

ACADEMIC BOARD PHASE THREE REVIEW

REVIEW TEAM REPORT

Faculty of Education and Social Work

2009

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## SECTION I: PREFACE

### (1) Background

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The Academic Board reviews are intended to encourage in faculties an academic culture that values scholarship, free inquiry and intellectual rigour and honesty, supporting, in turn, the development and maintenance of high standards of teaching, scholarship and research.

In 2001, the Academic Board initiated a cycle of collegial reviews of the academic activities within faculties with a view to supporting faculties in developing effective academic quality assurance process. These were followed up in 2003 with a second phase of faculty reviews, which expanded the scope to include all elements within the University Strategic Plan.

The Phase 3 Review is based on the Faculty's Self-Evaluation Report (SER) which provides an overview of the Faculty's assessment of the culture which supports, and the processes that lead to, continuous quality improvement in the Faculty at the time of the Review. To guide the development of the SER, faculties were invited to address criteria adapted from the Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence 2007.

### (2) The Review Process

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The Faculty presented its SER to the Academic Board on 17 March 2009 along with a number of supporting documents and relevant data. The Review Team met on 27 March 2009 to consider these materials.

The review visit took place on 8 April 2009. The key purpose of the visit was to enable the Review Team to assess the robustness and validity of the Faculty's judgements.

#### **Implementation**

Within six weeks of receipt of the Review Report, the Faculty is required to provide the Academic Board with a response to the recommendations contained in the report, indicating how the Faculty will build the recommendations into Faculty planning processes

Twelve months after the date the report was presented to the Academic Board, the Faculty is required to provide the Board with a progress report responding to the recommendations.

### (3) Membership

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#### **3.1 Review Team**

Professor Bruce Sutton, Chair  
Associate Professor Marian Baird, Faculty of Economics and Business  
Associate Professor Elaine Blignaut, Faculty of Dentistry  
Dr Diane Collins, Sydney Conservatorium of Music  
Dr Steve Cumming, Faculty of Health Sciences  
Professor James Martin, Faculty of Arts

#### **3.2 Senior Staff**

Professor Robyn Ewing, Acting Dean  
Dr Ann Armstrong, Director, Division of Professional Learning  
Associate Professor Janette Bobis, Associate Dean (Research)  
Dr Robyn Gibson, Associate Dean (Undergraduate & Preservice Programs)  
Associate Professor Jude, Irwin, Convenor, Social Work & Policy Studies  
Professor Michael, Jacobson, Co-Director, Centre for Research on Computer Supported Learning & Cognition

Dr Lindsey Napier, Pro Dean (Staffing)  
Professor Brian Paltridge, Director of Doctoral Studies  
Professor Peter Reimann, Associate-Dean (Information and Communication Technologies),  
Co-Director, Centre for Research on Computer Supported Learning & Cognition  
Associate Professor Hui-Zhong Shen, Director, China Education Centre  
Ms Shona Smith, Faculty Manager  
Ms Erin Sreejayan, Associate Director, Finance  
Dr Richard Walker, Associate Dean (Postgraduate)  
Dr Fran Waugh, Associate Dean (Learning & Teaching),

### **3.3 Students**

The Review Team met with three groups of students: fourteen undergraduate students; nine postgraduate coursework students and eleven research higher degree students (eight doctoral; three master's).

The Review team also met with other groups of staff, including early career researchers. The Review Team acknowledges the need to be careful about generalising the views of a small group of students to the whole student body.

## SECTION II: OUTCOMES

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. It should be noted that, in addition, other favourable comments and suggestions for improvement are mentioned throughout the text of the Report. The Report draws on the information provided in the Self-Evaluation Report as well as discussion with staff and students. The Review Team acknowledges that the comments of staff and students during the Review visit may not be representative of the entire Faculty but point to issues which the Faculty might wish to explore.

In some places, text from the Self-Evaluation Report has been incorporated directly into the text of this Report.

### (1) Introduction to Findings

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The Faculty of Education and Social Work is structured as an integrated, single school. The Faculty offers a wide range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Education and Social Work, including a graduate entry professional course, the Master of Teaching.

The Review Visit provided evidence of many strengths in teaching and research in the Faculty.

The Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and discussions with staff and students during the Review visit brought out a number of issues which are addressed further within this Report, as follows:

1. Recent changes in Faculty structure and leadership have created a somewhat uncertain environment. The appointment of a new Dean should provide the long-term stability for the Faculty to realise the potential of its new management structure.
2. The Faculty is successfully managing the integration of Education and Social Work to the benefit of both disciplines.
3. Accreditation requirements are central to the development and delivery of teaching in the Faculty. The Faculty has mechanisms in place to ensure that its graduates achieve academic excellence over and above accreditation criteria.
4. Strategies that the Faculty is implementing to improve its research profile and develop a sound research culture are achieving success among both staff and research students.
5. There are some indications of inconsistency in the quality of the student learning experience which require attention by the Faculty.

A summary of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations follows. Note that these are not prioritised by the Review Team. They are listed below in the order in which the relevant issues appear in the SER.

