

ACADEMIC BOARD FACULTY REVIEWS 2001 -2004
REPORT ON THE STRENGTHS, WEAKNESSES AND AREAS OF
IMPROVEMENT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In November 2001, the University of Sydney Academic Board commenced collegial reviews of academic activities to evaluate academic quality assurance processes and to assist in the dissemination of best academic practice. The Reviews were undertaken at Faculty-level, and were designed to assist faculties and deans to progress towards the goals identified in the University Plan and in faculty Teaching and Learning Plans. The Review process included a large element of self-assessment, with a focus on making sure that processes and structures were in place rather than focus on outcomes. At the conclusion of each review, a report was prepared which included commendations, recommendations for improvement, and examples of best practice relevant to other areas of the university. These commendations and recommendations form the basis of this report on the strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement across the university between 2001 and 2004.

AREAS OF IMPROVEMENT

The main area of improvement was in the acceptance of the review process itself. Whilst some faculties in Phase One of the Academic Board Faculty review process were wary of the process, by the time Phase Two commenced it had been accepted as being of value university-wide.

Other areas of improvement included: the successful dissemination and implementation of the Academic Honesty in Coursework policy and the consequent decrease in the instances of plagiarism across the university; the content and structure of the undergraduate curriculum; inclusion of graduate generic attributes in units of study outlines; implementation of faculty teaching excellence awards and encouragement of staff to apply for university awards; the quality of teaching staff in terms of higher education qualifications and English language proficiency; encouragement of staff to undertake staffing development programs at Institute for Teaching and Learning; acceptance and uptake of ICT in teaching and learning; and research training, especially in the area of research supervision.

STRENGTHS

The work of the Institute for Teaching and Learning, through strategic projects, working groups and programs for university teachers, has resulted in University strengths in the areas of: first year experience programs, research led teaching, research supervision, and good teaching. Learning Community is a strength across the University, particularly in the smaller faculties. Faculties were also commended for their work with the industry and the professions in all faculties, also demonstrated by a high involvement of service to the community.

PRIORITIES FOR ACTION

Areas where the University is not performing as well, and which therefore are considered to be priority areas for action cover a wide range of university activities. Based on the high number of recommendations received in Phase Two reviews, the main areas of concern relate to effective management – leadership and management, staff workload, and student administration. Aspects of teaching and learning which need priority action include: postgraduate coursework curriculum, assessment, provision of clear goals and standards, and support for local and international NESB students. Whilst some faculties are performing well in the implementation and dissemination of Academic Board policies, there is still need for action, particularly in relation to *Parallel teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students* and *Intellectual Property Rule*. In the area of support for postgraduate research students, more action is needed to ensure equitable infrastructure provisions across all faculties. Finally, the marketing, recruitment, enrolling and support of indigenous students should be considered as a priority area.

1 INTRODUCTION

In November 2001, the University of Sydney Academic Board commenced collegial reviews of academic activities to evaluate academic quality assurance processes and to assist in the propagation of best academic practice. The Reviews were undertaken at Faculty-level, and were designed to assist faculties and deans to progress towards the goals identified in the University Plan and in faculty Teaching and Learning Plans. The Review process included a large element of self-assessment, with a focus on ensuring that processes and structures were in place rather than focus on outcomes.

The first round of reviews, called Academic Board Phase One Reviews focussed on Teaching and Learning and Research Training (University Goals 1 and 3) took place between November 2001 and December 2002. The second round of Faculty Review Visits, called Phase Two Reviews, commenced in 2003 and were designed to follow-up on faculty progress since the first review. The Review scope was also increased to address all University strategic goals and their application at Faculty-level. The timetable was spread over two years with a 3 month gap for the AUQA visit, and concluded in November 2004.

Phase One reviews of the Institute for Teaching and Learning and the Koori Centre took place in May and June 2003 and Phase Two during March 2005.

At the conclusion of each review, a Report was prepared by the Review Team Secretary in consultation with the Review Team. Each report included commendations, recommendations for improvement, and examples of best practice relevant to other areas of the University. Reports and recommendations are available at http://www.usyd.edu.au/quality/about/abr_phase1.shtml and http://www.usyd.edu.au/quality/about/abr_phase2.shtml

This report seeks to provide information on the strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement across the university based on the commendations and recommendations from both Phase One and Phase Two reports from all faculties¹.

2 PROCESS

Each commendation and recommendation from the Academic Board Phase One and Phase Two reviews was analysed for subject content using the same categories as in the analysis of the SCEQ and SREQ open response comments. Commendations and recommendations which include more than one aspect were counted in all aspects mentioned. Where possible, links with results from the SCEQ and SREQ open response comments from 2000-2003 have been provided.

