university. This is laudable, but might be done in writing for distribution to the Board and the wider community, allowing the President's report to concentrate on more strategic issues.

Recommendation 17

The Review Panel recommends that the President, in his or her report to the Academic Board, regularly bring a summary of Council decisions and matters of relevance and interest from the Executive Team and Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee.

Minutes and Reports

The volume of papers produced for each Academic Board meeting is very large, and members commented that it was daunting to read. Nevertheless, the Review Panel and many interviewees were impressed with the amount and timeliness of work of the Academic Board Secretariat in producing and distributing papers for each Board and committee meeting. In addition, many members praised the action sheets produced by the Executive Officer, emailed after each Academic Board meeting, which indicate clearly what actions are to be taken and by whom.

Commendation 5

The Review Panel commends the UNSW Secretariat on the efficiency and speed with which it produces large volumes of paperwork (often in both hard and soft copy) for the effective functioning of the Academic Board and its Standing Committees.

A number of interviewees indicated that they would appreciate electronic copies of papers, instead of the hard copies they receive now. This would reduce the amount of paper necessary for meetings and allow members to print only relevant papers or to bring a laptop with them. A system tried by some committees, in which electronic versions of papers were projected at meetings, met with technical difficulties and has not proved satisfactory. Rather, it seems more appropriate for committee members to make their own decisions about how to deal with electronic papers. Therefore, we recommend provision of searchable hyperlink-tagged files that are easy to read, navigate, search and, if necessary, print. A few hard copies of papers might be provided at meetings in case of unforeseen circumstances.

In addition, electronic delivery would ensure timely receipt of papers before meetings. At present, delivery of hard copies sometimes means that the agenda is not received by all members in time. It also means that sometimes documents are tabled at meetings,

particularly committee meetings, and members must discuss issues and make decisions with inadequate preparation.

Recommendation 18

The Review Panel recommends that the Secretariat move to the provision of electronic copies of Academic Board and Standing Committee minutes and agendas.

The Review Panel reviewed sample annual reports of Standing Committees and noted that, while they were no doubt accurate, the reports were very brief and gave little insight into the policy issues that arose in the committee and the decisions that had to be made. For example, interviewees pointed to cases where a committee needed to vary UNSW selection, entry, or other rules in order to approve programs judged worthy. Annual reports may not be the best place to provide such information to the full Academic Board, but this is an important consequence of the delegation to committees. We concluded that an executive summary of committee meetings, including important issues and discussion, should accompany committee minutes to Academic Board meetings.

Recommendation 19

The Review Panel recommends that the minutes of Standing Committees be supplemented by an executive summary, drafted by the Chair of each committee for the next Academic Board meeting, which highlights important issues, decisions, and actions.

Communication by Elected Members with their Constituencies

The Review Panel was impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication of student members. These elected members appear to take their role, and the need to communicate effectively between students and the Academic Board, very seriously. They have been active in bringing academic concerns and particularly concerns about the student experience to the attention of the Board, following through to action, and communicating back to their constituents.

On the other hand, several elected staff members interviewed were concerned that there was no mailing list or similar means of communicating with their constituencies. Some elected members have established or accessed faculty-wide lists to which they regularly post reports of Academic Board activity and decisions. This is an important function of elected members, which we believe should be standard practice.

Commendation 6

The Review Panel commends the student members of the Academic Board for their enthusiasm, commitment, and communication between students and the Board.

Recommendation 20

The Review Panel recommends that the Academic Board facilitate a medium of communication for elected members to communicate with their constituencies and report back after every meeting of the Academic Board on the issues considered by the Board, indicating the direction being taken by the University on important issues.

List of Interviews

Interviewees included staff members from all Faculties and ADFAs.

Members of University Management

Vice-Chancellor

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research)

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students)

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Strategy) and Dean of Graduate Research

Pro Vice-Chancellor (International)

Executive Director (University Services)

Deans of Faculties (7)

Associate Deans (10)

Heads of School (2)

Academic Board Officers and Members

President, Academic Board

Deputy Presidents, Academic Board (2)

Academic Board Presiding Members (3)

Faculty Presiding Members (7)

Elected Academic Board Members (6)

Student Members (3)

Former President, Academic Board

Other University Staff Members

Executive Officer, Academic Board

Head, Policy Management Unit