## (2) Commendations

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Areas where the Academic Board commends the practices of the Faculty are as follows:

1. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the strategies it has put in place to ensure that staff have, and feel that they have, a voice and a place in which to express their views. At the same time is important that the Faculty implement mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of these and other communication strategies.
2. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the establishment of an external Advisory Board which will facilitate a broader strategic approach to its relationships with key stakeholders.
3. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the leadership it has shown in debate on the issues surrounding proposals for national teacher accreditation and a national school curriculum.
4. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its engagement with key communities, including mentoring partnerships with schools and its involvement in a wide range of public discourses.
5. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its commitment to support for early career staff.
6. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the operation of a fair and effective workload policy and its commitment to staff mentoring.
7. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the strategies it has in place to develop research in the Faculty, including the establishment of Research Networks, and for the success it has achieved in developing a vibrant research community.
8. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the support it is providing to research students, including the appointment of a Research Student Liaison Officer to provide a wide range of support services to RHD students and the establishment of a Division of Doctoral Studies.

## (3) Affirmations

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Areas where the Academic Board affirms the Faculty's identification of the need for improvements to its practices are as follows:

1. The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's intention to use a professional facilitator in the early stages of the next strategic plan to maximise involvement and engagement by staff.
2. The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's commitment to the development of a Knowledge Management Strategy.

## (4) Recommendations

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Areas where the Academic Board recommends improvements to the practices of the Faculty are as follows:

1. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop qualitative and quantitative benchmarking data against which it can measure the quality of its graduates and validate its claim to be an international centre of excellence in research and scholarship. (See also Recommendation 14).
2. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop clear mechanisms by which it can measure the effectiveness of its leadership structure.
3. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty further improve its communication strategies to ensure these engage with all levels of staff and students.

4. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop a strategic approach to its engagement with policy communities with a view to ensuring that the value to the Faculty as a whole from such engagements is made clear.
5. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it can improve its system of student representation so as to facilitate student involvement in planning and ongoing decision-making within the Faculty.
6. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop mechanisms to integrate planning across the Faculty and ensure consistency in its approach to the development of strategies and evaluation mechanisms designed to achieve key academic objectives and performance projections.
7. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty ensure that mechanisms are in place to facilitate the participation of staff in the both the development and the deployment of strategy, including ensuring that staff are made aware of the implications for their own work of specific strategies.
8. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop clearly articulated mechanisms to assist in the building of relationships with social work students, who report a sense of isolation from the mainstream of the Faculty.
9. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty implement measures to enhance the experiences of postgraduate coursework students, taking into account their particular needs for on-line methods of communication and advance provision of all course materials and assessment requirements.
10. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty
  - (a) develop a clear strategy, working with the ITL, to address the factors impacting on its CEQ and SCEQ scores; and
  - (b) implement processes aimed at improving the consistency of incorporation of feedback from all students on the quality of their learning experience, including the encouragement of informal feedback where possible.
11. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it can facilitate greater levels of input from postgraduate coursework students into program design.
12. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty review the organisation and management of professional placements to ensure clarity and consistency of policy and effective communication with students on all aspects of their placements.
13. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty
  - (a) continue to provide support to staff to develop, as appropriate, skills in the use of e-learning tools;
  - (b) establish goals for the appropriate integration of e-learning into more postgraduate coursework units of study; and
  - (c) articulate these goals to students.
14. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty explore mechanisms for meaningful national and international benchmarking to drive improvements in both teaching and research at a program level.
15. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop a strategic approach to the recruitment of doctoral students with a view to increasing the proportions of younger students.

## SECTION III REPORT

### (1) FACULTY PROFILE

As the only Faculty of Education and Social Work in Australia, the structure of the Faculty enables to work collaboratively across these two important human services' professions and examine the interrelationships between the two.

The SER advises that a key aim of the Faculty is to consolidate its position as an international centre of excellence in research and scholarship in education, social work, policy studies and related disciplines and fields of enquiry.

The Faculty indicated that its graduates are highly sought after, both nationally and internationally, and the Review Team was advised that feedback from stakeholders and employers confirms that University of Sydney Education and Social Work degrees are market leaders.

The Review Team had some concerns that the Faculty did not appear to have substantive evidence against which these claims and its aim to consolidate its position as an international centre of excellence in research and scholarship, might be monitored.

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop strategies that will provide it with objective information against which it can measure the quality of its graduates and validate its claim to be an international centre of excellence in research and scholarship. (See also **Recommendation 14**).

A key focus of the Review Team was an exploration of the efficiency and effectiveness of the current structural model in enabling the Faculty to achieve its strategic goals and ensure sustainability, including the nature of the relationship between Education and Social Work and the benefits accruing from the bringing together of these disciplines within the Faculty.

### **1.1 Faculty Environment**

#### **1.1.1 Faculty Culture**

The SER advises that the Faculty is committed to a strong culture of collegiality with support for staff at all levels and that this has been significantly enhanced by the new management structure introduced in 2005/6. An important feature of the new structure has been the introduction of a single, integrated school.

Key features of the new structure are:

- a senior management team with most appointments made on the basis of expressions of interest; and
- senior academic leadership groups, for programs, divisions and networks. Eight divisions oversee the core enterprises of the Faculty, each under the direction of an Associate Dean or Director:
  - Graduate Studies
  - Doctoral Studies
  - International Relations
  - Professional Learning
  - Research
  - Teaching and Learning
  - Undergraduate Studies
  - Professional Experience

The management team acknowledges that some staff remain unhappy with the removal of the three school structure and recognises the need to ensure that staff are positively engaged within the new structure. The Faculty has adopted a number of strategies, to ensure that staff have, and feel that they have, a voice and a place in which to express their views, including: Standing Committee for Faculty agenda setting which includes three elected staff; annual program of up to four Faculty fora; Faculty Bulletin Board; Keep in Touch morning teas.

