

# Response to the Review of the Academic Board and the Academic Forum

Prepared by the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Academic Board

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## Introduction

This response has been prepared by the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Academic Board following consultation and discussions regarding the report of the Review of the Academic Board and the Academic Forum. It attempts to include suggestions and comments received through written submissions.

It was felt that the report of the Review should be seen as a positive document, identifying areas for consideration. There were a number of points on which most of the submissions were in agreement, including:

- that the Academic Board should be the principal academic authority in the University was supported;
- the proposed membership of the Academic Board as expressed was not supported;
- the disestablishment of the Academic Forum was supported;
- the Vice-Chancellor should be the senior academic of the University;
- the model of succession proposed for the Chair and Deputy Chairs was not supported;
- the establishment of a Quality Assurance Committee was not supported;
- the establishment of an Admission Committee as a Standing Committee was not supported; and
- the existing committee structure was broadly supported.

The submissions also expressed a keenness to explore new processes for communication and interaction with the academic community and for active involvement in Academic Board activities.

The Deputy Chairs and Chair discussed the type of Board that would be appropriate for this institution in relation to principles, structure and roles and responsibilities.

The following principles were considered by the Deputy Chairs as important in informing the work of the Board. These principles should cross academic decision-making process and should underpin the work of the Board:

The University's Academic Board should:

- be the principal academic authority within the University of Sydney;
- be an independent body that represents various elected and appointed constituencies of the University;
- be concerned with the academic integrity of the University and be responsible for maintaining the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research;
- be an inclusive collegial entity with processes that encourage participation; and
- operate with transparent processes and outcomes.

These principles should inform the structure and processes of the Board to ensure that the work of the Board and its various Committees and working parties work efficiently and effectively.

It was felt that the Board's structure should be a model of distributive participation. This means there is a need to distinguish the Board as an entity (eg. its meeting requirements) from the work of the Board. The work should be carried out on three levels – by the Board itself, by Committees of the Board, and by working parties.

In terms of roles and responsibilities it was felt there should be an elected Chair of the Board, the Chairs of Committee should be elected by and from the Board and the Deputy Chair of the Board should be appointed by the Board from amongst the Chairs of Committees on the nomination of the Chair of the Board.

# 1. Role and Functions of the Academic Board

In the main there was a great deal of consistency in the recommendations in the Report of the Review and the responses received, however, areas of difference included:

- how the Board would participate in quality assurance matters;
- whether the Board should be the final point of appeal on academic matters; and
- how matters of strategic importance would be included in the operations of the Board.

The Review of the Academic Board and the Academic Forum recommended:

- R1.1 The Academic Board should be the principal academic authority within the University of Sydney with responsibility for maintaining the highest standards in teaching and research and for safeguarding academic freedom.

The University of Sydney By-laws currently establish the Board as the University's "primary academic advisory body".

The submissions received have strongly supported the recommendation which will enable the Board to take decisions, particularly in relation to approval of new and amended courses. This recommendation complements the Resolutions adopted by the Senate in relation to its governance processes.

To establish the Board as the principal academic authority, the University By-laws would need to be amended, along with other relevant legislation.

One submission considered whether the Board should be the "...principal **elected** academic authority..." to emphasise the nature of its membership.

One submission suggested that this strengthening of the Board's function should include the "designation of the Academic Board as the final point of appeal on academic matters, noting that such arrangements would streamline the decision-making of the University". Others noted that the Board should recommend that Senate adopt the above recommendation in principle and consider specific delegation of functions as part of the implementation process.

However there was concern expressed that the maintenance of standards implied administration along with decision-making, with the view that the Board should not be "actively involved in implementing policy...[as this]...should be the province of the University administration" and that this was ultimately the responsibility of the Vice-Chancellor who should be answerable to the Board for any failure to implement the Board's policy on standards, quality and other matters. This submission also expressed concern regarding appropriate allocation of resources to ensure this function was fulfilled.

Submissions by current Standing Committees of the Board supported the recommendation of the Board as the University's prime academic decision-making body, noting that changes in the operations of Senate could adversely impact on the academic operations of the University.

It was also noted from the submissions that the general recommendations "...will play a vital role in convincing both the membership and the University community that...the Board will...have sufficient authority and power to debate certain matters". It is possible to envisage that this " will play a significant role in encouraging attendance and contribution [to the University's academic decision-making process].

