

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

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Minutes of the meeting (02/3) of the **Committee of Chairs** held at 9.30 am on  
**Thursday, 29 August 2002** at the University of New South Wales.

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**PRESENT**

Professor Kevin McConkey (UNSW), Chair  
Professor John Coll (ACU)  
Professor Malcolm Gillies (ANU)  
Professor Martin Hayden (SCU)  
Professor David Green (Charles Sturt)  
Professor John Loxton (Macquarie)  
Professor Linda Connor (Newcastle)  
Professor Ray Cooksey (UNE)  
Professor Alan Johnson (UTS)  
Professor Judyth Sachs (USyd)  
Dr J Bergan (UWS)  
Professor David Griffiths (Wollongong)

**IN ATTENDANCE**

Professor Gordon Stanley, Board of Studies (Item 5)  
Mr David Patterson, Board of Studies (Item 5)  
Professor George Cooney, Chair, Technical Scaling Committee (Item 6)  
Ms Victoria Finlay (UNSW), Secretary

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**1. APOLOGIES/WELCOMES/FAREWELLS**

Apologies were received from Associate Professor John Rayner (Canberra), Professor Lesley Wilkes (UWS) and Mr David Blair (Macquarie).

Professor McConkey welcomed Professor Loxton as the nominee for Mr David Blair. He farewelled outgoing members Professors Martin Hayden (SCU) and Alan Johnson (UTS), and thanked them for their contribution to the Committee. Professor Johnson thanked the Committee for its input and commented that it had developed well over the last 18 months. He noted that the number of representatives attending showed the worth of the group.

Professor McConkey noted that items would be considered out of agenda order. He advised that the New South Wales Vice-Chancellors' Conference was now chaired by Professor Roger Holmes from the University of Newcastle. (The secretary to the NSWVCC was now Ms Sally Gordon.)

**2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 30 MAY 2002**

(See [http://www.secretariat.unsw.edu.au/committee\\_chairs02.htm](http://www.secretariat.unsw.edu.au/committee_chairs02.htm))

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed.

**3. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES**

There was no business raised under this item.

**4. FINANCIAL REPORT – SUBSCRIPTIONS**

Professor McConkey noted that most annual membership subscriptions had been paid. In response to a query, he advised that the subscriptions covered the travel costs of Professor Cooney, Chair of the Technical Scaling Committee, the Secretariat costs for the University servicing the Committee and catering costs for the meetings. He advised that subscriptions were due at the

beginning of each financial year and that they had been increased recently by the Committee for the first time in many years.

(See [http://www.secretariat.unsw.edu.au/committee\\_chairs02.htm](http://www.secretariat.unsw.edu.au/committee_chairs02.htm) for details of financial procedures).

## **5. BOARD OF STUDIES**

### ***Chair's Report***

Professor McConkey tabled a list of Committee of Chairs representatives on the Board of Studies Curriculum (BCC) and Industry (ICC) Committees (Appendix A) and a telephone and fax directory for the Board of Studies (Appendix B). He thanked the Committee for assisting him in filling the positions on the BCCs and ICCs, noting that the Board of Studies received feedback on attendance patterns; travel expenses were covered by the Board. The Committee thanked the Chair for increasing university representation.

Professor McConkey noted that the Chief Examiner system (for different HSC subjects) had been revised and half the positions would become open in 2003 – there was a two-year rolling changeover. The new positions had been filled recently and the Board of Studies had chosen academics in nearly all cases when they had been nominated for the position. The new position of Chief Examiner had a higher profile and a more active role in oversight of the HSC process. In addition, the selection process was more rigorous and the remuneration had been increased.

The Committee discussed issues associated with credit transfer across the University and TAFE sectors and a move within the TAFE sector to develop degree programs. Members discussed how this might intersect with the Ministerial Review of Higher Education, and noted the Chair's recent attendance at the NSW Vocational Education and Training Advisory Committee, where matters relevant to VET in TAFE and in High Schools, including the differences in competency and standards assessment, the difficulty in work placements in some areas, and the increase in "practice firms and virtual enterprise" companies had been discussed.

The Committee discussed the commercialisation of practice opportunities through the growth in "practice firms and virtual enterprise" companies (Appendix C). It was difficult to place all students in real workplace situations and the simulated environments provided greater structure for the learning environment, a greater range of opportunities and greater control of the experience. In addition, insurance issues associated with a real workplace could be avoided.

*At this point in the meeting, Professor Stanley and Mr Patterson arrived.*

In relation to the move within the TAFE sector to develop degree programs, Professor Stanley advised that he was on the Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board (VETAB) which fed into the Australian Qualifications Framework and that the position developed in conjunction with the NSW Department of Education and the Board was that associate degrees should be available in the TAFE sector in NSW (*A review of possible inclusion of an associate degree in the Australian Qualifications Framework* (AQF) tabled as Appendix D). The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) did not support this position. He suggested that universities express their opinions on the matter to VETAB.