While these strategies provide welcome opportunities for staff to engage with the Faculty, it is important that the Faculty implement mechanisms by which it can measure the effectiveness of these and other communication strategies (see **Recommendation 3**).

The Review Team was also concerned that there did not seem to be any emphasis on the importance of students also having a voice within the Faculty structure, although students generally seemed to feel positively about the nature of their interactions with the Faculty.

#### **Commendation 1**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the strategies it has put in place to ensure that staff have, and feel that they have, a voice and a place in which to express their views. At the same time, it is important that the Faculty implement mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of these and other communication strategies.

The Review Team explored the ways in which the dual disciplinary focus of the Faculty works in practice. There is agreement amongst senior staff that authority and responsibility at program and divisional level have been enhanced under the new structure and that the new structure has been successful in promoting cross-disciplinary collaboration. The program orientation of the Faculty has made it easier for staff to cross disciplinary boundaries and work together. The introduction of a program in Early Childhood, a priority for the Federal Government, has enabled the Faculty to build on its unique dual disciplinary focus in education and welfare policy. Links between the two disciplines are also strong in the field of Special Education, in which the Faculty also has links with the Faculty of Health Sciences.

There was no evidence that staff are conscious of a significant divide between Education and Social Work under the new management structure. There is, however, some fragmentation in the overall culture of the Faculty. This impacts on the level of collegiality among staff which needs to be addressed by the Faculty as it moves forward in consolidating the new structure. This fragmentation is also manifested in an apparent disjunction between the new management team and senior researchers which the research networks referred to later in this report have not yet resolved. The Review Team also formed the view that social work undergraduates did not feel a sense of inclusion in the Faculty.

#### **1.1.2 Research**

The Faculty has implemented a range of strategies aimed at improving its research profile, and there is evidence that research productivity has improved in recent years (see Section 7.2 Research). A key purpose of the revised Faculty structure has been to improve collaboration between disciplines. The Review Team noted a number of examples of cross-disciplinary research in human services, such as the Glebe Community Project, which include both Education and Social Work staff.

The Faculty has implemented a range of effective measures to improve the experiences of research students. These are referred to in detail in Section 7.2 Research Training.

#### **1.1.3 Engagement with Stakeholders**

The Dean's Advisory Board was established in 2006 to bring together key national and international figures to provide high level strategic advice to the Dean and senior management. Its members include senior staff from the Smith Family, Barnardo, federal and state education departments, the

New South Wales Institute of Teachers, the Catholic Education Commission and primary and secondary school principals. The Board has raised the Faculty's profile with these bodies.

There are also external advisory boards for the Division of Professional Learning and each undergraduate/pre-service program.

#### **Commendation 2**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the establishment of an external Advisory Board which will facilitate a broader strategic approach to its relationships with key stakeholders.

## **1.2 Challenges and key changes affecting the Faculty's competitive position**

### **1.2.1 Competitive Environment**

The Faculty has been a leader in teacher education, offering the first Master of Teaching degree in Australia. This is a two-year degree, to provide more time for reflections. Some competitors have introduced accredited qualifying graduate entry courses of much shorter duration than the MTeach. The Faculty is currently able to maintain its enrolments by demonstrating to prospective students the value of the University of Sydney qualification.

Undergraduate and postgraduate students confirmed the Faculty's statement that students choose to enrol in their courses based on the brand and reputation of both the University and the Faculty.

It is important that the Faculty develop strategies that will provide it with objective data against which the reputation of its programs and the quality of its graduates can be monitored – see **Recommendation 1**.

At the same time, a major challenge for the education profession is to address the attrition rate for teachers. Current statistics indicate that 30-50% of teachers leave the profession within three years of initial appointment. Attrition rates for social work graduates are not as great but are also significant (see Section 4 Student and Stakeholder Focus).

### **1.2.2 National Teacher Accreditation and National school curriculum**

There are potentially two major changes to the landscape of education professional preparation: national teacher accreditation and a national school curriculum. This will impact on the Faculty particularly in relation to assessment, which will need to align to the national curriculum.

The Faculty has actively engaged in debate on these issues including holding a one-day conference in 2008 attended by a large group of industry professionals, policy makers and academics, including members of the National Curriculum Board and a further symposium proposed for July 2009.

#### **Commendation 3**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the leadership it has shown in debate on the issues surrounding proposals for national teacher accreditation and a national school curriculum.

Issues relating to Accreditation and its impact on the curriculum are addressed in Section 7 Academic Process Management.

### **1.2.3 Maintenance of quality and services**

The Faculty faces specific challenges in ensuring the maintenance and continuous improvement of quality and services. Issues impacting on the Faculty's resources include the demands of the accreditation process, the requirements of University academic policies, such as Students at Risk, and the need to improve infrastructure and support for research students.

The Review Team explored the ways in which the Faculty is managing these challenges and notes that these are issues that the Faculty needs to address through its strategic planning process.

The Review Team notes that research students had no adverse comments to make on the levels of support they received from the Faculty and from the Research Student Liaison Officer, although some research students reported a sense of isolation (see Section 7.2 Research Training).