It is therefore **recommended**:

*AB1.1 That the Academic Board recommend that Senate adopt the following principle:*

*"The Academic Board is the principal academic decision-making body within the University of Sydney, with responsibility for maintaining the highest standards in teaching, scholarship and research and for safeguarding the academic freedom of the University."*

It is further **recommended**:

*AB1.2 That the Chair and Deputy Chairs, on behalf of the Academic Board consider the role and function of the Academic Board as the principal academic decision-making body and propose revised terms of reference for consideration at the Februarys meeting of Senate and the Academic Board.*

The Review of the Academic Board and the Academic Forum recommended:

R1.2 The Academic Board should play an active role in quality assurance of teaching and research (see Recommendation R4.1).

This recommendation was supported, however the related recommendation regarding the establishment of a Quality Assurance Committee was not.

The general consensus was that quality assurance should inform all aspects of University policies and practice and as such should be integrated into the terms of reference of all committees.

It is therefore **recommended**:

*AB1.3 That the terms of reference of the revised Academic Board provide for the Academic Board to play an active role in quality assurance of teaching, scholarship and research.*

Most submissions did not support the recommendation that:

R1.3 The Academic Board should be the final point of appeal on academic matters affecting students.

It was suggested that the Senate should retain this responsibility and Senate has recently established a Committee to consider appeals against decisions of the Student Proctorial Board. The current process for appeals against an academic decision is through the Chair of the Board, who determines whether an appeal is referred to Senate, based on procedural matters. This will be considered further when the full role and functions of the Board is proposed.

Only one submission opposed the following recommendation and favoured retaining the Academic Forum.

R1.4 Given the role and functions of an enlarged Academic Board (see Recommendation R2.1) the Academic Forum should be disestablished.

Other submissions considered a revised Board structure would encompass existing aspects of the Academic Forum and revised membership of the Board could make the existence of the Forum redundant.

It is **recommended**:

*AB1.4 That Senate disestablish the Academic Forum.*

It was felt that a forum for wide ranging discussion on issues should be encouraged and therefore it is also **recommended**:

*AB1.5 That, if the Academic Forum is disestablished, the Academic Board conduct one Academic Board Forum each semester, to which all members of the University community are invited to consider and discuss matters of academic and strategic interest.*

The following recommendation was also contained in the report of the Review:

R1.5 Matters of strategic importance including planning and resourcing should be included within the agenda of the Academic Board as advice to the Vice-Chancellor.

The nature of the academic environment at this institution means the discussion of resourcing matters is inappropriate, therefore the following is **recommended**:

*AB1.6 That the Academic Board provide advice to the Vice-Chancellor on academic matters which it considers to be of strategic importance.*

The following recommendations regarding the structure of the agenda were also supported:

R1.6 The agenda of the Academic Board should always contain at least one matter of strategic importance and should allow for questions to the Vice-Chancellor with and without notice.

R1.7 The Chair of the Academic Board should report on decisions and discussions of Senate at each meeting of the Academic Board.

It is therefore **recommended**:

*AB1.7 That each agenda of the Academic Board normally include:*

- (1) at least one matter of strategic importance,*
- (2) a report from the Chair of the Board on decisions and discussions of Senate; and*
- (3) time for questions to the Vice-Chancellor and/or the Chair of the Academic Board with and without notice.*

## 2. Membership of the Academic Board

The membership proposed in the Review of the Academic Board and the Academic Board was not supported. The original recommendation was

- R2.1 The membership of the Academic Board should be:
- (a) the Chair (being a Professor elected, for a term of two years, by the members of Academic Board and all other Professors who are not currently members of Academic Board);
  - (b) a Deputy Chair (being a Professor elected, for a term of two years, by members of the Academic Board and all other Professors who are currently members of the Academic Board);
  - (c) a Deputy Vice-Chair (being a Professor elected, for a term of two years, by members of the Academic Board and all other Professors who are not currently members of the Academic Board);
  - (d) the Deans;
  - (e) one-third of all professors (to be elected by all professors within each College from the professors within that College);
  - (f) the Heads of Departments, Units and Schools;
  - (g) fifteen persons who are non-professorial members of the academic staff of each College (5 from each College);
  - (h) the President of the Sydney University Postgraduate Representatives Association;
  - (i) the President of the Students' Representative Council;
  - (j) one person elected by and from those persons already elected to hold office as postgraduate student members of Faculties from 1 January in the year following election to the relevant Faculty;
  - (k) one person elected by and from those persons already elected to hold office as undergraduate student members of Faculties from 1 January in the year following election to the relevant Faculty;
  - (l) five general staff members elected by the general staff;
  - (m) the Vice-Chancellor;
  - (n) the Deputy Vice-Chancellors;
  - (o) the Pro Vice-Chancellors (both Colleges and Corporate), and
  - (p) such other members as co-opted by the Academic Board such as University Librarian, Assistant Pro Vice-Chancellors.