After the initial analysis, commendations and recommendations from both Phases were grouped according to category. Further examination determined the strengths and weaknesses and areas of improvement across the university. The main determining factor was the comparative number of commendations and recommendations between Phase One and Phase Two.

Specific topics of commendations and recommendations are provided from Phase Two reviews.

¹ NB Commendations and recommendations from the Institute for Teaching and Learning and the Koori Centre have not been included in this analysis.

3 ARRANGEMENT

Since the strengths, weaknesses and areas of improvement apparent in the Academic Board faculty review commendations and recommendations transcend all facets of academic quality assurance processes, the information in this report is presented under the following areas:

- Quality assurance and improvement processes
- Implementation and dissemination of Academic Board policies
- Teaching and learning
- Diversity, equity and access
- Internationalisation
- Excellence in research
- Engagement with the industry and the professions
- Effective management
- Service to the community

4 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES

This category includes general quality assurance and improvement processes, review and accreditation procedures, benchmarking, and evaluation and feedback to students. In their Phase Two Self Evaluation Reports, faculties were required to report on this area of their activities, including their responses to Phase One recommendations, and to provide an evaluation of their activities in relation to each of the University's strategic goals.

4.1 GENERAL QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT PROCESSES

Whilst there were some faculties in Phase One of the Academic Board Faculty review process who were wary of the process being collegial and of benefit to them or the university, by the time Phase Two commenced, the process had been accepted as being valuable across the university. This is indicated by the number of faculties who received commendations on either their responsiveness to Phase One recommendations and/or the quality of and faculty-wide ownership of the Self Evaluation Report. It was also shown in more practical ways by the increased degree of cooperation shown by some faculties in the administration of the process between Phase One and Phase Two.

Other areas that received commendations in the area of quality improvement in the Phase Two reviews included:

- Presence of a quality culture
- Use of internal and external reviews in change management process
- Quality assurance processes in relation to offshore programs
- Accreditation processes (Australian and international)

Areas that received recommendations in the area of quality improvement in the Phase Two reviews included:

- Ensuring consistency and transparency of quality assurance processes
- Quality assurance processes in relation to offshore programs
- Evaluation of international initiatives
- Review and reporting of trends from SCEQ, SREQ, CEQ
- Evaluation of admissions processes
- Evaluation of graduates

4.2 BENCHMARKING

With more recommendations than commendations on benchmarking activities present in both Phase One and Phase Two, this is an area in need of improvement across the university. (4 commendations in both Phase One and Phase Two; 6 recommendations in Phase One and 10 in Phase Two) Review Teams suggested that faculties should consider establishing benchmarking relationships with other faculties, with Go8 universities, and with international universities; and in the areas of teaching and learning and research.

4.3 EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

The provision to students of written feedback on how their USE comments have improved courses for them and for future students is an area of both strength and weakness across the university. There were 12 commendations and 12 recommendations in the Phase One reviews, and 7 commendations and 6 recommendations in Phase Two. Three of the faculties that received recommendations in Phase One received commendations in Phase Two, indicating quality improvement.

5 IMPLEMENTATION AND DISSEMINATION OF ACADEMIC BOARD POLICIES

The implementation and dissemination of Academic Board policies in general was targeted in both Phase One and Phase Two reviews, with areas of good practice being identified in a few faculties – four commendations in Phase One and one in Phase Two. However the number of recommendations on this topic (6 in Phase One and 5 in Phase Two) indicates that there is more work to be done to ensure that information on policies is available to both staff and students, and that measures are in place to guarantee their implementation.

In addition to investigating the implementation and dissemination of policies in general, three specific policies were targeted in discussions. These were Academic Honesty in Coursework, Parallel Teaching of Postgraduate and Undergraduate Students, and Intellectual Property. Although the number of specific commendations and/or recommendations relating to these policies is small, it still indicates where action needs to be taken or where progress has been made.

The successful implementation and dissemination of the policy on **Academic Honesty in Coursework** was commended in two faculties in Phase Two. Improvements in academic honesty were also noted in SCEQ open response comments analysis. Students in one faculty commented on the improvement in the ‘plagiarism’ culture within the faculty and noted that it had almost disappeared. During the Phase Two reviews, one faculty was reminded about compliance with Academic Board policies, in particular Academic Honesty in Coursework.

