

# ACADEMIC BOARD PHASE THREE REVIEW

## REVIEW TEAM REPORT

Sydney College of the Arts

2008

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

### **SECTION I: PREFACE**

1. Background
2. The Review Process
3. Membership
  - 3.1 Review Team
  - 3.2 Senior Faculty Representatives
  - 3.3 Students

### **SECTION II: OUTCOMES**

1. Introduction to Findings
2. Commendations
3. Affirmations
4. Recommendations

### **SECTION III: REPORT**

1. Introduction and Faculty Profile
2. Leadership
3. Strategic Planning
4. Student and Stakeholder Focus
5. Measurement, Analysis and Knowledge Management
6. Workforce Focus
7. Academic Process Management

## 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 2 October 2008 along with a number of supporting documents and relevant data. The Review Team met on 14 October 2008 to consider these materials.

The review visit took place on 21 October 2008. 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 Rick Benitez, School of Philosophical and Historical Inquiry, Faculty of Arts

Associate Professor Michael Halliwell, Sydney Conservatorium of Music

Dr John Hughes, Faculty of Education and Social Work

Associate Professor Peter McCallum, Office of the Provost and Deputy Vice-Chancellor

Professor Penny Gay, Department of English, Faculty of Arts, was a member of the Review Team and participated in the preliminary review of the Faculty's SER but was unable to attend on the Review Day and was replaced by Associate Professor Michael Halliwell.

### **3.2 Senior Faculty Representatives**

Professor Colin Rhodes, Dean

Mr Phil Alterator, Finance Manager

Associate Professor Brad Buckley, Director, Graduate School

Dr Debra Dawes, Director, BVA

Dr Ann Elias, Director, Theoretical Enquiry

Associate Professor Marilyn Fairskye, Associate Dean, Research

Ms Jane Gavan, Associate Dean, Teaching and Learning

Ms Isobel Horton, Acting Faculty Manager

### **3.3 Students**

The Review Team met with three groups of students: five undergraduate students; six postgraduate coursework students and five research higher degree students.

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. 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 Sydney College of the Arts operates as a single entity without schools or departments. It focuses in the discipline areas of Fine Arts, Media Arts and Object Art and Design. It offers the following degrees:

- Bachelor of Visual Arts (Fine Arts) (Media Arts) (Object Art and Design)
- Postgraduate Coursework degrees:
  - Master of Documentary Photography
  - Master of Film and Digital Image
  - Master of Interactive and Digital Media
  - Master of Studio Art
- Research degrees:
  - Doctor of Philosophy
  - Master of Visual Arts

The Review visit reinforced evidence presented in the Self-Evaluation Report of a Faculty engaged in the implementation of a range of initiatives designed to ensure that it achieves its aspiration to retain its position as the premier provider of contemporary art learning and research nationally and in the region and an acknowledged world leader.

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. The Faculty is taking steps to improve engagement with both artistic and local communities. The establishment of an Advisory Board is a positive step in ensuring the engagement of the College with the wider community.
2. There is evidence that the strategies that the Faculty is implementing to improve its research profile and develop a research culture are achieving success. Key issues for the Faculty relate to the definition of research within a creative arts environment, the manner in which creative work is recognised by the University and outside organisations, and the opportunities for the Faculty to achieve research funding from sources such as the Australian Research Council.
3. There are infrastructure and resourcing issues across the Faculty which impact on both staff and students.
4. The Faculty has undertaken significant internal reviews: the Review of the Bachelor of Visual Arts and the Review of the PhD. It is important to ensure that the outcomes of these reviews feed back into faculty processes.

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 its initiative in establishing a Graduate School.
2. In respect of engagement with stakeholders, partners and collaborators, the Academic Board commends the Faculty for
  - (a) its active exchange programs with leading international art schools; and
  - (b) its initiative in employing a Public Relations and Marketing Manger to facilitate its engagement with stakeholders and the public.
3. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for conducting a campaign into schools to bring students into the College to learn about ceramics and glass disciplines.
4. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for implementing the following communication mechanisms:
  - (a) Dean's weekly newsletter
  - (b) Dean's monthly meeting with the SCA Student Society.
5. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for employing a Gallery Director who will work on increasing the profile of the SCA Gallery.
6. 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 communities.
7. The Academic Board commends the Faculty's initiative in working with the Alumni Office to foster relationships with alumni.
8. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its initiative in commencing an image digitisation project.
9. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its policy of maintaining corporate knowledge through the use of honorary appointments following retirement.
10. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for undertaking a Review of the Bachelor of Visual Arts.
11. The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the appointment of a professor with a track record in obtaining ARC grants which will allow the Faculty to commence building research teams and to be in a better position to access ARC funding.

