

AGENDA ITEM 12

Report of the Research Committee

12.2 Report of the University Research Committee meeting held on March 22 2006

The committee met on 22 March 2006 when there were present: The Acting Chair (Associate Professor T Masters) presiding, Professors M Behnia, M Crossley, M Harris, P Jones, P McCallum, D Nutbeam, C Pollock and S Simpson, Ms' M Robb and J Leong, Mr W Dawson and Dr A Black.

12.2.1 Receipt of Report

The Committee recommends that the Academic Board receive and note the following report of the meeting held on 22 March 2006.

12.2.2 Proceedings of the Committee

(1) Faculty of Architecture, Report of the Associate Dean for Research – Professor John Gero

Professor Gero reported that the discipline of Architecture began at the University in 1919 and now exists as a no department, no school Faculty, delineated internally according to disciplines. These are:

- Architecture and Allied Arts;
- Architecture and Design Science;
- Design Computing and Cognition;
- Environmental-Behavioural Studies; and
- Urban Planning and Policy.

The Faculty hosts five research Centres:

- Planning Research Centre;
- Ian Buchan Fell Housing Research Centre;
- Key Centre of Design Computing and Cognition;
- AHURI Sydney Housing and Urban Research Centre node; and
- CRC for Construction Innovation (research partner).

Research performance – load, completions, publications and income – is variable across the faculty. Roughly 60% of all staff (about 30) are research active. There are approximately 70 research students.

Some of the key issues for the Faculty are:

- A lack of applications for grants and an uneven distribution of grant applications;
- The high number of professional staff who typically do not hold PhDs;
- Extremely high teaching workloads, with studios for example taking considerable time;
- Uneven distribution of research in general;
- Uneven research culture across the faculty, though this is changing;
- Higher degree research completion times; and
- Attracting the best PhD students, Australians in particular.

One of the underlying problems is the existence of two cultures. One that is professional and tied to industry, and the other, slightly younger generation who have received research training and are therefore more focused on research.

The Faculty has several strategies in play for Improving Performance of the staff:

- Appointing new staff with research track records. In the last 8 years the Faculty has only appointed new active research staff that have PhDs. All staff appointed have applied for grant funding.
- Mentoring of new and existing staff.
- Improved record keeping of research output.
- A reduction of teaching workloads.
- Strategic research support.
- Consideration of hiring one or two research-only Professors
- Focus on applying for external grants - applications for ARC DPs this year were the highest ever and there is a strong focus on the ARC Linkage Projects program.

With regard to recruiting more and better students, the Faculty has introduced the following initiatives:

- Top-ups for APA and EIPRS scholarships;
- Faculty research scholarships;
- Assistance with external research scholarships;
- Supplemental funding for the PRSS to allow more students to present at conferences;
- Improved resource support for research students; and
- Improved monitoring of progression.

In the discussion that followed there was acknowledgement of both the problems facing Architecture and the success they have had. It is clear there is significant research being carried out and the unevenness is mostly cultural. Whether or not external research funding increases significantly soon, it is expected that publications will. The Faculty is engaged in some outstanding and high impact research. It may even be that some work currently thought of as consulting is in fact research.

There was consensus that it is important that practitioners (who are not research active) are still involved in teaching and training; this situation is common to many Faculties. Perhaps it is simply a matter of classifying people differently rather than feeling bound by standard definitions. In Architecture 20% of the Faculty budget is spent on part-time teaching.

(2) Faculty of Health Sciences, Report of the Director, Research and Innovation – Professor Shane Thomas

Professor Thomas focused on two main points, establishing accurate and useful data collection and an action plan for coming activity in the Faculty. In general the external grant performance of the Faculty is increasing, yet publications are declining (though 2005 was a better year). Against this backdrop the Faculty has ambitious goals for future research performance, and in order to meet those goals has established the following key initiatives:

- A grant writing support scheme of \$5000 per application. This incentive has already led to an increase in NHMRC Project applications.
- Targeted support for those looking for international funding such as the NIH.
- The establishment of four research groupings, each with research administrative support and a level E convener. Resources will be allocated to each grouping and all staff encouraged to join one.
- Substantial investment in Professorial appointments and linkages with associated agencies. Placing staff in practice (only) positions.
- Considering upgrading the internal definition of research active based on realistic criteria for research active staff that reflect past and current

performance. There would be increased requirements for research only staff as well as higher level staff.

- Staff reporting on past and present activity (pubs, grants etc), primarily as a diagnostic measure.
- A thematic analysis of publications in order to understand linkages and groupings.
- A substantial push for ARC Linkage, in Round 2 especially. They are perfect for FHS and could lead to stronger engagement with the hospitals, such as Royal North Shore.
- Investment in infrastructure to support research.

