

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

Minutes of the meeting (02/1) of the **Committee of Chairs** held at 9.30 am on
Thursday, 28 March 2002 at the University of Wollongong.

PRESENT Professor Kevin McConkey (UNSW), Chair
Professor John Coll (ACU)
Professor Malcolm Gillies (ANU)
Associate Professor John Rayner (Canberra)
Associate Professor Brailey Sims (Newcastle)
Professor Ray Cooksey (UNE)
Associate Professor Rosemary Wickert (UTS)
Professor David Griffiths (Wollongong)

IN ATTENDANCE Professor George Cooney, Chair, TSC (for Items 4-7)
Professor Gordon Stanley and Mr David Patterson, OBOS (for Items 4-7)
Ms Victoria Finlay (UNSW), Secretary

1. APOLOGIES/WELCOMES

Professor Martin Hayden (SCU), Professor Judyth Sachs (USyd), Professor Alan Johnson (UTS), Professor David Green (Charles Sturt), Professor Lesley Wilkes (Western Sydney), Professor Elizabeth More (Macquarie) and Professor Linda Connor (Newcastle).

Professor McConkey welcomed Professor Gillies from ANU and the Deputy Chairs attending for UTS and Newcastle.

Professor McConkey thanked Professor Griffiths, Lynn Woodley and Catherine Zelinsky for their assistance in organising the meeting.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 1 NOVEMBER 2001

The minutes of the meeting of 1 November 2001 were confirmed. Members commended the innovation of dot point summaries being circulated soon after meetings, noting that they could be used for reports to members' Academic Boards.

(1 November 2001 summary attached as Appendix A, and see

http://www.secretariat.unsw.edu.au/committee_chairs.htm for minutes and summaries).

3. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

3.1 Standing Orders

Professor McConkey noted that, in the context of clarifying Committee relationships following a discussion with Professor Blake, Chair of the NSWVCC, the Committee had revised its Terms of Reference and had agreed to draft standing orders. He tabled correspondence with Professor Blake (Appendix B), relating to the revision of the Terms of Reference, which would be considered by the NSWVCC at its June meeting. He noted that the Committee's schedule of meeting dates (Appendix C) corresponded with the NSWVCC meeting dates of 18 June, 17 September and 19 November. Professor McConkey would meet with Professor Blake (UTS) and Professor Holmes (Newcastle), who would become the new Chair of the NSWVCC, at the end of June.

The Committee considered the draft standing orders, and the following points were noted:

- The rationale for scheduling meeting dates to coincide with NSWVCC dates should be included.
- The rationale for the location of meetings, which was that meetings should alternate between big cities and smaller cities/towns, should be included.
- The exact dollar amount of the financial contribution should be removed.
- To confirm advice to the NSWVCC, a quorum of half plus one would be required.
- Appendix C in the standing orders was the most recent Terms of Reference from the TSC.
- The view was put that it would be useful if the Chair attended the NSWVCC. However, the provision of a written report had been customary for reasons of independence.
- The Chairs of the Committee and the TSC were legally covered as employees of their respective universities.

The Committee noted that financial arrangements following a change in Chair varied, depending upon whether the secretariat functions moved to another university or not. It had been mooted that a permanent secretariat be established for the NSWVCC, which might also service the Committee of Chairs.

The Committee

RESOLVED COC02/1

That the Committee of Chairs approves the Standing Orders and Rules of Procedure for the Committee, as detailed and amended in the documents presented, noting that the outcome of the NSWVCC's deliberations on its standing committees might necessitate some changes.

3.2 NSWVCC

The Committee noted that the NSWVCC was examining plagiarism policy. Professor Holmes was writing a model policy to table at the next NSWVCC, and there was an expectation that most universities would adopt some form of this model. Professor McConkey noted that the University of Sydney had developed an Academic Honesty Policy, and it was agreed that this would be circulated to members (see http://db.usyd.edu.au/policy/policy_text_search.stm). Associate Professor Sims undertook to email to the Committee information on Professor Holmes' plans in this area (Appendix D, and Chairs website, 28 March 2002 section). The Committee noted that it had agreed previously to share policy information with sources acknowledged.