The Committee discussed matters relating to postgraduate diplomas and honours degrees and the different ways in which they were awarded. The Committee noted a concern at some universities that students were moving away from thesis based honours years in favour of fourth years based on coursework. Honours was the bridge between undergraduate learning and postgraduate research and it was harder to find students to take up postgraduate research scholarships in some disciplines. Members discussed moves to award pass degrees with distinction for four year

degrees where honours were not available.

Relatedly, a number of students were progressing to a PhD following a Masters by coursework degree. The point was made that this appeared to be a discipline specific phenomenon, but data was hard to gather. The Committee noted that consistency of nomenclature could be achieved in some disciplines where professional accreditation was required. The issue of a preliminary PhD year for students not quite up to the level of direct PhD entry was mentioned. Members noted that an increase in the diversity of pathways to degrees was evident in the new marketplace.

Members were requested to provide details to the next meeting on how their universities defined the postgraduate diploma and it was agreed to put the honours year issue on the next agenda as well.

### ***Report from the Board of Studies***

The Committee received a report from Professor Gordon Stanley and Mr David Patterson on the new HSC and on matters related to Vocational Education and Training.

Professor Stanley reported on the HSC performance scale, noting that for the first time, various levels of performance could be seen across subjects. He discussed distribution and standards referencing, noting that the emphasis in the new HSC was on reporting knowledge and skills, not ranking HSC marks. The UAI was a rank for a minimum entrance standard and was a different kind of reporting. The value of the outcomes reporting in the new HSC was that it gave a clearer understanding of the academic content of achievement and recognised the student's development regarding the subject area. It could be aligned easily with TAFE assessment models and allow for credit transfer into TAFE from the HSC. He referred to the TAFE website (<http://www.det.nsw.edu.au/hsctafe/current/tafensw.htm>) which contained information regarding performance with respect to standards.

Professor Stanley queried universities' judgements regarding credit transfer, noting that University Developed Board Endorsed Courses, not subject to moderation with respect to standards, were accepted for a semester of credit by some universities, while extension courses, which comprised a high level of achievement, were not. There should be recognition of content outcomes so that it was not repeated in first year courses. Other sectors used this for a more consistent approach to credit transfer. In response to a query, Professor Stanley advised that there was a desire within Government for universities to achieve a greater consistency in approach to credit transfer.

The Office of the Board of Studies had produced Standards Packages in every HSC subject, containing actual scripts referenced to each standard. This made comparisons easy, and could mean that a student would not need to undertake an introductory course if they satisfied the standards. In the past, universities did not have access to scripts. Now they had evidence embedded in the practice of the HSC examinations.

Professor McConkey noted that the question could be asked, if TAFE could identify credit transfer and if the HSC could articulate standards for output, why couldn't universities identify credit transfer and articulate standards for input? If universities recognised UDBECs and gave credit for them but not for better HSC subjects, there was an inconsistency in practice. He noted that there might or might not be good reasons for why different universities did things differently in this area. The Minister for Education was interested in this matter and would be writing to Vice-Chancellors shortly requesting information and noting that various inconsistencies needed discussion. Professor Stanley noted that the matter would be partly articulated in the Commonwealth Ministerial Review of Higher Education. Discussion would be held on the possible development and funding of a formal program of universities developing courses for the HSC. Compatible credit transfer arrangements allowed for seamless transitions and was a cost-effective use of resources. Professor Stanley advised that the matter would only fuel the argument for provision of associate degrees at TAFE as it was easier for students to get credit transfer at TAFE and they

would not repeat content which they had already learned. He suggested that the Minister would like to see evidence of universities using the standards information to communicate with students on credit transfer.

The Committee discussed a range of issues regarding credit transfer arrangements and noted that at the postgraduate level, exemptions rather than advanced standing was usually used if similar content had been completed at the undergraduate level, and that a review of credit transfer arrangements would allow bright students to be taken further.

Professor Stanley advised that the *HSC Media Guide* would be supplied to members as soon as it was available and that Standards Packages could be provided for one subject per member. Mr Patterson tabled an information booklet and three 2002 HSC Updates, which were available at regular intervals on the Board of Studies website (Appendix E).

## **6. TECHNICAL SCALING COMMITTEE**

The Committee discussed matters relating to the new HSC and the UAI and considered the draft report of the Technical Scaling Committee prepared by Professor George Cooney (final version attached as Appendix F).

During discussion of the draft report, the paragraph about moderation of assessment marks on page 5 was clarified. The Board of Studies moderated the school assessment marks against raw examination marks so that the moderated assessment marks covered the same range as the examination marks. The rank order of students was not changed. Then the marks were aligned to standards by experienced markers. Where a student was at the bottom on assessment and at the top in the examination, two marks would appear and the HSC mark would be the average of the two given equal weighting. Professor Cooney agreed to amend the sentence to reflect this more clearly.