Many submissions noted that there were inequities in the proposed constitution between various constituencies. The Deputy Chairs and the Chair of the Board considered this issue, and using the model of distributed participation propose membership as set out below.

It was felt that election of members on a faculty basis provided increased representation and encouraged reporting back by members to faculties. It was considered that membership of the Board by the professoriate should be encouraged, but on a faculty basis so as not to disadvantage particular faculties.

It is proposed to increase student membership on a College basis and dependent on the nature of the study being undertaken.

The proposal to include general staff as members of the Board was discussed at length. It was considered that it was best to draw expertise from all sectors within the University through the Committee and working party processes and that this would include general staff, particularly in the areas of student administration and from areas where policies and procedures are implemented.

AB2.1 *The membership of the Academic Board shall be:*

***Ex Officio Members***

1. *The Chair of the Academic Board*
2. *The Vice-Chancellor*
3. *The Deputy Vice-Chancellors*
4. *The Pro Vice-Chancellors and Assistant Pro Vice-Chancellors*
5. *The Deans of the faculties and colleges*
6. *The University Librarian*
7. *The Director of the Koori Centre*
8. *The Director of the Institute for Teaching and Learning*
9. *The President of the Students Representative Council (SRC)*
10. *The President of the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA)*

***Elected Members***

11. *Three academic staff members, at least one of whom where possible must be a professor, elected by from the Dean's advisory committee, or equivalent body, of each of the following faculties and colleges:*
  - *Agriculture*
  - *Architecture*
  - *Dentistry*
  - *Education*
  - *Engineering*
  - *Law*
  - *Nursing*
  - *Pharmacy*
  - *Rural Management*
  - *Veterinary Science*
  - *Sydney College of the Arts*
  - *Sydney Conservatorium of Music**for terms of two years from 1 January*
12. *Five academic staff members, at least one of whom where possible must be a professor, elected by from the Dean's advisory committee, or equivalent body, of each of the following faculties and colleges:*
  - *Arts*
  - *Economics and Business*
  - *Health Sciences*
  - *Medicine*
  - *Science**for terms of two years from 1 January*
13. *Three non-professorial members of academic staff elected by and from the non-professorial members of academic staff of each of the Colleges of Health Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences and Sciences and Technology*
14. *Two undergraduate student, not being a member of the academic staff, elected by and from the undergraduate student members of the faculties, colleges and boards of studies of each of the:*
  - *College of Health Sciences;*
  - *College of Humanities and Social Sciences; and*
  - *College of Sciences and Technology**for a term of one year from 1 January*

15. *One postgraduate coursework student, not being a member of the academic staff, elected by and from the postgraduate coursework student members of the faculties, colleges and boards of studies of each of the:*
  - *College of Health Sciences;*
  - *College of Humanities and Social Sciences; and*
  - *College of Sciences and Technology**for a term of one year from 1 January*
  
16. *One postgraduate research student, not being a member of the academic staff, elected by and from the postgraduate research student members of the faculties, colleges and boards of studies of each of the:*
  - *College of Health Sciences;*
  - *College of Humanities and Social Sciences; and*
  - *College of Sciences and Technology**for a term of one year from 1 January*

***Co-opted Members***

17. *Up to four members may be co-opted by the Academic Board on the advice of the Chair of the Academic Board for a term specified at the time of co-option*

Having considered the comments included in the written submissions, on balance the recommendation to rescind the Rule relating to the gender composition was supported.

- R2.2 The rule relating to gender composition of elected Officers (Deputy Chairs) or elected members of the Academic Board (Rules relating to Academic Board 1996, Rule 5(2)) should be rescinded. Care should be taken to ensure appropriate representation relating to gender, discipline and expertise.

The proposed membership of the Board (recommendation AB2.1) could make the existing Rule difficult to enact and faculties should consider appropriate representation relating to gender, discipline and expertise during elections.