4. BOARD OF STUDIES

Professor Stanley reported that a national study *University Credit for School Students* had been submitted to DEST (see report circulated in Chairs email from K.McConkey@unsw.edu.au, 17/04/2002, 10:42 AM and on Chairs website). The study recommended that the Federal Government consider funding university courses in secondary schools for appropriate students and suggested various scenarios.

Committee of Chairs representation on Board Curriculum Committees

Professor McConkey tabled an updated list of Committee of Chairs representatives on Board Curriculum Committees (BCCs) (Appendix E, with "The Board's syllabus development process"). He emphasised the importance of nominating academics willing and able to attend the meetings of the BCCs. While the universities had no direct representatives involved in preparing the writing briefs, they could exert substantial influence through the BCCs.

Professor McConkey noted that the nomination procedures for Examination Committees differed in that nominations could be made directly to the Board of Studies. Sometimes the Board asked for the Chair's assistance in locating academics able to serve on the Examination Committees.

5. TECHNICAL SCALING COMMITTEE (TSC)

Professor Cooney spoke to the circulated *Report of the Calculation of Universities Admission Index 2001*. Considering the magnitude of the change to the HSC, he believed that the UAI calculation had proceeded smoothly.

Professor Cooney advised that the data had been checked thoroughly on input and output, and noted that additional data checks would be introduced in 2002. He also advised that some issues had arisen regarding the setting of the top mark and scaling which would be investigated. The distribution of scaled marks had been scrutinised to ensure that students were not disadvantaged.

In relation to the relationship between the UAI and HSC marks, Professor Cooney noted that misunderstanding still existed regarding the UAI being a rank, not a mark. Several media releases had assisted in educating the community and this year, more focussed releases in plain English would be made. The matter was described in the circulated document *Why is my UAI so low when my HSC marks are so high?*

Professor Cooney noted that queries had been received regarding why certain units were included in the UAI calculation instead of others (this information was printed on the advice notice). A mark of 92 in Modern Greek, for example, might only place a student in the top 15% if the average was 88, while a mark of 80 in Information Processes might place the student in the top 5%, and this result would then be included in the UAI calculation in preference to the Modern Greek result.

Professor Cooney noted that the timing of the release of results was a matter for the Minister, and that it had been the Minister's view that the release of the HSC results was pre-eminent and should precede the release of the UAI by 24 hours. The Committee noted that the logic of separating the release of results was not as compelling as it had been, although there were logistical and technical issues involved in allowing a same-day release.

Table of equivalences, policy on assessment and review of other secondary qualifications

Professor McConkey tabled an email from Professor John Mack (Appendix F), regarding the current table of equivalences used by the UAC in relating a French baccaalaureate score to the UAI and the policy for undertaking the assessment and review of other secondary qualifications on a regular basis. Professor McConkey noted that it was necessary to bring forward an update of the relevant schedules for the Assessment of Qualifications manual.

Professor Cooney agreed that an update was necessary. He said that it would be straightforward in relation to the International Baccaalaureate as the Board of Studies had provided data. Updating equivalences for the French baccaalaureate, tertiary preparation certificates and foundation courses could be more involved. Professor McConkey undertook to work with Professors Cooney and Mack to bring a recommendation forward to the 30 May meeting.

6. UDBEC GUIDELINES

Professor McConkey reported that members had indicated acceptance of the revision of the Board of Studies Guidelines for University Developed Board Endorsed Courses (UDBEC). Some minor amendments had been suggested to clarify certain aspects. He would report to the Board of

Studies on 9 April that the revised guidelines were acceptable to the Committee. It was noted that the courses could count towards university entrance but not towards the UAI.