Professor Cooney referred members to the appendix in the report, which showed the percentage of students in each HSC band. He noted that the UAI could not be compared to the HSC marks, which were reported by the Board of Studies in a different way. Some changes would be made to certain examination papers in some extension courses where too many students had ended up at the top of the band. Members discussed examination papers and the percentage of students in each band.

## **7. PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC BOARDS**

### ***“UNE Academic Board Self-Audit Survey 2002”***

The Committee considered UNE’s template to be used to evaluate the performance of its Academic Board and discussed performance review of Academic Boards.

Professor Cooksey advised that he had based the template on Professor Hayden’s questions. He had wanted to conduct a self-audit of the UNE Academic Board before the AUQA audit in 2003, as the Board had never reviewed itself, only its committee structures. He planned to circulate the template to all Board members shortly, following commentary from the Committee of Chairs.

Members commended the template and observed that it could be useful for their Boards as well. A focus on the Board’s work overall rather than the meetings alone was important. There had been debate at some Boards regarding the Board’s role in monitoring policy implementation. It could be argued that the Academic Board did this better as it was a collegial activity rather than a management led activity. The University of Sydney was reviewing the level of compliance with certain policies and would identify areas for improvement. A draft information pamphlet on the UNSW Academic Board was tabled (Appendix G).

## **8. PLAGIARISM POLICY**

### ***UNE “University Policy on Plagiarism & Improper Conduct”***

The Committee considered UNE’s circulated policy on plagiarism based on the NSWVCC template. During discussion, the following points were noted:

- The flowchart had been reworked from the NSWVCC version.
- It was essential to ensure that a student signed a plagiarism declaration for each assessment task and it should include a statement that the student agreed that the task could be scanned.
- USYD had taken a different focus, on academic honesty as a core value of the University.
- A report on electronic plagiarism in Victoria would be released shortly. Information would be sent to members on how to obtain the report. Victorian universities had collaborated in the exercise, which used “Turnitin” software to identify the percentage of plagiarised material in students’ work. What percentage would constitute plagiarism needed to be defined. Sampling for the average university would involve one person to coordinate and equip the exercise. Perhaps the sampling could be conducted for 12 months to provide a baseline, and then random sampling could be conducted. Software cost around \$20,000.
- The point was made that setting the same assignments or having too many assessment tasks could contribute to problems with plagiarism.

## **9. REVIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION**

The Committee discussed the Ministerial Review of Higher Education, noting that policy was likely to emerge over the next few months. During discussion, the following points were noted:

- Rapid change might occur at the interface of teaching and research. There was concern that identification of areas of teaching and research and teaching only would happen anyway in a fragmented way. If the 30% research component was taken out of University funding, it would have a profound effect on research.
- The question of whether education was a public or private good appeared to be veering in the direction of private good.
- Mechanisms to increase the mobility of students might increase.
- Responses had acknowledged the role of Academic Boards. The issue of accountability of Councils was discussed briefly.
- There was concern that responses would have little effect on the final outcome of the review. It was expected that most decisions would be made by the end of October.

## **10. MAPPING EXERCISE – UNIVERSITY PREPARATION PROGRAMS**

The Committee noted the initial information provided by members in regards to a “mapping exercise” on Foundation Studies/University Preparation Programs (Appendix H). Members had been asked to gather information from their Foundation Studies directors on the nature of these preparatory programs, advanced standing arrangements, data on students, etc. It was agreed to continue this exercise at the next meeting.

## **11. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

### ***11.1 ICAC forum Degrees of Transparency: corruption resistance in NSW universities***

Professor McConkey advised that he had attended the ICAC forum *Degrees of Transparency: corruption resistance in NSW universities*. This forum had expanded on material contained in *Degrees of Risk: a corruption risk profile of the NSW university sector*. (Members were urged to read the report, which could be found at [www.icac.nsw.gov.au](http://www.icac.nsw.gov.au).) It was reported that interactions at the forum conveyed a degree of distance in the mindset with which some participants approached common sense issues.



Professor McConkey tabled an article from *The Sydney Morning Herald* on the ICAC report *Degrees of Risk* (Appendix I) and a list of better practice publications that the UNSW Internal Audit Office had supplied to him and that the Deputy Auditor General from the NSW Audit Office had advised universities should know about (Appendix J).

### **11.2 Conference on Governance Issues for Academic Board/Senate and University Council**

#### **Secretariat Personnel**

The Committee noted that a Conference on Governance Issues for Academic Board/Senate and University Council Secretariat Personnel would be held on 25 – 26 November at Southern Cross University.

### **12. NEXT MEETING**

The Committee agreed that the meeting scheduled on the reserve date of Thursday, 28 November 2002 would not be required. The next meeting would be held on **Thursday, 27 March 2003**, at the University of Western Sydney.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1.45 pm.