## (2) LEADERSHIP

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### 2.1 How Senior Leaders Lead

#### 2.1.1 Vision and values

The Management Committee leads the Faculty through ensuring that expectations are clearly set, resources flow to priorities, and achievements and contributions are supported and acknowledged. Membership of the Committee includes all Heads of Divisions, Program Directors and senior general staff.

The secondment of the last three (of four) Deans to central portfolios, has led to the development of some sense of uncertainty in relation to Faculty leadership. The current Acting Dean has, however, provided both the vision and the structures to enable the Faculty to move ahead in achieving its strategic goals.

The Review Team noted that the Faculty policy of calling for expressions of interest from staff when leadership roles, both within the management team and for program directors, become vacant, works well and that this process is open and transparent.

The Review Team explored the extent to which staff and students agree that the Faculty has a clear and shared mission and vision. As the Faculty had noted in the SER, some staff do feel somewhat isolated from the management structure and there is evidence that there are some marginalised groups within the Faculty.

#### **Recommendation 2**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop clear mechanisms by which it can measure the effectiveness of its leadership structure.

#### 2.1.2 Communication and Faculty Performance

Mechanisms for communication include:

- Four annual Faculty fora and regular Learning and Teaching fora
- Faculty and Committee meetings. Meeting reports are made available to staff via the intranet.
- Faculty retreats
- Website/intranet
- Bulletin Board
- Morning teas

The Review Team has commended the Faculty (see Section 1.1.1) for these communication mechanisms. Evidence was provided during the Review Day that early career staff are satisfied that the communication flows in the Faculty work well and they are able to access the information they need. The Management Committee acknowledges, however, that information does not always reach everyone in the Faculty. It was not clear what strategies the Committee has in place to address this.

There was some evidence of difficulties in communication with students, for example in relation to Faculty policy and organisational arrangements for professional placements, as noted in Section 7 Academic Process Management.

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty further improve its communication strategies to ensure these engage with all levels of staff and students

## 2.2 Social responsibilities

### 2.2.1 Ethical Behaviour and Corporate Social Responsibility

The Faculty has a number of systems in place to encourage and ensure ethical behaviour including:

- regular reminders of relevant university policies including codes of conduct, research practice and child protection;
- dissemination of information to students on ethical behaviour including guidelines on plagiarism; and
- induction of students into the ethical codes of practice of their professions.

### 2.2.2 Support of Key Communities

#### Professional Communities

The Faculty has a range of engagements with schools and human service providers providing field education, including mentoring partnerships with those schools that host the greatest number of students.

#### Policy Communities

The Faculty is involved in a wide range of public discourses. As noted earlier in this report, its recent sponsorship of the National Curriculum Symposium has reinforced the Faculty's influential position on curriculum and policy. The SER indicates that flow-ons to the Faculty for its engagement with public policy include the potential for R&D collaborative activities. It was not clear, however, how the value to the Faculty as a whole of its engagement in public discourses was evaluated. The Review Team formed the view that the Faculty would benefit from a more strategic approach.

#### Community Groups

The Glebe Community Housing Project, which includes participation by both students and staff, is a key form of community engagement by the Faculty. This project brings together common interests in social and public policy and education. It is looking at both social and educational needs in Glebe and is an intensive bringing together of Education and Social Work.

#### International Communities of Scholars

This issue is also addressed in Section 7.1 Research. While there is evidence that the Faculty has international links with research-intensive universities, the Review Team was not informed of the strategic goals that underpin these engagements.

#### Commendation 4

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its engagement with key communities, including mentoring partnerships with schools and its involvement in a wide range of public discourses.

#### Recommendation 4

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop a strategic approach to its engagement with policy communities with a view to ensuring that the value to the Faculty as a whole from such engagements is made clear.

### (3) STRATEGIC PLANNING

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#### 3.1 Strategy Development

##### 3.1.1 Strategy Development Process

The Faculty has a five-year strategic plan covering the period 2005-2009. Strategic planning in the Faculty is strongly informed by accreditation requirements and potential changes to government policy. A key focus of strategic planning is on long-term Faculty sustainability.

The SER advises that the development of the plan involved broad Faculty-wide consultation and all staff were invited to participate. At the same time, the SER indicates that some staff believe that the centralised structure of the Faculty means that most of the work is done by the Management Committee. The Review Team was pleased to note that the Faculty is intending to use a professional facilitator in the preparatory stages of the next plan to maximise involvement and engagement by the staff in the process.

##### **Affirmation 1**

The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's intention to use a professional facilitator in the early stages of the next strategic plan to maximise involvement and engagement by staff.

It was not clear, however, that students had been or were to be given an opportunity to participate in the process and the Review Team formed the view that the Faculty should find a mechanism to provide them with a greater sense of involvement.

##### **Recommendation 5**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it can improve its system of student representation so as to facilitate student involvement in planning and ongoing decision-making within the Faculty.

One of the initiatives of the Faculty restructure was the creation of the position of Associate Dean for Academic Programs. This portfolio has the brief of setting strategies for academic programs and has a key responsibility in facilitating strategic future thinking and planning.

##### 3.1.2 Strategic Academic Objectives

The Faculty's strategic academic objectives and related support strategies for Research and for Learning and Teaching were noted. No priorities were attributed to these objectives, and it was difficult for the Review Team to obtain an understanding of how the outcomes of support strategies were being evaluated. There did not appear to be a direct relationship between the strategic academic objectives for learning and teaching as listed in the SER and the Faculty's Learning and Teaching Strategic Plan.