## (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 Review Team affirms the Faculty's recognition of the need to re-establish a relationship with the Koori Community and its organisation of an exhibition with the Koori Centre to commence this reconnection.
2. The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's intention to develop a guide to career prospects for graduates. It is important that this guide address career prospects for graduates of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

#### (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 consider how the staff forum can be more effectively utilised to promote discussion of key issues by all staff.
2. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop more effective mechanisms to ensure that its communication processes work well at all levels of staff and students.
3. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty endeavour to improve its links with the Koori community, through the appropriate use of the Sesqui lectureship it has designated for this purpose.
4. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty continue to improve processes that
  - (a) facilitate the participation of staff in the development and deployment of strategy, including ensuring that staff are made aware of the implications for their own work of specific strategies; and
  - (b) help to ensure that its system of student representation facilitates student involvement in the strategic planning process.
5. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty provide information to students on the outcomes of student feedback through staff/student liaison committees, unit of study outlines and other appropriate mechanisms.
6. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty continue to examine the way workload models are used in other faculties to ensure that staff work is balanced so as to appropriately align with the Faculty's goals in teaching and research and is equitably distributed throughout the Faculty.
7. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it might provide a more formal system of staff mentoring, particularly for early career staff.
8. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop a clear statement of the roles of technical staff in relation to teaching support and monitor compliance with this across all disciplines.
9. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it can ensure greater industry input into its postgraduate coursework courses to meet student needs for industry relevance and knowledge of the most recent advances.
10. The Academic Board recommends the Faculty continue to focus on developing the academic effectiveness of Theories of Art Practice units of study within the Bachelor of Visual Arts.
11. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty investigate how it can improve the experiences of undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students with respect to the provision of materials and up-to-date technologies.
12. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty explore mechanisms for meaningful national and international benchmarking to drive improvements in both teaching and research.
13. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty focus on building its research profile through strategies involving staff support and development and mentoring to achieve optimal publication and grant success from appropriate funding bodies.
14. The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty ensure that a key focus of the Graduate School is on communication across all postgraduate students.

## SECTION III REPORT

### (1) INTRODUCTION AND FACULTY PROFILE

The Faculty has advised that it aspires to achieve its vision through

- attracting and retaining the highest quality students and staff;
- delivering innovative and current learning and teaching in contemporary art, particularly at postgraduate levels;
- producing international quality research;
- engaging with professional and local communities at all levels; and
- attracting external funding for projects in all areas of its activities.

The focus of the Academic Board Review was the Faculty's strategies and mechanisms to achieve these goals, the extent to which those goals currently are being achieved and the views of staff and students on the effectiveness of the strategies and mechanisms the Faculty has in place. The Review Team was also particularly interested in exploring issues relating to the Faculty's culture as an art school and the impact this might have on the achievement of academic and artistic goals.

#### 1.1 Faculty Environment

##### 1.1.1 Faculty Culture

The SER advises that the Sydney College of the Arts has an art school culture, with a heavy emphasis for both students and staff on self-identification as a visual artist. The challenge is to bring the Faculty together as a group in a university setting.

The Review Team explored possible tensions between the individual and group culture in the Faculty and the benefits of coming together as a group. This involved consideration of the definition of an academic culture in the context of an art school, the values staff and research students see in being an academic as well as an artist, and the extent to which there is congruence between academic standards and artistic standards. The Faculty has acknowledged that some tensions remain (see Section 2.2.1).

The Review Team was advised that the Faculty is moving to more reflective practice in engaging in academic discourse such as speaking at conferences and formalisation of discourse through writing. The view was expressed that the Faculty is embracing a change of culture and generating different discussions. The issue of culture also relates to the Faculty's relationship to the University, of which it has been a part since 1990. The Faculty has encouraged staff and students to involve themselves in University issues and there is evidence that this is succeeding in breaking down barriers though the opportunities thereby opened up remain only partially exploited. The Dean advised that he has encouraged a review of creative and performing arts across the institution, not with the aim of bringing about structural change, but in order to exchange knowledge. The Review Team noted that PhD students in the Faculty were comfortable in regarding themselves as both artists and academics, an indicator of the success being achieved in the melding of artistic and academic environments in the Faculty.

##### 1.1.2 Research

The Faculty has stated that it aims to achieve greater coherence and structure of research culture.

The Review Team explored the extent to which this new research culture was being achieved. This generated discussion on the definition of research in a creative arts environment. It was pointed out to the Review Team that the research components of creative work are not always obvious. Research activity in the Faculty, for example, may not be presented in the form of journal articles, but was demonstrated in other fora, such as conferences and in the artworks themselves. There was a view that all creative work had reflective and public outcomes.

The Faculty continues to lobby to have creative work recognised by the University, the research community and government as equal to all forms of pure and applied research, as measured by research quality frameworks. Evidence was presented by the Faculty in Section 8 Results, that this lobbying had been successful within the University and partly successful beyond. From 2006, funds that were allocated to individuals such as those from the Australia Council and Screen Australia, which were not previously counted as research income, were incorporated into University statistics, provided that a substantial proportion of research benefits went to the University. This also had a significant impact on weighted research publications counted in the Faculty which increased from 2.00 in 2005 to 267.67 in 2006.

The Faculty also intends to target external research income, including from the ARC. One of the key strategies to achieve this has been the appointment of a professor with an ARC track record (see Section 7.2 Research). A range of factors impacts on the ability of staff to achieve success in ARC funding. While nearly all staff are research active, they largely work independently, but to achieve ARC funding, the Faculty needs to be able to consolidate its research strengths. It was noted that ARC funding was not always appropriate as the ARC does not fund research where the sole or main outcome is creative work. It was noted that Linkage grants may provide a fruitful way of funding projects that are relevant to the Faculty's research efforts and increasing the Faculty's ARC grant income.