The issue of **parallel teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate students** was raised as an issue in both Phases of the Academic Board reviews. The faculty that received a recommendation on this issue in Phase One was commended for the work it was doing to address the issue at their Phase Two review. One other faculty received a commendation on their strategies to nullify the situation of parallel teaching. There were three recommendations relating to the parallel teaching of postgraduate and undergraduate students in the Phase Two reviews, all in CST faculties. Postgraduate coursework students from four faculties commented on this as an area in need of improvement in the SCEQ open responses for 2003.

The dissemination of information to students regarding the **Intellectual Property Rule** is an area of weakness in so far as there were no commendations on this issue in either Phase of the reviews. There were five recommendations in total, with one faculty receiving a recommendation at both reviews.

6 TEACHING AND LEARNING

A number of aspects of teaching and learning and the student experience were discussed in Academic Board Faculty reviews. These included:

- *Curriculum*
- *Skills development*
- *Good teaching*
- *Quality of teaching staff*
- *Appropriate assessment*
- *Appropriate workload*
- *Clear Goals and standards*
- *Learning community*
- *Learning resources*
- *Student progression and retention*
- *Overall satisfaction*

6.1 CURRICULUM

Commendations and recommendations on the curriculum have been divided into two aspects:

- 1. Content and structure of units of study (including PBL), and availability of advertised courses; and*
- 2. Practical aspects of the curriculum, including practicums, clinicals and work experience*

6.1.1 Content and structure

Although the number of commendations and recommendations on the content and structure of the curriculum were fairly equally divided in Phase Two (15 and 13); there were almost three times as many recommendations than commendations in Phase Two. The seven commendations received by faculties in Phase Two related to:

- Cross faculty availability of English in Academic Settings units of study
- Design and review of Postgraduate coursework programs
- Revision of undergraduate degree programs
- New degree proposals

The twenty recommendations related to:

- Review, design, objectives, goals of postgraduate coursework programs
- Review of Units of study and standardisation of credit points
- Curriculum review
- Core courses to be developed at College level
- PBL – understanding, culture, combining students from Medicine and Dentistry
- Planning and implementation of indigenous health courses
- Mode of offering (e.g. block)
- Marketing and curriculum of degrees when offered by two faculties
- Updating information on unit of study availability

SCEQ open response comments on the content and structure of the curriculum (i.e. subject content, relevance, up-to-datedness, linkages between units of study in same degree/ discipline) are fairly evenly divided across the university between students who consider it to be one of the best aspects and those that consider it to be an area in need of improvement. Students appreciate the opportunity to diversify their experiences by undertaking a wide range of subjects and across disciplines (e.g. in double degrees and Liberal Arts).

Although improvements in curriculum are being made across the university, these appear to be occurring mainly in the undergraduate programs. There is still work to be done, especially in the area of postgraduate

coursework programs, including parallel teaching of courses with undergraduate students. Another area of concern is the understanding of PBL by first year students in Dentistry and Medicine.

6.1.2 Practical aspects of the curriculum

This aspect of teaching and learning was a feature of discussions in the ‘professional’ faculties, where practical or work experience is a requirement of the degree program. It is one of the few occasions when the analysis of the SCEQ open response comments and the Academic Board Review findings did not coalesce.

With two commendations and eight recommendations on this aspect in the Phase Two reviews, the process, structure, coordination and opportunities for practical experience appears to be in need of improvement across these professional faculties.

The following issues were mentioned as areas of concern by Review Teams in Phase Two:

- Addressing quality and process issues around the clinical experience
- Communication of rationale behind structure of clinical component to students
- Performance opportunities for Conservatorium students
- Support during practicum for Education students (also in Phase One)
- Extending professional opportunities overseas
- Coordination of professional practice and extra mural placements
- Increasing practical experience through internships

The practical aspects of the curriculum rated highest in the SCEQ open response comments received from students in the ‘professional faculties’. Contrary to the above conclusions from the Academic Board reviews, more comments are received on practical aspects being one of the best aspects than an area in need of improvement.

6.2 SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

This includes the development of the university graduate generic attributes and the development of disciplinary skills.

There seems to have been an improvement in the integration of graduate attributes into the curriculum between Phase One and Phase Two reviews reflecting an outcome of the Graduate Attributes Working Group of the Institute for Teaching and Learning. In Phase One commendations and recommendations were evenly distributed – though faculties in CHASS received no commendations. In Phase Two, six faculties received commendations on their implementation of Phase One recommendations on graduate attributes. Another five faculties also received commendations on this issue. Five recommendations relating to the development of generic attributes were made in Phase Two reviews. These were spread across all Colleges.