The Faculty has placed particular emphasis on the development of support strategies for research, and, as noted elsewhere in this report, there is evidence that these strategies are working well. The Review Team explored the operation of the Faculty's allocation of workload points for research, based on the submission of individual research plans. It was advised that this process was fair and equitable and that confirmation of workload points was tied to successful outcomes from research plans. (See also Section 6.1.2 (b) Workforce Planning).

### **Performance Projections**

The SER also indicates the areas targeted for development in order to ensure a more secure financial base for the Faculty, some of which were reflected in the Strategic Academic Objectives. It is important for the Faculty to ensure that clear strategies and evaluation mechanisms are developed to accompany these projections. The Review Team had some concerns that problems were identified, such as the lengthy approval process for international partnerships with no indication of how the Faculty is managing these. In other instances, there are very broad projections, with no specific targets or strategies, for example, the need to embed the strategic plan in agendas and debates in the Faculty.

#### **Recommendation 6**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop mechanisms to integrate planning across the Faculty and ensure consistency in its approach to the development of strategies and evaluation mechanisms designed to achieve key academic objectives and performance projections.

### **3.2.1 Strategy Deployment**

The SER indicates that for those not immediately involved in a management role, the plan exists in the background and is perhaps insufficiently visible. Some staff refer to it only a needs basis such as when completing TIES or other grant applications which require reference to material in the plan. It was not clear how the Faculty intended to more fully engage staff in the deployment of strategy and ensure that they are aware of the implications for their own work of specific Faculty objectives.

#### **Recommendation 7**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty ensure that mechanisms are in place to facilitate the participation of staff in the both the development and the deployment of strategy, including ensuring that staff are made aware of the implications for their own work of specific strategies.

## (4) STUDENT AND STAKEHOLDER FOCUS

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### 4.1 Student, Stakeholder and Market Knowledge

The Faculty's obtains information on the needs, expectations and preferences of its students through a range of mechanisms including

- market research; and
- consideration of issues affecting the marketplace such as economic drivers and media reports on the professions.

Awareness of issues affecting the market place has led to the development of new programs such as a graduate entry qualifying degree in Social Work.

The career expectations of graduates is an important issue informing the Faculty's targeting of its student market. At the same time, a major challenge for the education profession is to address the attrition rate for teachers. The Faculty is aware that current statistics indicate that 30-50% of teachers leave the profession within three years of initial appointment. Attrition rates for social work graduates are not as great but are still significant. Students interviewed indicated that they were aware of this attrition rate and acknowledged that their specific professional qualifications might be used as an entry points for other careers.

All students had chosen to study in this Faculty based on the high reputation both of the University and the Faculty.

### 4.2. Student and Stakeholder Relationships and Satisfaction

#### 4.2.1 Building relationships with Students

The Faculty has indicated that the greatest challenges to building relationships with students are

- building relationships with social work undergraduates in the early years of the degree when they spend little time in the Faculty; and
- more effectively engaging postgraduate coursework students, particularly part-time students, in the life of the Faculty.

#### **Undergraduate/graduate entry students**

The Faculty has a wide range of strategies to enable it to build relationships with students. These include

- Committee membership by students
- EDSOC activities
- Drop-in clinic in the Division of Learning and Teaching.

There were some indications that social work students did not feel included in the life of the Faculty in their first few years. This was also reflected in comments made about the role of social work representatives on the undergraduate committee. (It is noted, however, that in year 1 social work students do not undertake study in the Faculty).

#### **Recommendation 8**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop clearly articulated mechanisms to assist in the building of relationships with social work students.

Both education and social work students feel well supported within the Faculty, although there are concerns regarding the support for professional placements for education students, which are referred to in Section 7 Academic Process Management.

Relationships with most staff appear to be excellent, with students commenting favourably on the willingness of staff to provide time and support, and the flexible nature of arrangements for accessing staff.

While the Faculty has effective mechanisms in place to communicate with students on matters affecting their individual programs, they may not always feel that their voice is heard on broader issues. The Review Team has noted, for example, that the Faculty does not indicate that there is opportunity for student input to program reviews. The Review Team suggests that students could be better informed on and encouraged to participate in such reviews and other planning activities. No specific recommendation is made regarding this issue, as this relates to issues of communication with students, which are addressed elsewhere in this Report.

### **Postgraduate Coursework students**

As indicated above, the Faculty is aware of the need to engage postgraduate coursework students more effectively in the Faculty. The experiences of postgraduate coursework students are variable, with some courses providing higher levels of support than others, although generally the students interviewed felt comfortable with their access to information and advice.

Concerns were expressed, however, that the Faculty does not have appropriate systems in place to ensure that postgraduate coursework students can access course materials at a time and place that suits them. This is also addressed in Section 7 Academic Process Management. More on-line communication, including use of on-line discussion forums and WebCT, as well as advance provision of all course materials and assessment requirements, could enhance the experiences of postgraduate coursework students.

International students have specific needs which it is not clear are being effectively addressed by the Faculty. It is noted that an academic staff member has been appointed to take responsibility for the pastoral care of international students. The terms of this appointment might be extended to include relevant academic advice. International students in particular found some difficulties with terminology, particularly early in their courses.