It is therefore **recommended**:

*AB2.2 That the Rule relating to gender composition of elected Officers (Deputy Chairs) or elected members of the Academic Board (Academic Governance Rules relating to the Academic Board, Rule 5(2) be rescinded.*

The recommendation relating to appointment or promotion to professor

- R2.3 Criteria for appointment or promotion to professor must include a willingness to participate fully in the activities of the Academic Board.
- may have been appropriate when it was proposed that a third of the Board membership comprise members of the professoriate. The principle of the recommendation is however supported.

It is therefore **recommended**:

*AB2.3 That the Academic Board request the Academic Staffing Committee to consider the Criteria for appointment or promotion to professor, with a view to clarification or inclusion of the criteria to include a willingness to participate fully in the academic decision-making activities of the University.*

### 3. Role of the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Academic Board

The proposed role of the Chair and Deputy Chairs of the Academic Board generated many submissions. Particular comments received related to the model of succession and the role of the Chair of the Board in relation to the Vice-Chancellor.

The following recommendation was not supported as it was felt that the Vice-Chancellor should be the most senior academic at the University. It was also considered that it is the responsibility of the Board and a whole, not an individual to safeguard the academic integrity of the University:

- R3.1 The person who holds the position of Chair of the Academic Board should be recognised as the most senior academic at the University of Sydney while he or she holds this position; he or she should be seen to be responsible for maintaining the academic integrity of the University as well as being the point of contact between the academic community and Senate and between the academic community and the Senior Executive Group.

It is therefore **recommended**:

*AB3.1 That the Vice-Chancellor be recognised as the most senior academic at the University of Sydney.*

*AB3.2 That the person who holds the office of Chair of the Academic Board be recognised as the most senior **elected** academic at the University of Sydney while in office.*

*AB3.3 That the Chair of the Academic Board be a professor, elected by all members of the Academic Board for a term of office of two years.*

*AB3.4 That the Chair of the Academic Board be a full-time position.*

*AB3.5 That the Chair of the Academic Board be expected to retain some academic involvement with faculties, including the supervision of postgraduate research candidates.*

*AB3.6 That the Chair of the Academic Board be responsible for overseeing the work of the Academic Board in all its aspects.*

*AB3.7 That the Chair of the Academic Board be the point of contact between the academic community and Senate and between the academic community and the Senior Executive Group.*

In considering the following three recommendations, it was felt that an alternative model for Chairs of Committees and a Deputy Chair be considered:

- R3.2 There should be two Deputy Chairs (one a Deputy Chair and the other a Deputy Vice-Chair) of the Academic Board and the Deputy Chairs should support the Chair across the entire portfolio of academic responsibilities. It would be an expectation that each of the Deputy Chairs would eventually become Chair of the Board.

R3.3 The Chair and Deputy Chairs should not be full-time officers of the Board but should retain some academic responsibilities.

R3.4 The Deputy Chairs would not necessarily chair the committees of the Academic Board.

Therefore it is proposed that the Chair of the Academic Board chair one of the Standing Committees of the Board and that the remaining Chairs be elected by and from the members of the Academic Board. The Chairs of the Committees and the Chair of the Board then form an "executive" for the Academic Board.

A single Deputy Chair from this group should then be appointed by the Board on the nomination of the Chair. It is anticipated that this model provides a mechanism for the election of skilled members of the Board to Chair Committees appropriate to their area of expertise and to provide a model of succession to the Chair of the Board.

It is **recommended**:

*AB3.8 That the Chairs of the Standing Committees of the Academic Board be elected by and from the members of the Academic Board for terms of office of two years.*

*AB3.9 That the Deputy Chair of the Academic Board be appointed by the Academic Board from the Chairs of the Standing Committees of the Academic Board, on the nomination of the Chair of the Academic Board.*

*AB3.10 That the Chairs of the Standing Committees of the Academic Board be not full-time officers of the Academic Board.*

The Deputy Chairs considered this recommendation and comments submitted by members of staff in relation to this and the recommendation was not supported:

R3.5 The Chair of the Academic Board should attend but not be a member of the Senior Executive Group. In the absence of the Chair the most senior Deputy Chair should attend the meetings of the Executive.

It was felt that a broad link with the Senior Executive Group should be encouraged (recommendation AB3.7 refers) but that such a link should be broad and appropriate to issues being considered.