The Faculty advised that it is looking at funding appropriate for both individual researchers and their disciplines and feels confident that it is maximising its opportunities.

The Faculty has advised that the SCA Graduate School will expand over the next five years to provide high quality studios, a range of graduate-level seminars and a visiting artists and scholars program specific to the research student cohort. With the recent significant increases in research student enrolments in the Faculty, a Graduate School provides a model in which one staff member can have designated responsibility for an overview of the management of research candidatures. It appears, however, that, at this stage, research students were not well-informed about the Graduate School, and the Review Team formed the view that more attention might be given to communication with research students about its structure and aims (see Section 7.2).

**Commendation 1**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its initiative in establishing a Graduate School.

**1.1.3 Engagement with Stakeholders, Partners and Collaborators**

The Review Team explored with the Faculty the mechanisms it has in place to judge the value of its external relationships. This included the extent to which exchange programs are used and their impact on students and staff, the nature of their relationships with the various galleries and the nature of their relationships with other external stakeholders.

The Review Team was advised that the Faculty's many exchange programs with top-ranking international art schools are all active and well-utilised, mostly for the purpose of undergraduate exchange. The Review Team heard from undergraduate students who had successfully participated in exchange schemes. Research students indicated, however, that there was some uncertainty about how to access exchange schemes. The Review Team was not clear that the Faculty has in place mechanisms to evaluate the experiences of international students on exchange at SCA.

The Review Team noted that the Faculty had recently employed a Public Relations and Marketing Manager who would map the various activities in which the Faculty was involved and give all stakeholders an overview of those activities.

The issue of the Faculty's engagement with key communities is also discussed in Section 2.2.2 Support of Key Communities.

**Commendation 2**

In respect of engagement with stakeholders, partners and collaborators, the Academic Board commends the Faculty for

- (a) its active exchange programs with leading international art schools; and
- (b) its initiative in employing a Public Relations and Marketing Manger to facilitate its engagement with stakeholders.

**1.2 Challenges**

**1.2.1 Competitive Environment**

The Faculty's primary local competitor is COFA at the University of New South Wales, which has a broader range of subjects and a much larger postgraduate school than SCA. The Faculty indicated, nevertheless, that there is net drain out of COFA to SCA of postgraduate students and that the excellent quality of postgraduate education at SCA is recognised by students. It was also noted that COFA trains high school art teachers and the Faculty indicated that it felt there was little likelihood of the Department of Education accrediting the University of Sydney to offer teacher training in this discipline at present. It was felt appropriate that it would be strategically advisable for the Faculty to be clear on this point.

At the undergraduate level, ceramics and glass disciplines have difficulties in attracting students as these courses are not offered as part of the HSC curriculum. The Faculty is conducting a campaign into schools to bring students into SCA to learn about these media.

**Commendation 3**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for conducting a campaign into schools to bring students into the College to learn about ceramics and glass disciplines.

**1.2.2 Resources and Infrastructure**

The Faculty has identified resources and infrastructure as key strategic challenges. Infrastructure problems have the capacity to severely diminish the Faculty's reputation.

While the heritage listing of SCA buildings ensures a level of ongoing maintenance, the Faculty faces real problems in respect of funding for maintenance and refurbishment of internal spaces.

The Faculty already has some difficulty in adequately housing research students, and this is likely to be exacerbated as research student numbers continue to grow. Research students indicated some dissatisfaction with the size and quality of space available to them (see Section 7.2 Research Training). There was also evidence of concern amongst many students at a perceived lack of material resources.

## (2) LEADERSHIP

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### 2.1 How Senior Leaders Lead

#### (a) Vision and Values

Senior leaders help to promote the Faculty's vision and values through the governance structure. The formal governance structure is through the Faculty Board to the Research and Learning and Teaching committees. There are also undergraduate and postgraduate student/staff liaison committees. The Dean meets regularly with senior leaders.

A staff forum has also been established to provide opportunities for all staff to discuss key issues, with a less formal agenda than the Faculty Board. The Review Team found that there were mixed views on the effectiveness of the staff forum in encouraging participation from all staff. It was also noted that discussion on the BVA recommendations had been conducted through smaller focus groups and this had achieved positive outcomes.

#### **Recommendation 1**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how the staff forum can be more effectively utilised to promote discussion of key issues by all staff.

The SER noted a range of ways in which senior staff demonstrate leadership at an informal level. While the Review Team did not investigate during the Review visit how senior leaders assess their own effectiveness, the Dean has subsequently advised the Chair that the assessment and improvement of leadership has been a key issue within the senior team within the last year or so, with formal mechanisms in place to monitor and strategise.

#### (b) Communication and Faculty performance

The Faculty has a range of communication mechanisms, including:

- Weekly Dean's newsletter
- Dean's monthly meeting with the SCA Student Society and with senior faculty administrators.