### **Recommendation 9**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty implement measures to enhance the experiences of postgraduate coursework students, taking into account their particular needs for on-line methods of communication and advance provision of all course materials and assessment requirements.

### **Research Students**

The Faculty has a range of effective mechanisms to build relationships with postgraduate research students. These are referred to in Section 7.2.2 Research Training.

## 4.2.2 Determining student and stakeholder satisfaction

### Feedback

Student satisfaction is measured through the formal evaluation mechanisms of USE, CEQ and SCEQ, annual progress report interviews with doctoral candidates, the Students at Risk policy, feedback at Learning and Teaching focus groups and course reviews.

The Faculty acknowledges that student satisfaction with generic skills, as measured through both CEQ and SCEQ need to be improved. It is taking steps to improve the numbers of students completing the surveys in order to obtain a wider cross-section of responses.

There was some inconsistency in the extent to which students feel their feedback is acted upon. The view was expressed that the extent to which feedback was acted upon depended on individual course coordinators, some of whom were more receptive to feedback than others. MTeach students, however, were provided with information on changes made in the light of student feedback.

### **Recommendation 10**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty

- (a) develop a clear strategy, working with the ITL, to address the factors impacting on its CEQ and SCEQ scores; and
- (b) implement processes aimed at improving the consistency of incorporation of feedback from all students on the quality of their learning experience, including the encouragement of informal feedback where possible.

## (5) MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

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### 5.1 Selection and use of information and data

The Review Team noted the Faculty's summary of the data used to measure performance and support Faculty decision making.

### 5.2 Management of information and knowledge

#### **Faculty Knowledge Management (KM) Strategy**

The Faculty's KM strategy is driven by the Faculty's ICT Team under the direction of the Associate Dean ICT and the leader of the ICT team. The Faculty's strategy is to develop a basic infrastructure for knowledge processing in the Faculty over the next five years and to engage in a number of knowledge management and change projects. Projects to date include SUMO, the online course description system and the Faculty Bulletin, which is now maintained as a blog. Other activities include integration of management data and EVA, a video annotation tool that can be used for knowledge creation in an organisational context.

The Review Team explored the extent to which the Faculty is committed to the development of a Knowledge Management culture. The drivers of the strategy were seen as being the need for the Faculty to develop solutions to the management of complex knowledge and information and provide a guide to best practice. The Faculty would benefit from having information on decision-making processes and be in a better position to learn from both successes and failures with respect to innovation projects.

#### **Affirmation 2**

The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's commitment to the development of a Knowledge Management Strategy.

## (6) WORKFORCE FOCUS

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### 6.1 Workforce Engagement

#### 6.1.1 Workforce enrichment

A key focus of the Faculty's workforce enrichment strategy is the induction and support of new staff, including mentoring and support for the development of their research profiles. The Faculty has created the role of Pro-Dean (Staffing) to provide the leadership and framework for this to operate effectively.

Early career staff indicated that the support mechanisms in the Faculty generally worked very well, with the provision of mentoring, availability of start-up funds and appropriate management of workloads. They feel the Faculty has been proactive in ensuring that they receive adequate levels of support for research through the Research Network and encouragement to work in small teams.

#### **Commendation 5**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its commitment to support for early career staff.

#### 6.1.2 Workforce and leader development

##### (a) Performance Management and Development PM&D

The PM&D program is utilised for research planning and setting individual performance goals. There are, however, inconsistencies in how this program is managed across the Faculty and is not always positively received. The Faculty would like to see greater articulation between the PM&D process and promotion.

##### **Staff Development**

Mechanisms to support staff development include:

- The Pro-Dean (Staffing) has worked with Faculty middle management staff to develop confidence and competence in their leadership responsibilities.
- Shadowing of Associate Deans and Program Directors facilitates succession planning.
- The Faculty has effective processes in place to consider applications for SSP.
- The Faculty has commenced regular fora to debate the concept of the good teacher.

##### (b) Workforce Planning

The Faculty is conscious of the need to develop a workforce that can respond to future requirements. Key strategies include workload policy and support for early career staff.

The Faculty has a well-developed workload policy and there is evidence that this operates fairly and effectively. The workload policy also takes particular account of the specific needs of early career staff, who have a reduced teaching load in their first year.

The policy specifies 40% of time for research. As an incentive to support research the Faculty allocates workload points for research based on the submission of research plans. Research plans are reviewed in the PM&D process and feed into workload planning for the following year. It is important that the Faculty ensure that workload plans translate to research achievement in order to ensure that this process works fairly for all staff and achieves the desired outcomes in respect of research productivity.

A mentoring system to support early career staff in their applications for external research funding has been developed. The Research Incentives Scheme provides rewards for Level D and E staff who include more junior staff on research grant applications. Mentoring for teaching

operates at a more informal level but there is every indication that early career staff are well guided by more senior staff.

**Commendation 6**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the operation of a fair and effective workload policy and its commitment to staff mentoring.

**(c) Recognising and rewarding staff**

The Faculty has a range of strategies to recognise staff achievements, including annual teaching excellence awards

**6.2 Workforce Environment**

The Review Team noted the Faculty's concerns that University requirements for the implementation of specific policies, such as the Students at Risk Policy and the lead time necessary for the introduction of new programs, may strain the Faculty's resources and create stressors for staff. It is important that the Faculty acknowledge the requirements of effective participation in the wider University community and work to develop solutions to the issues identified, in consultation with University management.