The Faculty is considering teaching only categories for clinical staff and other practitioners. There would be a separate core of teaching professionals, not expected to do research. It was acknowledged, however, that “research informed teaching” is still vital and that there were enough common points between these two groupings to allow mutual professional development of all teaching staff together. Reclassifying the staff in this way is beneficial for the University and appears to be good for the staff. A related issue is how research and teaching cross-subsidise each other. While it would be ideal to separate these two and cost them separately, the deconvolution is virtually impossible.

(3) Report from Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation)

Professor Nutbeam reported that with regard to the RQF, the final advice from the Expert Advisory Group has been given to the Minister. She has appointed new panels for the next phase. There is still much uncertainty about all aspects of the RQF. How, when, if, and the relationship to funding. Professor Nutbeam restated the previous message that although there was no need for action amongst academics, there was an opportunity and need to strengthen the administrative support capability of the University. It was noted that the Productivity Commission will conduct a review of publicly funded research, and that the University of Sydney should seek to play an active role and contribute to this review.

Professor Nutbeam spoke about the current CRC round. USyd would continue a very cautious approach as it was becoming less clear that there are real benefits for University partners in CRCs. USyd will submit 6 EoIs, though all of these are for ongoing CRCs where the University already has an existing relationship; there is no interest in new CRCs.

One of the key research implications of the internal change will be with respect to the Business Liaison Office (BLO). The BLO will move to be aligned with the Office of the General Counsel (reporting to the Chief Financial Officer) in effect separating the production and management of IP from the activity of doing research – the DVC Research and Innovation portfolio will now focus purely on Research. Along with this philosophical move there will be a physical move in to the new IT building concurrent with the arrival of the new Director on 1 June. Clearly the role of the BLO and its exact relationship to the University would continue to evolve and grow.

The Chair congratulated Prof Nutbeam on his new post as Provost, and thanked him for his guidance and wisdom as Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

(4) Report from Professor Masud Behnia, Dean of Graduate Studies

Professor Behnia spoke briefly on the following matters:

- The Commercialisation Training Scheme – in particular how it might work. The Go8 DOGS are making a submission to DEST.
- The University will award 15 extra international student scholarships for new students – the pool for awards would contain both the reserve IPRS list and new candidates. Applications close Monday 27th March.
- Post graduate induction day.
- The Vice-Chancellors awards for research supervision are open.
- The results of the survey of research student satisfaction were now available for analysis. The trends are positive – there is high satisfaction of research students, completions are improving, as is load. One caveat, however, is that there is a significant difference in satisfaction between local and international students. The overseas students tend to feel neglected and isolated. This situation needs to be improved as soon as possible for growth to be able to occur.

(5) Report from Mr Warwick Dawson, Director, Research Office

The Chair proposed a vote of thanks to the Research Office and its' Director in particular, along with the Director of Research Development for their outstanding efforts during the ARC Discovery round.

Mr Dawson began with the comment that part of the information the RO was trying to collect in a survey following the Discovery round was on peoples perceptions and experiences with the new structure in the RO. Some statistics from the round were that USyd had a 10% increase in applications matching a similar increase across the board. Aside from Melbourne, who had a big push this year after last years weak performance, applications from the Go8 Universities fell. Sydneys increase came from higher fellowship numbers and increases in the number of applications from Science and Medicine.

For the first stage of the NHMRC process, 422 Notifications of Intent were received, 70 more than Melbourne. The University was also buoyed by the news of the award of 3 out of 4 NHMRC Health Service Grants totaling roughly 9 million.

Mr Dawson spoke briefly about the pending ARC audit. In preparation there will be an internal audit team checking some systemic issues along with a random sample of current grants under administration.

Other items noted were:

- The next round of Short Term Visiting Fellowships had been advertised and would close in May – the process for that would be refined and communicated shortly;
- ARC LIEF and the University Major Equipment Scheme were now open for Eols;
- The Professorial and Senior Fellowships were being finalized and negotiated; and
- This years DEST publications collection was underway, with hope for a further increase.

(6) Report from Ms Merrilee Robb, Director of Research Development

Ms Robb proposed the delivery of more targeted training for staff with regard to the preparation of grant applications, ARC in particular, but potentially NHMRC too. Specific groups could be along discipline lines or other groupings such as women or early career researchers. In addition to the obvious goal of increased grant success the motivation would be to increase

expertise and awareness in the process and to get researchers more focused further out from deadlines. Feedback from the committee was requested.