The Faculty indicated that that it was also considering a general Faculty newsletter to convey important information to staff and students. This would replace individual emails to staff and students. Other forms of communication included: meetings of chairs of studio; committee structures; staff/student meetings; weekly management meetings from which discussion is fed back to studios. A majority of staff is actively engaged in activities at Faculty or University level and information is transmitted by these staff to committees, studios and individuals.

There was some evidence that students are not broadly enmeshed with communication strategies across the Faculty, which seem to be less effective than indicated in the SER.

#### **Commendation 4**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for implementing the following communication mechanisms:

- (a) Dean's weekly newsletter
- (b) Dean's monthly meeting with the SCA Student Society.

#### **Recommendation 2**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop more effective mechanisms to ensure that its communication processes work well at all levels of staff and students.

## 2.2 Social responsibilities

### 2.2.1 Ethical Behaviour and Corporate Social Responsibility

The Faculty had acknowledged in the SER the constant tension between boundaries as defined in the art world and the boundaries of a university environment. This tension has the potential to raise a range of issues regarding ethical behaviour.

The Faculty has a range of mechanisms to address ethical issues, including seeking approval from the Human Ethics Committee, workshops from the Anti-Discrimination Commission and use of the Charter of Academic Freedom. There would always be some tension between academic and artistic freedom, the expectations of ethics committees, and common social mores. This tension is best broached through the encouragement of open dialogue on ethical, artistic and social issues between staff and students.

### 2.2.2 Support of key communities

The Faculty supports key communities in a range of ways, including individual staff positions on boards and arts communities and exhibitions at the SCA Gallery. The Faculty recognised the need to increase audiences at the SCA Gallery and will be employing a Gallery Director who will work towards achieving this goal.

#### **Commendation 5**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for employing a Gallery Director who will work on increasing the profile of the SCA Gallery.

The Faculty has a range of engagements with the community including relationships with local primary schools and Trinity Grammar. The SCA Board also has external members to advise on curriculum issues. There was acknowledgement, however, that both students and staff could benefit from more widespread and active forms of engagement.

SCA staff are very much engaged in the commercial art world, largely on an informal basis, although concerns were expressed that galleries and museums and the commercial art world did not fully appreciate the role of the SCA as an academic and artistic institution. There are current plans to establish a formal relationship with an art gallery which could incorporate a research fellowship and opportunities for students to exhibit. The Faculty was also building a relationship with the MCA Education Officer.

The Review Team noted that the Dean is developing an external Advisory Board which would assist the Faculty in making connections, developing projects and obtaining sponsorships. The Review Team also noted that alliances with external galleries could be of assistance in enabling students to access relevant new technology, this having been raised as a problem by both undergraduate and postgraduate students.

#### **Commendation 6**

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 communities

The Faculty has a Sesqui lectureship designed to develop links with the Koori community but has indicated that the potential of this new lectureship had not yet been fully explored.

#### **Recommendation 3**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty endeavour to improve its links with the Koori community, through the appropriate use of the Sesqui lectureship it has designated for this purpose.

### (3) STRATEGIC PLANNING

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#### 3.1 Faculty level strategic planning process

The development of the Faculty's Strategic Plan took place over a period of approximately eight months. The consultation process included an away day where strategic issues were discussed by all staff; feedback from Faculty committees and emails from staff. Data from the CEQ, SCEQ, USE etc. were used to inform the Plan in relation to student feedback. The Strategic Plan was formally approved by the Faculty Board. The SER indicated, however, that the Faculty was aware that some staff were not completely satisfied with the development of the Plan. Concerns related to insufficient consultation and a lack of external artists who might have contributed to its development. The Faculty hopes to resolve these issues prior to the next review of the Plan.

The Review Team found the strategic academic directives of the Faculty based on the current Strategic Plan somewhat unfocussed. The Review Team has noted that it is important that the Faculty have processes in place to prioritise and implement these directives, and align them with the Faculty's Learning and Teaching Plan. Pressure of time on the Review Day meant that there was no opportunity to raise these issues with the Faculty.

The Review Team explored with staff and student groups the effectiveness of Faculty mechanisms to obtain involvement in and understanding of the Faculty's strategic priorities, their development and deployment. Student groups indicated that they had little knowledge of the Faculty's Strategic Plan, although they did acknowledge the members of relevant student representative groups would probably be aware of this.

#### 3.2 Action plan development and deployment

Senior staff take responsibility for achieving specified goals and actions. To ensure deployment and integration throughout the Faculty these are developed and implemented through the various representative bodies.

Tracking, measurement of outcomes and performance planning is achieved through mechanisms such as KPIs and the budget process.

#### **Recommendation 4**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty continue to improve processes that

- (a) facilitate the participation of staff in the development and deployment of strategy, including ensuring that staff are made aware of the implications for their own work of specific strategies; and
- (b) help to ensure that its system of student representation facilitates student involvement in the strategic planning process.

#### (4) STUDENT AND STAKEHOLDER FOCUS

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##### 4.1 Student, Stakeholder and Market Knowledge

The SER set out the mechanisms the Faculty has in place to attract students. For undergraduate students this includes portfolio development days at country high schools and at the SCA for students who have included the SCA in their first three UAC preferences. The Faculty is reviewing its undergraduate brochures to ensure they are easily understood by potential students.