## (7) ACADEMIC PROCESS MANAGEMENT

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### 7.1.1 Core competencies

#### Accreditation

The Review Team explored the impact and potential constraints of accreditation on curricula in Education and Social Work.

Core curricula in the Faculty must satisfy the accreditation requirements of the New South Wales Institute of Teachers (Education courses) and the Australian Association of Social Work (Social Work courses). Accreditation requirements specify both the generic skills required of graduates and the core competencies required in the relevant professional areas.

The accreditation process for Social Work was described as a more collegial and collaborative process than that for teacher education, with both presenting a very heavy workload for the Faculty.

While the accreditation process for both disciplines is prescriptive, the Faculty indicated that there is sufficient flexibility in how the requirements are addressed for both disciplines for students to demonstrate their superiority in relation to courses offered elsewhere. There are opportunities for creativity in both assessment and delivery and students are able to demonstrate that they have not only met, but have exceeded competency levels.

### 7.1.2 Coursework design

Advisory committees for undergraduate degrees include external stakeholders and staff from other faculties are involved in program reviews. The Faculty has also recently established advisory panels for reviews.

Undergraduate and MTeach students were generally very satisfied with the design and content of their courses. There were indications, however, of some dissatisfaction from postgraduate coursework students with the design and content of their courses. Concerns included lack of flexibility of choice in units of study and the relative proportions of vocational and theoretical content.

It was not clear how great student involvement has been in program reviews. The Faculty may wish to consider how student feedback could be more effectively integrated into program design.

#### **Recommendation 11**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it can facilitate greater levels of input from postgraduate coursework students into program design. (See also related **Recommendation 10**).

### 7.1.3 Coursework Delivery

#### (a) Program quality/student satisfaction

The Faculty has a range of mechanisms in place to ensure the quality of its programs. Student satisfaction is measured through the formal evaluation mechanisms of USE, CEQ and SCEQ. This is addressed in Section 4 Student and Stakeholder Focus.

There was some evidence of some inconsistency in the quality of student learning experiences, including lack of integration of subject matter across units of study. Also of concern to students was a perception of inconsistency between their experiences of the delivery of teaching in the Faculty and the theories of good teaching as contained within their programs. Those comments may be reflected in the Faculty's CEQ and SCEQ scores. As noted in Recommendation 10, the Academic Board recommends that the Faculty work with ITL to address these issues.

The Faculty has drawn attention to a decline of interest in teaching and the steps it is taking to address this, such as regular fora to debate the concept of the good teacher. The Review Team reinforces the importance of this debate and the importance of ensuring the consistency of the student experience in good teaching.

### **Professional Placements**

The organisation and management of professional placements was raised with the Review Team as a key concern for education undergraduate and MTeach students. Professional placements are a significant aspect of the Faculty's teaching effort, particularly in Education which has over 2700 placements per year. Concerns centred on the need for clarity on policy, equal treatment of all students seeking placements, and communication with the Professional Experience Office. Students indicated that there is a perception that some students receive more favourable treatment than others in the management of their placements and that there is inconsistency of advice from different staff members, particularly in relation to policy on whether students can find their own placements. Timetabling is also a concern, with some placements taking place at the same time as exams, and students do not feel supported in managing this. Social work students indicated that they did not have the same difficulty with professional placements.

#### **Recommendation 12**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty review the organisation and management of professional placements to ensure clarity and consistency of policy and effective communication with students on all aspects of their placements.

A separate but related issue is the difficulty experienced by MTeach students in completing their nine-week internship in the final semester of their program. The financial burden placed by this requirement has led to a number of students electing to graduate with the Bachelor of Teaching after three semesters, rather than completing the MTeach. The MTeach students interviewed, however, confirmed that the internship was a valuable component of their training and would be an important factor in how they adjusted to full-time careers as teachers. To address some of their concerns, the Faculty was endeavouring to include more professional preparation in the Bachelor of Teaching.

#### **(b) Technology and e-learning**

The SER indicates that the Faculty places considerable emphasis on technology and e-learning. The Review Team formed the view, however, that there is more that the Faculty could do to embed technology and e-learning more within all courses, particularly postgraduate coursework. There appears to be inconsistent use of Web-CT, which students expect to be able to use on a day-to-day basis.

The Review Team notes that the Faculty has developed Moodle, a general teaching tool, as an alternative to Web-CT and that feedback has indicated that this has been a successful method in communicating and understanding student needs. The Review Team suggests that Faculty should investigate more closely the use of e-learning tools across all courses as there appears to be some evidence that the Faculty's views on their effective use is not reflected in student comments.

#### **Recommendation 13**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty; and

- (a) continue to provide support to staff to develop skills in the use of e-learning tools;
- (b) establish goals for the integration of e-learning into more postgraduate coursework units of study; and
- (c) articulate these goals to students.

(c) **Research-led teaching**

While students are aware that high profile researchers did not always teach, they were given evidence of research in progress and were aware of the research culture in the Faculty. Students value the linking of theory and practice through a research base. It was noted, however, that there are some tensions: many students are seeking a professional qualification and do not always see the relevance of research, nor do they wish to undertake any research.