Mr Patterson advised that the guidelines would be distributed to all universities and made available on the Board's website. It was noted that the deadline for endorsement of courses by the Board of Studies was May, to allow appropriate planning and notice to schools and prospective students.

Professor Stanley clarified the difference between distinction courses and Board endorsed courses. The Board of Studies had funded distinction courses in 1994 as a pathway to university for students who met acceleration criteria. The McGaw Review had recommended that the Board should not continue to develop more academic courses beyond matriculation level as students did not receive the first year university experience and usually did not receive credit transfer. It was preferable for students to have access to university courses. As a result, the Board was phasing out distinction courses but was reluctant to do so completely until there was an alternative available, for which funding was required. Distinction courses were available statewide and the *University Credit for School Students* argued the case for Federal funding. Professor McConkey indicated that the Committee might need to come to a view on advice to the NSWVCC if funding became available following the publishing of this report.

7. REVIEW OF NEW HSC

The Committee noted that Geoff Masters would be presenting a report to the Board of Studies on 9 April on the Review of the New HSC, which would be made available on the BOS website (see Chairs email from K.McConkey@unsw.edu.au, 17/04/2002, 10:42 and <http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/>).

Professor Stanley made the following comments:

- The data in the report were encouraging, while noting that the exercise of public examinations was not perfect and there was always room for improvement. Some issues arising from the data would be looked at in more detail.
- An analysis of media reports on the HSC had shown that a higher proportion were favourable and that of the negative reports, two thirds were produced by one journalist at one newspaper.
- Fewer inquiries after the release of results, requests to check marks and special consideration requests had been received.
- Some recommendations from the report were of a technical nature regarding processes, and some recommendations involved the extent of differentiation of performance in extension courses.
- The Board would be consulting with relevant groups over the recommendations and would seek the Committee's nominees.

During discussion of the teaching of science subjects, the following points were noted:

- Many NSW science teachers were excited by the new syllabus. The new syllabus challenged the way science had been taught and this could explain the resistance reported from some areas. The model of contextual learning had been developed with significant academic input, consultation and broad consensus, but some preferred how it had been taught.
- Enrolments in some science subjects had increased marginally against a previous downward trend. The Board of Studies would be examining enrolment patterns over two years in May. Increases in VET and reduction in the minimum number of units from 11 to 10 would translate to decreased enrolments in some areas.
- The Board of Studies would be examining the science syllabus content as there was an opinion that there was too much content in some areas.

Professor McConkey reported that one school had made a robust presentation to him regarding

its concerns with Physics, Chemistry and Biology, particularly in regard to the contextualised approach to teaching in those areas, and its belief that the Committee of Chairs should support its view. The school believed that there should be an advanced science stream in each area.

Professor Stanley reiterated that the changes had not been made lightly and had involved significant academic input. For Physics, the University of Sydney Physics Department had developed the support material for teachers, and a nominee of the Committee had been involved in developing the curriculum for each subject. He noted that the subjects had been more theoretical and abstract in the past. Views differed on what the correct mix of theoretical and contextual aspects should be, but many believed that the balance in the new HSC was correct and engaged students more effectively.

Members of the Committee expressed the view that the changes were an excellent innovation, which should be encouraged, and which mirrored the way in which many first year university courses were being taught. Members believed that it was positive to see that the downward trend in enrolments in some science subjects was being arrested. This would provide a challenge to universities which were being presented with a growing number of more enthusiastic students rather than a dwindling number of students who might be better prepared in theory.

8. AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Professor McConkey reported that he had taken part in the AUQA Auditor Training Program and an AUQA debriefing. The questions to be asked in the audits had been presented in the training program. He noted that an AUQA conference would be held in Brisbane on 27-28 September 2002.

UNSW had released to staff only a report containing the UNSW submission to the trial audit, the AUQA report, the UNSW response, and UNSW's paper on the shadow audit it had conducted.