The Review Team was told that both undergraduate and postgraduate students were attracted to the Faculty both by its reputation and the fact that it enabled them to combine theory and practice.

The Review Team noted the Faculty's initiative in undertaking a project with a focus group of five students from one school who have expressed an interest in visual arts, offering them pre-interviews with staff and subsequent tracking of choices.

##### 4.1.1 Building relationships with students and stakeholders

###### (a) Building Relationships with Schools

In line with University marketing plans, the Faculty is targeting the top 101 high schools as well as dedicated visual arts schools such as Dulwich Hill High school. The Faculty also has periodic mailings to many schools. It was noted that following the development of a high school's liaison program, first preferences in 2007 and 2008 had increased.

###### (b) Relationships with the Koori Community

The Faculty recognises that there is a need to re-establish a relationship with the Koori community and is currently organising an exhibition with the Koori Centre to commence this reconnection.

###### **Affirmation 1**

The Review Team affirms the Faculty's recognition of the need to re-establish a relationship with the Koori Community and its organisation of an exhibition with the Koori Centre to commence this reconnection.

###### (c) Other mechanisms for engagement with students and stakeholders

The Faculty provided examples of the steps it has taken to build relationships with stakeholders, including scholarships for students and alumni and the development of links with the Museum of Contemporary Art, the Art Gallery of NSW and private galleries, which have enabled foundation students to go on tours and experience an orientation in these major galleries.

The lack of response from external stakeholders to the BVA review team's request for information has emphasised for the Faculty the importance of concentrating on relationship building.

###### (d) Career Guidance

The Faculty has compiled a document providing a guide to career prospects and uses this as a marketing tool. The Faculty has advised that it is developing a briefer version of this for current students.

Undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students indicated to the Review Team that they felt uncertain about how to transfer the knowledge and skills gained at SCA from studio to practice.

**Affirmation 2**

The Academic Board affirms the Faculty's intention to develop a guide to career prospects for graduates. It is important that this guide address career prospects for graduates of both undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

**(e) Relationships with alumni**

The Faculty acknowledged that its relationships with alumni might be improved and is undertaking a project to contact alumni and build ongoing relationships with them, through mechanisms including the opportunity to include their own page on the SCA website and a regular newsletter from the Faculty.

**Commendation 7**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty's initiative in working with the Alumni Office to foster relationships with alumni.

**4.1.2 Determining student and stakeholder satisfaction**

**(a) Feedback**

The Faculty has a range of mechanisms to capture student and stakeholder feedback which are set out in other sections of this Report. These include USE, SCEQ and other formal teaching evaluation mechanisms; the student/staff liaison committees; feedback box in the Object Art studios, weekly meetings with students held by studios and mid-semester reviews.

The Faculty has acknowledged that SCEQ data have highlighted administrative issues of concern to students and is conducting a survey to obtain more detailed information on those concerns. The Review Team noted that the Faculty was aware of the need to close a gap in the loop for the use of USE information between coordinators and the Learning and Teaching Committee and was considering the best way to address this.

There was evidence that some student feedback through staff/student liaison committees had been acted upon. However, students indicated that because of timing issues, they were often not made aware of the impact of their feedback.

**Recommendation 5**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty provide information to students on the outcomes of student feedback through staff/student liaison committees, unit of study outlines and other appropriate mechanisms.

**(b) Retention and support**

Retention and support mechanisms identified in the SER include:

- All students: studio access: following completion of an OH&S course, students have studio access seven days a week to midnight
- Undergraduate students: mid-semester reviews and student interviews
- Postgraduate students (coursework and research): orientation morning; mini-postgraduate conference every second year
- Research students: weekly lectures and seminars at which work is presented; dedicated research librarians; studio space for all full-time research students.

The Review Team found that all students enjoyed the personal, human aspects of their courses, indicating that the Faculty's support mechanisms are generally working well. With respect to support for their development as artists, the experiences of undergraduate students vary across disciplines. There was some evidence of specific issues regarding support

provided to students in photography, which appear to relate to the large numbers of students in this course, lack of feedback on their work and lack of access to up-to-date equipment.

Concerns were also raised by postgraduate students in respect of facilities and infrastructure, including difficulty of gaining studio access outside normal working hours and inadequate space for research students.

Recommendations relating to these issues are contained in Section 7 Academic Process Management.

## (5) MEASUREMENT, ANALYSIS AND KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

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

The Review Team noted that, funded by a TIES grant, the Faculty has commenced an image digitisation project that will capture images from students and staff that can be used in lectures and research.

Issues relating to knowledge management are addressed elsewhere in this report.

<b>Commendation 8</b>
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The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its initiative in commencing an image digitisation project.
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## (6) WORKFORCE FOCUS

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### 6.1 Workforce Engagement

#### 6.1.1 Workforce enrichment

Issues relating to academic staff development are addressed in section 6.1.3 below.

