

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

Minutes of the meeting (01/4) of the **Committee of Chairs** held at **9.00 am on Thursday, 1 November 2001** at Southern Cross University (Ballina Beach Conference Centre).

PRESENT Professor Kevin McConkey (UNSW), Chair
Professor Ray Cooksey (UNE)
Professor Rob Cowdroy (Newcastle)
Professor David Griffiths (Wollongong)
Professor Martin Hayden (Southern Cross)
Professor Ric Pashley (ANU)
Professor Judyth Sachs (Sydney)
Mr David Blair (Macquarie)

IN ATTENDANCE Ms Victoria Finlay (UNSW), Secretary to the Committee

1. APOLOGIES AND WELCOME

Apologies were received from Professor John Coll (ACU), Professor Alan Johnson (UTS), Professor David Green (Charles Sturt), Associate Professor John Rayner (Canberra), Professor Alf van der Poorten (Macquarie), Professor Lesley Wilkes (Western Sydney) and Professor George Cooney, Chair of the Technical Committee on Scaling (TCS), (Macquarie).

The Chair noted that Mr David Blair was attending in Professor van der Poorten's stead, and that Professor Elizabeth More would attend in his stead at the next meeting. He advised that Professor van der Poorten was on long service leave, and that he would write to thank him for his many years of service on the Committee of Chairs. The Chair farewelled Professor Pashley, who was attending his last meeting, and noted that Professor Cowdroy's return was subject to the outcome of election.

2. MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF 23 AUGUST 2001

The minutes of the previous meeting were confirmed.
(Please refer to http://www.secretariat.unsw.edu.au/committee_chairs.htm).

3. BUSINESS ARISING FROM THE MINUTES

- **Standing Orders**

Standing Orders would be developed for consideration in 2002.

- **NSWVCC**

The Chair had written to Professor Tony Blake, Chair of the NSWVCC, on issues discussed at the 23 May 2001 Committee of Chairs meeting, including the Committee's membership, terms of reference, the role of the Technical Committee on Scaling (TCS), financial procedures, legal considerations and reporting relationships (Appendix A).

The Committee noted that the NSWVCC would discuss further the Committee of Chairs' role and relationship to the NSWVCC and the role of its other committees at its meeting on 20 November 2001. Its previous meeting had been taken up with consideration of "The Universities Legislation Amendment (Financial and Other Powers) Bill 2001".

Relatedly members were asked to check whether staff from their university listed as members of the TCS were willing to continue. The Chair would be stepping down in 2-3 years and succession planning was required.

[Secretariat Note: The membership of the TCS was emailed to the Committee on 6 November for confirmation, and is also accessible via the "please select" drop down menu at http://www.secretariat.unsw.edu.au/committee_chairs.htm]

- ***Member University Contributions***

The Committee noted that all but one of the member Universities had paid the annual subscription to the Committee of Chairs.

4. *ROLE OF ACADEMIC BOARDS*

The Chair noted that the constitutions of the member universities' Academic Boards had been emailed to members and were available in hard copy if required. He said that it would be useful to convey key points to members' Academic Boards and to provide input to the National Committee of Chairs meeting. It was noted that the relationship between Boards and Councils had not been addressed at Southern Cross University's recent University Governance Conference at Macquarie University (Appendix B), and members expressed interest in this relationship being addressed at the National Committee of Chairs meeting. The Chair undertook to convey relevant comments and suggestions from today's meeting to Professor John Rayner.

Structure of Boards (Professor Cowdroy)

Professor Cowdroy reviewed the structure of the Academic Boards of the member universities.

He noted that the structures varied from a "bottom-up" advisory role, which was being reinforced at Newcastle and Sydney, to ANU, which had a new "top-down" structure.

Professor Cowdroy posed a number of questions:

- What is the purpose of the Academic Board?
- How is it viewed within the University?
- Is it a rubber stamp to formalise a role of veto for administrative issues?
- Does it endorse/not endorse policy that has already been made?
- Does it have a quality assurance function?
- Does it support/facilitate the growth of academic life?
- What about its informal roles? Does it provide informal avenues for lobbying and a supportive, facilitative function, the importance of which is not reflected in its formal constitution?
- Do the Board's committees play a representative role by attendance, making them too large to be effective? Or are they less democratic and more able to act? Is democracy or the ability to act and respond more quickly the first imperative?
- How do the roles of Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor fit in? (At Newcastle, they had been made members of equal status to other members, but could not be Chair or Deputy Chair.)
- What is the balance between the ex-officio and elected membership? (A predominance of elected members was preferred, to ensure that they dominated decision-making, while ex-officio membership was required to prevent a divide between the top-down and bottom-up approach.)
- What about the roles of the Chair and the Deputy Chair(s)? Should they be elected from within the Board or from the academic community at large (as was the case at Newcastle)? Should the Chair be a member of the Board? Should the Chair and Deputy Chair(s) be full or part-time?