Professor McConkey made the following points:

- UNSW had sought to influence the AUQA process through involvement in the trial audit.
- The UNSW approach in preparation for the trial audit had been very different from that adopted by the Northern Territory University (NTU). Consequently, the two universities had had very different experiences of the trial audit. At the training workshops, the approaches favoured by the universities taking part also varied from the highly collegial, integrated approach to an approach which involved senior management and/or consultants. AUQA had the view that universities could approach the audit in whatever way they felt was suitable for their institution.
- AUQA had been receptive to UNSW's sometimes challenging comments on its processes.
- AUQA had used a second version training manual at the training workshops, attended by staff from a number of universities. There were some shifts in language and emphasis in the second version.

Professor McConkey tabled a page from the AUQA manual (Appendix G). He advised that if universities embraced the opportunity provided by the audits, they could do a lot towards shaping the way in which they were conducted. It was important that universities had some convergence in the way that they approached the audits. He argued that a centralised approach was not ideal, as this marginalised quality assurance. Rather than setting up a separate QA committee and separate QA procedures, it was better to have quality assurance added to the terms of reference of every committee.

Professor McConkey advised that UNSW had received commendations in some areas that were not sector-wide and recommendations in some areas which would be sector-wide, including

assuring quality in on-line delivery and offshore programs.

During discussion, the following comments were noted:

- The suggested approach to QA paralleled that which ACU had been developing.
- Continuous improvement and monitoring rather than crisis management were required. It was important to ensure that quality processes produced quality outcomes.
- The value-added approach to graduates was discussed; not all universities could be in the top percentile. Benchmarking with similar institutions was important.
- The organisational structures of universities differed significantly but it was important that the audit processes captured qualities identified as central goals of the institution. It was stressed that "wet paint" policies would not work.

9. MEETING OF NATIONAL COMMITTEE OF CHAIRS

Associate Professor Rayner reported that positive feedback had been received following the National Committee of Chairs meeting at the University of Canberra in February 2002. He agreed to provide his report on the meeting to the Committee (see report circulated in Chairs email from V.Finlay@unsw.edu.au, 24/04/2002, 2:40 PM). It was noted that the summary document produced from the November meeting of the Committee of Chairs had been helpful to the National meeting.

The National meeting had discussed the relationships of Academic Boards to Councils and Executives. The Committee discussed the issue of demarcation between academic and resource issues, a boundary that was expected to be maintained by most Boards, noting that this demarcation was becoming more artificial as the areas converged. It was noted that it would be helpful to move towards a common position regarding policy development and the issue of the blurring of the boundary between academic and resource issues.

Members discussed the size and changing roles of Academic Boards. The insinuation of workload and quality issues into Academic Board matters was noted. Some Boards were involved in the approval of promotion policy, while others commented on it. The UTS Academic Board had an important role in the quality of community service it provided to the University. At ANU, the administrative and collegial functions of the Academic Board and Executive had been merged, with the Vice-Chancellor chairing the Board. Deans had to sign off that proposals were not in breach of the workload stipulations of the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

The Committee noted that a link between the Academic Board and the Executive through the Chair of the Board was desirable. It was also noted that there had been disquiet expressed about increasingly interventionist management practices at some universities. The view was put that as Councils had ultimate responsibility for quality issues, they were taking a stronger role to ensure that QA mechanisms were in place.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 Assessing Performance of Academic Boards

Professor McConkey advised that Professor Sachs (USyd) had asked that the Committee consider an agreed way of assessing performance of Academic Boards. It was agreed that a national survey, concerned with performance issues and conducted as a follow-up to the University Governance Conference held at Macquarie University in 2001, would be placed on the agenda for the next meeting. (See SCU document circulated in Chairs email from mhayden@scu.edu.au, 26/04/2002, 10:37 AM).

11. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on **Thursday, 30 May 2002** at the Australian National University.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 3.00 pm.