In this section of the SER the Faculty drew attention to the roles of general staff in the smooth running of the Faculty. With respect to administrative staff, the Faculty advised that it has some needs unique to remote campuses such as facilities management and IT support.

A number of issues was raised in respect of technical staff and their role in supporting academic activities. The Faculty is committed to ensuring that technical staff have access to development and training and has allocated an annual budget for this purpose. Additional technical staff support is likely to be required in the light of a new undergraduate program delivery and increases in postgraduate enrolments.

The Review Team found that there was some lack of clarity in defining the boundary between demonstration and teaching, in relation to the contribution required from technical staff. This is addressed in greater detail in Section 7 Academic Process Management.

#### 6.1.2 Workload Management

Staff are encouraged to be more flexible in how they organise their teaching to make time available for short-term research opportunities.

The Faculty's workload model had been the subject of recommendation from the previous Academic Board review, at which time it has been an average of eighteen teaching contact hours. The base model had been lowered to fourteen hours, but was now sixteen hours, as a result of discussion and agreement at the Faculty Board. It was noted that this would be revisited in the light of the BVA review.

The Review Team was concerned that the number of teaching contact hours per FTE under the current workload model was in tension with the research aspirations of the faculty.

A further challenge for the Faculty is ensuring equity in workload given the differences in class size in units of study. There was evidence that some staff feel under pressure because of the size of their classes, not just their contact hours. It is acknowledged that this is a difficult issue to resolve.

#### **Recommendation 6**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty examine the way workload models are used in other faculties to ensure that staff work is balanced so as to appropriately align with the Faculty's goals in teaching and research and is equitably distributed throughout the Faculty.

#### 6.1.3 Workforce and leader development

##### (a) Performance Management and Development

The Faculty advises that it is committed to a work environment in which activities proper to the role of each individual can be conducted in the best possible way. This includes an ongoing commitment to staff development and training.

The University's PM&D program is an essential tool for academic staff development in the Faculty.

The Review Team noted that the Faculty has an active SSP program, with three staff undertaking SSP each year. While there was some concern expressed that SSP opportunities

remained less adequate than desirable, particularly for early career staff, the Review Team was satisfied that the Faculty's SSP was being used effectively by the Faculty to improve its research profile.

Other mechanisms for workforce development include attendance at the ITL Principles and Practice of University Teaching and Learning program and a teaching development day arising from the BVA Review. Staff are encouraged to enrol in the Graduate Certificate in Higher Education and the Faculty is considering making this mandatory for new appointments.

**(b) Workforce Planning**

The Review Team noted that the Faculty has an imbalance of staff at senior levels. This has implications for academic management, particularly research leadership.

The Faculty aims to increase both Level D and Level E appointments, by promotion as far as possible. The Faculty has taken steps to ensure that the University has become more aware of practice-based research outcomes and the definition of research in the creative arts.

New appointments will also be made, using opportunities such as the University's new lectureship scheme. The Faculty has also made a chair appointment to a professor with an ARC track record who will provide mentoring and support for research grant applications. This is also addressed in Section 7.1 Research.

The Review Team noted that many staff are given honorary appointments on retirement so as to maintain corporate knowledge.

**Commendation 9**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for its policy of maintaining corporate knowledge through the use of honorary appointments following retirement.

**(c) Mentoring**

For early career academics, each discipline meets as a team and senior staff assist the development of junior staff. The Faculty has acknowledged that support for early career academics needs to be more systematic.

In discussion with staff, the Review Team formed the view that a more formal mentoring system could be introduced by the Faculty. The PM&D process could be utilised more proactively as a source of mentoring and it was suggested that support for mentoring could be obtained through other creative arts areas of the University, especially from the Faculty of Arts. As an additional resource to the Faculty, the Review Team also notes that SydneyPeople is able to provide some outstanding professional expertise, enhancing and rejuvenating the mentoring process that should not be overlooked.

**Recommendation 7**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it might provide a more formal system of staff mentoring, particularly for early career staff.

**(d) Recognising and rewarding staff**

Faculty strategies designed to reward and recognise performance include the development of a Faculty-based teaching award to be offered in 2009 and exhibitions of staff work in the gallery.

## **6.2 Workforce Environment**

### **Workforce capability**

The Faculty endeavours to ensure that its staff have the capacity to achieve an appropriate balance in teaching, research and administration.

The Review Team explored the Faculty's mechanisms for determining academic staff workloads and how it manages the workforce environment to ensure outcomes for staff are achieved in teaching and research. See Section 6.1.2 Workload Management.

## (7) ACADEMIC PROCESS MANAGEMENT

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The Faculty advises that it is planning to review the efficiency and pedagogical appropriateness of all units of study, according to the type and subject demands of the course. In particular, it will continue to discuss options to bring a broader range of teaching and teaching support into units of study where appropriate. The Faculty believes it may be possible to achieve a clearer distinction between training, instruction and teaching support. This could lead to an increased number of technical supervisors and studio instructors.