At the same time, there are some indications that the Faculty's research capabilities and efforts are not being translated into teaching as effectively as they might be. The Review Team noted that the Faculty has some concerns that senior staff do not always wish to engage in teaching and that Leadership in Teaching is an agenda item for the Faculty.

(d) **Benchmarking**

The Faculty has indicated that there has been some benchmarking of teacher education courses, though none of social work courses. The SER indicates that one of the difficulties for the Faculty in undertaking benchmarking is the fact that there are very few faculties of Education and Social Work. This may mean benchmarking specific programs within other appropriate faculties.

While acknowledging the complex nature of benchmarking, the Review Team formed the view that the Faculty could make better use of national and international benchmarking data to drive improvements in both teaching and research at a program level.

**Recommendation 14**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty explore mechanisms for meaningful national and international benchmarking to drive improvements in both teaching and research at a program level.

## 7.2 **Research and research training**

### 7.2.1 **Research**

The Faculty has implemented a range of strategies aimed at improving its research profile, and there is evidence that research productivity has improved in recent years

(a) **Research networks**

A research network structure was developed in 2006 and there are currently eight networks: Social Policy; TESOL; Policy and Professional Practice; Arts English and Literacy Education; Development and Learning in Children and Youth; Childhood and Youth; Youth, Sport and Health; Centre for Computer Supported Learning and Cognition (COCO).

A review has been undertaken to evaluate the efficacy of the structure and network goals. The Review Team has noted that the Research Networks have been effective in fostering cross-disciplinary research and have also been beneficial to the development of research activity for early career staff.

(b) **Excellence in research/internationalisation and collaboration**

The Faculty has strategies in place to encourage excellence in research at an international level including symposia to which international colleagues are invited and providing funding for overseas conference attendance through the research networks.

The Review Team explored the extent to which the Faculty was engaged in both local and international collaboration in research. It was noted that a challenge for the Faculty in respect of publication in international journals was its professional practice orientation. The attention

of the Review Team was, however, drawn to the extent to which the Faculty was contributing to international theory in education and social policy.

The amalgamation of Social Work into the Faculty has fostered interdisciplinary research. This is also referred to above under the Glebe Community Development Research Project. (Section 2.2.2 Support of Key Communities). There are international dimensions to this locally-based project, with a number of other countries using the same theoretical framework of social inclusion in their own communities. The Social Policy Network was particularly useful in bringing together the various areas of the Faculty, and this was mirrored in other networks.

The attention of the Review Team was also drawn to other areas of research in which the Faculty was engaged in international collaborations, which had not been identified within the SER. COCO was very well known internationally, as were other areas of the Faculty. There was international collaboration in successful ARC grants, staff had received international awards and were on international boards and editorial panels.

**(c) Assisting staff to achieve their research potential**

Staff are assisted to achieve their research potential through the mechanisms noted above under Workforce Focus, and through the activities of the Research Division. The appointment of a Research Manager has also greatly assisted staff in developing research profiles, providing assistance to staff in accessing support from various funding schemes as well as support in the writing of applications.

**Commendation 7**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the strategies it has in place to develop research in the Faculty, including the establishment of Research Networks, and for the success it has achieved in developing a vibrant research community.

**7.2.2 Research Training**

There has been a marked increase in research higher degree enrolments in the past five years, with 223 doctoral students enrolled in 2008 (increase from 175 in 2004).

The Review Team noted that the average age of doctoral students in the Faculty is 53. There are a number of reasons for this, including that graduates are keen to move into the classroom or profession on graduating and there is no immediate reward for research qualifications within the teaching profession in Australia. The Review Team noted that, of students interviewed, only a small minority were undertaking research degrees with a view to moving into an academic position.

The number of very late career research students has implications for not only for completion rates but also for workforce planning for recruitment of future academic staff. The Review Team agreed that the Faculty should adopt a more proactive approach to the recruitment of a younger cohort of doctoral students, including from the enhancement of its undergraduate honours programs, provision of a clearer research path from Master's coursework degrees, and implementation of strategies to recruit teachers and social workers back from the class-room and profession at an earlier age.

**Recommendation 15**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop a strategic approach to the recruitment of doctoral students with a view to increasing the proportions of younger students.

The Faculty has initiated a range of mechanisms aimed at improving the experiences of research students. These include:

- induction program for all RHS students;
- appointment of a Research Student Liaison Officer;
- development of completion guidelines;
- Research Student Forum;

- establishment of Division of Doctoral Studies.

There is evidence that these mechanisms are working well, although it is not clear what stage the establishment of the Division of Doctoral Studies has reached.

#### **Commendation 8**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the support it is providing to research students, including the appointment of a Research Student Liaison Officer to provide a wide range of support services to RHD students and the establishment of a Division of Doctoral Studies.

The research students interviewed confirmed that they were attracted to the Faculty because of its international reputation. They felt that the Faculty had been very supportive and provided an appropriate induction program. They were particularly complimentary of the support and information provided by the Research Student Liaison Officer.

Key issues for research students centred on

- the need for more integration across the Faculty – they did not feel part of a research student culture. The Review Team anticipates that this will be addressed once the Division of Doctoral Studies is operational;
- lack of opportunity to gain lecturing skills.

Staff indicated their concerns with insufficient space for PhD students, largely emanating from poor building design, although this was not raised as a concern by any of the students interviewed.

### **7.2.3 Research Supervision**

Students are generally satisfied with the quality of their research supervision.