During discussion of the questions raised by Professor Cowdroy, members made comparisons between universities and the following comments were noted:

- Representation and relationship to management was crucial.
- The right to independence of action was important.
- As the divide between academic and administrative staff became blurred, the Board had an increasingly important role to play in this relationship. Some Boards made provision for general staff membership.
- There was also a blurring of the divide between academic and administrative/resource matters.
- An important function of the Board was to foster positive relationships between parts of the University.

Relationship with Council/Executive/etc (Professors Sachs & Pashley)

The Committee discussed the relationship of Academic Boards with Councils and Executives and the following comments were noted:

- Constructive interdependence rather than independence was seen as a healthy role for the Board, with the Board in the role of the "honest broker". A constructive and direct relationship with Council was seen as crucial, but Boards should have independence in thought and action.
- Boundaries of responsibility of members should be clearly defined. In some cases, there was a lack of distinction between governance and management. Erosion of trust between senior management and Boards/Councils had a debilitating effect, even when other performance indicators were positive.
- The opinion was expressed that Academic Boards should be the paramount body for academic decisions, and that Councils should express more trust and confidence in Academic Boards.
- The opinion was expressed that Academic Boards were in a state of crisis, not sure of their identity and experiencing pressures on a number of fronts that they were not well equipped to deal with. Professional groups such as Pro-Vice-Chancellors were taking on some tasks traditionally carried out by Academic Boards.
- The merits or otherwise of various types of membership, size and decision-making powers of Boards and other senior bodies within universities were discussed.
- Various points made at the University Governance Conference, including that Council and Board members should have an induction process, were discussed.
- The opinion was expressed that Academic Boards "can't do much but they can stop a lot".
- Regular reports to the Academic Board from the Vice-Chancellor and Pro-Vice-Chancellors could prompt debate.
- The criteria which should be used to measure the performance of Academic Boards and Councils needed to be determined. Review processes should be aligned so that the same set of data could be drawn from.

Role of Chairs/Deputy Chairs (Professor Griffiths & Mr Blair)

The Committee discussed the role of Chairs and Deputy Chairs and the following comments were noted:

- The Chair's primary function on Council was seen as an educative one on academic matters. Chairs who were members of Council now had liabilities due to the new legislation. Council members needed to adopt a university-wide view.
- Chairs had three roles: to represent the Academic Board view, their own view and the academic community's view. The role of the Chair on the Executive as a representative of the Academic Board and the academic community was discussed. Whether the Chair was elected by the Board or the academic community as a whole had an effect on the representative role.
- In some cases, Chairs stood in for senior executive members for certain matters and some saw

this as a blurring of the role. The opinion was expressed that Chairs needed to be vigilant about the representative nature and independence of their role and that the academic and management roles should be kept separate. Chairs were a part of and apart from the Executive.

- Chairs had to maintain their academic credibility and therefore their own academic work, and had to 'rehabilitate' themselves following their term of office. Certain personal attributes were necessary for an effective Chair.
- The level of resources made available and the responsibilities for Chairs and Deputy Chairs varied depending on the size of the university. In some cases, the role of the Deputy Chairs was uncertain and needed attention.
- Chairs provided a leadership role to the academic community and in some cases a conduit for students. Student participation and representation was discussed.
- Chairs gained experience in managing the complexity of a diverse disciplinary culture. Previously the role had been a pathway to the Vice-Chancellor's position but this was changing and depended upon the size and history of the university.
- Councils often encouraged Academic Boards to provide a different and independent perspective. The challenge for the Chair was to manage the expression of different views at the Board so that it was constructive for the university as a whole.
- Chairs often spoke on behalf of the university, articulated different viewpoints and provided a positive/negative evaluation for Council.
- The President of the Academic Board at UNSW had been interviewed three times during the AUQA trial audit: as a member of Council, as President of the Board and with the Executive Group. AUQA had asked, "What makes a good Academic Board?"

Ways to Improve Functions (Professors Hayden & Cooksey)

The Committee discussed ways to improve functions and the following points were noted:

- Review of Academic Boards and committees was beneficial as long as clear outcomes were identified which had the support of the community.
- The role of the Academic Board was evolving as accountability was translated; quality assurance and resource issues needed to be confronted.
- The way Academic Boards could play a role in resource issues was discussed.
- There was a strong expectation that Academic Boards would play a dominant role in quality assurance in partnership with Pro-Vice-Chancellors Education/Academic. This could lead to the development of rules for the review of academic units. Academic Boards could maintain some influence over academic units by the way in which quality assurance was managed.
- It was difficult to sharpen the focus of the Academic Board due to various expectations of it.
- Best practice required that Boards have clear priorities. The agenda should be structured to deal with a small set of priorities and items should be considered within that framework.
- The attributes of the members involved in the Board's work had a significant impact on the functioning of the Board.
- Ensuring that subcommittees were the "work horses", careful planning of agendas and running meetings efficiently improved the functioning of Boards. Much of the work of the Board was carried on outside the actual meetings. The quality of the preparatory work and supporting documentation was crucial and helped to shape expectations of proposals coming forward.
- Providing retreat reports and quality assurance information on Academic Board websites was helpful.
- The Committee discussed how the performance of Academic Boards could be judged. The monitoring of policy implementation was considered important. It was challenging to communicate and oversee the implementation of policy rather than just ratifying it. Professor Sachs reported that performance indicators had been identified to measure the performance of USyd's Board and she undertook to report back on the matter. The performance of Boards should be an item for the agenda in university reviews. The suggestion was made that the National Committee of Chairs and/or the AVCC could develop a code of practice regarding

relationships with Academic Boards.

- There was a high correlation between the performance of the Academic Board and the performance of the institution.
- The training that large Boards could provide to inexperienced members in academic life was invaluable. Academic Boards were crucial to asserting enduring academic values.
- Planning reviews and retreats and improving communication generally was essential. The profile of Academic Boards should be raised to ensure that all elected positions were contested.

The Chair undertook to liaise with Professor John Rayner regarding the way that the matters discussed might be taken up at the national meeting. Members were invited to contact Professor Rayner with any suggestions. Members agreed to adopt a common nomenclature when discussing Councils and Academic Boards.

The dot points developed under the four headings above are attached as Appendix C.

5. HSC & UAI

The Committee noted that the NSW Board of Studies was holding a symposium on Human Society and its Environment Yrs 7-10 (Appendix D). The Committee also noted the University nominated membership of BOS Curriculum Committees (Appendix E) and that the BOS had been streamlining nomination procedures. It was important that people nominated by the Committee of Chairs were committed to serving on the Board's committees.

The Committee noted that the BOS had commenced working on advancing the study of languages and that there were a number of issues related to the area of "bonus marks". The effect of giving bonus marks for languages in Victoria was being investigated. Procedures for HSC examination committees and the UAI had been progressing well. The Media Guidelines on the new HSC would be circulated to members. It was expected that the issue of standards referencing of the HSC and the ranking of the UAI might raise some issues in the community.

6. QUALITY ASSURANCE

The Committee noted that AUQA information was available on the AVCC website. During discussion of quality assurance issues, the following points were noted:

- The relationship of management, Academic Boards and Councils to quality assurance strategy should be clarified. Some universities saw the AUQA audits as the responsibility of the Board, while recognising that the "buck stops" with Council.
- Delegation of the AUQA audit was not recommended; it needed to be conducted from a senior level at the University.
- A trial audit had been held at UNSW, and Australian Catholic University, Macquarie University and University of Newcastle had been scheduled for audit in 2002. Newcastle would be treated as a special case as it was being restructured.
- The trial audit at UNSW had been conducted in a very short time frame. Twenty schools had taken part in an internal review, which had provided the basis for the performance portfolio submitted to AUQA. The President of the Academic Board had played a significant role in writing the portfolio and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education) had coordinated and collated the supporting documentation.
- AUQA had requested some additional documentation and had supplied a list of questions it wanted addressed and areas in which it wished to conduct interviews. Staff interviewed had been briefed by the University and alerted to the issues that would be raised. It was important that processes and outcomes were linked rather than just a description of processes given.
- Questions asked by AUQA had included: "How do you know?" "How does what you do relate to what you are trying to achieve?" "How do others know about what you are doing?" "How

do you know it works?" "What do you have in place to continuously improve your activities?" "Does the Academic Board work well and how do you know?" "What can you point to that shows that it works well?" "What do you have in place to monitor implementation of policies?"

- The time and effort required for the AUQA audit should not be underestimated.
- UNSW was conducting a shadow audit. Staff who had been interviewed by AUQA were being given a questionnaire to fill out. The shadow audit would provide a critique of the AUQA manual, reflect on the panel visit, provide analysis and comment on the AUQA report, and make specific suggestions for modifications in the interests of Australian universities. AUQA had indicated that it would reflect on and modify the audit process.

7. "UNIVERSITIES IN CRISIS" - REPORT ON HIGHER EDUCATION

The Committee noted that the report could be accessed via the Government website:
http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eet_ctte/public%20uni/report/contents.htm

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no business raised under this item.

9. NEXT MEETING

- *Next Meeting of the NSW/ACT Committee of Chairs* is scheduled for Thursday, 28 March 2002, at the University of Wollongong.
- *The National Committee of Chairs* will meet 8-9 February 2002 at the University of Canberra.

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 1:00 pm.