The Review Team explored with students and staff their understanding of the role of technical staff in relation to teaching support. While academic staff considered that the teaching of technical skills, which mainly involved the demonstration of use of tools, was quite separate from academic aspects of teaching, the Review Team formed the view that there was some ambiguity in the definition of demonstration which was undertaken by technical staff. Both students and technical staff believed that the demonstrating undertaken by technical staff crossed a boundary into teaching. The Review Team had some concerns that there are some aspects of student learning, particularly in new technologies, where students appear to be learning core skills from technical staff, which might not be appropriate and that those staff might need recognition for their contribution. The Review Team also noted that career paths for technical staff were limited.

### **Recommendation 8**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty develop a clear statement of the roles of technical staff in relation to teaching support and monitor compliance with this across all disciplines.

#### **7.1.1 Core competencies**

Core competencies are designed to ensure to meet with Faculty and University strategic goals and to ensure that all graduates acquire the specified graduate attributes. The Review Team found that students valued highly the combination of context and theory in their learning experiences in the Faculty and that all students who participated in the Review Day interviews were highly articulate.

#### **7.1.2 Coursework program design**

The focus at the SCA is on the development of creative projects authored by individuals rather than groups and, while there is some group work, this is a distinct difference from other art faculties.

The Review Team found that students were generally very satisfied with the design of the courses. At a broad level, students found the SCA to be a very human place, in which the skills and ability of each student are supported and enabled to flourish. They found that their courses were providing them with competence as practitioners.

#### **Undergraduate**

The Faculty advises that the undergraduate program is student-centred and the Faculty is able to gauge individual levels of support for each student. Changing student requirements have seen courses move to a balance between structure and self-direction.

#### **Postgraduate**

In postgraduate coursework the focus of the Faculty is on devising a creative outcome together with articulation with industry, thus providing courses with industry relevance. Postgraduate coursework students indicated to the Review Team that they would like to have more input from industry into their courses, including some teaching from industry leaders. Students were enrolling in postgraduate coursework courses to gain a qualification which would provide them with credibility as artists, but were not always satisfied with the design and content of their courses.

#### **Recommendation 9**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty consider how it can ensure greater industry input into its postgraduate coursework courses to meet student needs for industry relevance and knowledge of the most recent advances.

The Faculty has developed degree progression pathways with the School of IT, has shared units across degrees with arts theory and electives and screen writing and relationships with the Faculty of Architecture (electives in sound design) and Arts (digital cultures program). Despite these interactions with the wider University, some postgraduate coursework students indicated to the Review Team that they felt somewhat isolated and that there could be more interaction with other areas of the University, for example Sound Sculpture at the Conservatorium of Music. Some students were satisfied with the level of flexibility in their degrees whereas others were limited in choice and would like to be able to build additional skills through electives.

#### **7.1.3 Review of the Bachelor of Visual Arts**

The Faculty has recently completed a review of the Bachelor of Visual Arts, with the goal of ensuring alignment of degrees that are coherently structured and in which students have a clear understanding of learning pathways. A curriculum review team has now been appointed to carry forward the recommendations where possible into the implementation stage. Faculty engagement in this stage of the process has been achieved through a staff forum and the establishment of smaller stakeholder focus groups set up to discuss the recommendations in more detail.

#### **Commendation 10**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for undertaking a detailed review of the Bachelor of Visual Arts.

#### **7.1.4 Coursework Delivery**

##### **(a) Student Satisfaction and Feedback**

Student satisfaction is measured through the formal evaluation mechanisms of USE, CEQ and SCEQ as well as other mechanisms as set out in Section 6 Student and Stakeholder Focus. The Faculty has very good CEQ scores, indicating a high degree of satisfaction from students with the delivery of their courses and units of study. The Review Team noted, however, that individual student comments indicated a level of concern with aspects of teaching which was not reflected in the overall data. The Faculty indicated that students' expectations were a key factor in this and that it was looking at ways of addressing this.

##### **Undergraduate students**

Students commented positively on a range of strengths of the delivery of teaching in the undergraduate program, particularly studio work. At the same time, there were some critical comments which the Faculty may wish to take into account in the implementation of the review of the Bachelor of Visual Arts. These include:

- concern with the delivery of teaching in Theories of Art Practice (THAP), which is taught across all undergraduate years, possibly relating to under-resourcing;
- a sense that first-year is insufficiently challenging for more motivated students;
- dissatisfaction with the level of technology and material and technical support available to photography students;
- poor quality equipment available to students in Electronic and Temporal Arts;
- possibly too much reliance on technical staff for training in core skills, with insufficient numbers of technical staff available.

Of some concern to the Review Team were comments indicating that Theories of Art Practice, one of the units of study which all undergraduate students take in common, and which should

provide a significant unifying influence across the Faculty, may not be effective in achieving its academic intent.

**Recommendation 10**

The Academic Board recommends the Faculty continue to focus on developing the academic effectiveness of Theories of Art Practice units of study within the Bachelor of Visual Arts.

Maintenance of infrastructure and facilities has been identified by the Faculty as specific challenges and the comments of students confirmed this. The Review Team raised the possibility of the Faculty's seeking partnerships with the commercial world to assist in keeping up to date with modern technology, as part of a longer term strategy.