It is **recommended**:

*AB3.11 That the Chair of the Academic Board should be invited to attend meetings of the Senior Executive Group, where appropriate.*

The following recommendations were felt to be too prescriptive and intrusive on the day to day workings of the Board and were not supported:

R3.6 The Chair of the Academic Board should meet with the Deputy Chairs at least weekly.

R3.7 The Chair and Deputy Chairs should meet with Chairs of Standing Committees at least fortnightly to co-ordinate the activities of the Committees and the Board.

While regular meetings should be encouraged, the leadership style of the Chair of the Board should not be legislated and other mechanisms for consultation may be more appropriate from time to time.

## 4. Committees of the Academic Board

There has been much discussion about the Committees of the Board. The report of the Review notes that the existing Committee structure works well, but recommends the following:

- R4.1 The Standing Committees of the Board should be:
- (a) Teaching and Learning Committee, with responsibilities for undergraduate and post-graduate coursework programs and the enhancement of teaching and learning. The committee would probably need three sub-committees.
  - (b) Research and Research Training Committee, responsible for research and postgraduate research degrees. Again, this committee would probably need two sub-committees.
  - (c) Quality Assurance Committee, responsible for policies for ensuring quality assurance in academic matters.
  - (d) Admissions Committee, responsible for policies relating to the admission, selection and progression of students.
- R4.2 The Academic Staffing Committee should cease as an Academic Board committee, but if considered desirable by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Employee Relations), it should continue as an advisory committee to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Employee Relations).
- R4.3 The Library Committee should cease as an Academic Board committee, but if considered desirable by the University Librarian, it should continue as an advisory committee to the University Librarian.

Many submissions contained detailed submissions regarding the Committee structure and the recommendations are not supported.

Having considered the submissions and the operations of the Committees, the Deputy Chairs and Chair of the Board **recommend**:

*AB4.1 That the Standing Committees of the Board shall be:*

- (1) Teaching and Learning Committee*
- (2) Research Committee*
- (3) Undergraduate Studies Committee*
- (4) Graduate Studies Committee*
- (5) Academic Staffing Committee*

*AB4.2 That the Library Committee shall be a sub-committee of the Teaching and Learning Committee.*

*AB4.3 That the Admissions Committee shall be a sub-committee of the Undergraduate Studies Committee.*

*AB4.4 That quality assurance matters shall be embedded in the terms of all the Committees.*

The review suggested membership of the standing committees as follows:

- R4.4 The membership of the Standing Committees should be:
- (a) a Chair appointed annually by the Academic Board on the recommendation of the Chair of the Board but with the expectation of continuity for at least two to three years;
  - (b) appropriate members of the executive and professional staff.
  - (c) appropriate student representation;
  - (d) a majority of members elected by the Academic Board from the Academic Board;
  - (e) members co-opted on the advice of the Chair of the committee in association with the Chair of the Board, to take account of gender, discipline and expertise.

The constitution of the Committees has generated considerable discussion, particularly in regard to where membership of the Committees is derived. The Deputy Chairs and Chair of the Board felt that this issues, along with the terms of reference of the Committees should be considered further as an aspect of the implementation of the review.

It is therefore **recommended**:

*AB4.5 That the Chair and Deputy Chairs, on behalf of the Academic Board, consider the constitution and terms of reference of the Standing Committees of the Board and proposed revised terms of reference for consideration at the February meeting of the Board.*

## **5. Communication within the University**

The report of the Review of the Board noted work being undertaken in relation to communication from the Board in the following recommendation:

- R5.1 The proposal of the Chair of the Academic Board to establish a working party to examine ways in which the activities of the Board can be actively and widely disseminated is strongly endorsed.

The Deputy Chairs and Chair noted that the working party had been established and would continue its work, particularly in light of outcomes of the review of the Board and that the establishment of the working party had been endorsed by the Board

It was considered that the following recommendation:

- R5.2 The agenda and minutes of the Academic Board should be available electronically to all staff and should be distributed electronically to all professors of the University.

related to implementation of the revised Board and should be considered at that time, therefore is not currently being recommended to the Board.

Communication from the Board needs to link with the structure of the Board, particularly the model of distributive participation. This model draws upon interest and expertise of academic staff at various levels within faculties and schools.

The broadest level of representation is at the Academic Board through an election process. Committees are constituted on a representational basis and working parties are formed and reformed as the need arises. People can self-elect or be selected on the basis of interest and expertise.

Other issues to consider for implementation include the timing of Board and Committee meetings to ensure that there is timely consideration of issues while allowing enough time for work to be undertaken.