**Postgraduate coursework students**

Postgraduate students were very satisfied overall with the quality of the delivery of their courses. Some students wanted more time on technical skills and less time on theory, but acknowledged that the theoretical component was a feature of SCA, unlike other art schools. Students in the Master of Studio Art course were particularly complementary about the Art Theory course.

There was some concern that the technology in the Faculty was not always up to date and that, as noted above, there was insufficient input from industry. Another point of concern for postgraduate coursework students was that there was little sense of engagement with the local community.

**Recommendation 11**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty investigate how it can improve the experiences of undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students with respect to the provision of materials and up-to-date technologies.

**(b) Benchmarking**

The Faculty acknowledges that benchmarking to date has been *ad hoc* and could be more systematic. The Review Team noted that a benchmarking exercise during the final Honours examination period was completed earlier in 2008 by a staff member from the ANU, which has resulted in a number of recommendations for improvement. Some benchmarking takes place through the national body, ACUADS. At the same time, it was noted that many staff are continually examining national and international programs and that benchmarking was integral to the academic process

The Faculty is approaching the end of major reviews of the BVA and PhD and priorities would arise from these in relation to benchmarking.

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.

**Recommendation 12**

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

**(c) Research-led teaching**

The Faculty advises that artistic developments and technological innovation are generated from the practices of individual staff which translates into research-led teaching.

### 7.1.5 Honours

The Faculty has a program of competitive entry into Honours, based on academic requirement, proposal, interview and portfolio. Honours students all reported positive experiences and were clear as to their reasons for undertaking honours and the value it could add to their courses.

## 7.2 Research and research training

### 7.2.1 Research

#### (a) Core competencies

The Faculty's research is both practice-based and practice-led. Its research outputs are diverse and can include a creative object or event and/or can be concerned with new understanding about the nature of practice.

#### (b) Encouraging research excellence/assisting researchers to achieve and sustain their research potential

The Faculty advises that 80-90% of staff are research-active across their disciplines. A major issue for the Faculty, however, is difficulty in accessing ARC-type funding for creative work. Most research funding comes from the Australia Council, Screen Council, Carrick, commissions etc. This funding goes directly to individuals and is not always recognised by the University for research purposes, although as noted in Section 1 Profile, a change in University policy in 2006 has led to a better recognition of creative work and creative grant income for the Faculty

Sesqui funding has enabled the Faculty to appoint a professor with a track record in obtaining ARC grants. This will allow the Faculty to commence building research teams and to be in a better position to access ARC funding. The Review Team also suggested that the Faculty concentrate its efforts in obtaining ARC funding on achieving success with Linkage Grants.

#### **Commendation 11**

The Academic Board commends the Faculty for the appointment of a professor with a track record in obtaining ARC grants which will allow the Faculty to commence building research teams and to be in a better position to access ARC funding.

The Faculty has a number of mechanisms to support researchers to achieve and sustain their research potential, including grant-writing workshops and a research development fund which allows approximately 30% of academic staff to travel to international conferences for research purposes.

The Review Team explored the success of these strategies with staff. There was a general view, both from early career and other staff that the strategies were working and the Faculty felt positively about its improved research reporting and potential for improving research outcomes.

#### **Recommendation 13**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty focus on building its research profile through strategies involving staff support and development and mentoring to achieve optimal publication and grant success from appropriate funding bodies.

### 7.2.2 Research Training

A PhD in the Visual Arts has been introduced only relatively recently and has seen the number of PhD students in the Faculty increase dramatically over the past few years. The Faculty also has a significant number of students enrolled in the Master of Visual Arts by research.

A major challenge for the Faculty is to ensure that there are sufficient numbers of qualified staff to supervise PhD students. The Review Team noted that all research students who participated in the

Review Day were very satisfied with the quality of their supervision. The SER indicated that the Faculty has achieved high completion and graduation rates for doctoral candidates.

The Faculty has a range of processes designed to support research students to succeed. These include:

- weekly lectures
- postgraduate research seminars at which presentations are given
- dedicated research librarians
- studio space for all full-time research students.
- financial support for international travel
- Biennial Postgraduate Student Conference
- orientation morning.

There was evidence that these support strategies are working well and that the Faculty is actively engaged in improving the postgraduate research experience within the context of a creative arts school. As with other groups of students, infrastructure was a concern, including adequacy of space allocated to them and access to materials. There was also some concern at lack of engagement with the local community.

Research students welcomed the formation of a Graduate School which they hoped would allow for greater interaction between students and the formation of working relationships. However, that at this stage, research students were not well-informed about the Graduate School, and the Review Team formed the view that more attention might be given to communication with them about its structure and aims.

**Recommendation 14**

The Academic Board recommends that the Faculty ensure that a key focus of the Graduate School is on communication across all postgraduate students.

**7.2.3 PhD review**

In 2008 the Faculty conducted a review of the PhD content, regulations and Faculty guidelines with a view to clarifying the nature of the PhD at the SCA. This review has resulted in a number of recommendations covering:

- Promotion of the PhD
- Core structure of the PhD
- Annual review process
- Research skills and methodologies for creative practices
- Supervision
- Admissions and
- Recommendations relating to the structure and title of the Master of Visual Arts.