6.3 GOOD TEACHING

Commendations and recommendations on good teaching have been divided into five aspects:

1. *Standard of teaching received;*
2. *Provision of useful and timely feedback;*
3. *Research-led teaching;*
4. *Group work; and*
5. *Teaching excellence awards*

6.3.1 Standard of teaching received

NB: *This category concentrates on the standard of teaching received by students. The presence of teaching qualifications and relevant disciplinary experience is included in Quality of teaching.*

Reflecting the work done by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning), the Institute for Teaching and Learning and the Academic Board to improve the standard of teaching across the university, there were very few recommendations on this issue at Academic Board faculty reviews. In fact, only two recommendations on this topic were received by faculties in the Phase One reviews and none in Phase Two. In contrast, there were 13 commendations in Phase One covering the standard of teaching. During the Phase Two reviews, one faculty was commended on the change of culture relating to the importance of teaching across the faculty since the Phase One review.

Judging from the increase in the number of favourable comments received in the SCEQ open responses, and the decrease in comments on areas in need of improvement for both undergraduate and postgraduate coursework, the standard of teaching has improved. This confirms the results of the Academic Board review discussions.

6.3.2 Provision of useful and timely feedback

The number of recommendations on the provision of useful and timely feedback to students on assessment halved between Phase One and Phase Two reviews (10 in Phase One and 5 in Phase Two). The number of commendations was almost identical (4 in Phase One and 3 in Phase Two). Two faculties were commended on improvements in this area at their Phase Two reviews. Three faculties received recommendations at both Phase One and Phase Two reviews. Since there were more recommendations than commendations in both Phases of the Review there is still work to be done in this area.

This is confirmed by the fact that the lack of provision of useful and timely feedback continues to be an area of concern amongst students responding to the SCEQ open response comments. No faculty recorded an improvement in the percentage of comments received on this topic between 2000 and 2003.

6.3.3 Research-led teaching

Overall there were more commendations than recommendations in this aspect of good teaching – nine commendations in Phase One and 3 in Phase Two; four recommendations in Phase One and two in Phase Two. These results, plus the analysis of comments received in the SCEQ open response questions, indicate a growing awareness across the university of the importance of integrating research into teaching and learning. In the 2003 SCEQ (undergraduate and postgraduate coursework) 53 comments referred to research led teaching as being one of the best aspects of the degree course. This compares to 44 in 2002 and 43 in 2001. Faculties in all Colleges are represented in these comments.

6.3.4 Group work

As a direct result of a recommendation on group work in Phase One, one faculty received a TIF grant for a group work project to survey students on their attitudes and feelings towards group work, and will conduct an audit of the types of group work used within the Faculty. At the Phase Two review, the faculty was commended for this project but advised to inform students about its existence and progress.

6.3.5 Teaching Excellence Awards

During both Phase One and Phase Two faculty reviews, emphasis was placed on the value of faculty and university awards for excellence in teaching. In Phase One, eight faculties were encouraged to either consider

implementing their own awards, or to support academics in applying for existing awards. The success of this encouragement is evident in the fact that four faculties received commendations for their actions in this area at their Phase Two reviews. Three faculties were advised to investigate teaching award schemes and encourage staff to apply for the Vice Chancellor's awards.

6.4 QUALITY OF TEACHING STAFF

Commendations and recommendations on the quality of teaching staff are divided into three main aspects:

- 1 ***Experience, qualifications, tutor training, mentoring of academic staff*** – *full-time, part-time and casual. This includes English language proficiency of academic staff; relevant experience of staff in the subject being taught; qualifications to teach in higher education; mentoring of staff in teaching and learning; tutor training/ handbooks etc NB: Standard of teaching received by students is included under Good Teaching; standard of teaching received.*
- 2 ***Staff development.*** *This includes encouragement of staff to participate in courses run by the Institute for Teaching and Learning, including the 3 day program and the Graduate Certificate of Higher Education and other staff development activities*
- 3 ***Teaching and Learning Plan/ Teaching and Learning Committee.*** *This includes participation and involvement of staff in the development of the Teaching and Learning Plan and membership of the Teaching and Learning Committee. It also includes the activities of the Teaching and Learning Committee and related working groups.*

6.4.1 Experience, qualifications and training

The qualifications, experience and training of academic staff/ tutors continues to be an issue across the university; though some faculties have made improvements in this regard since the Phase One reviews. There has been a significant improvement in the English language proficiency of staff in some faculties (notably Economics and Business) which is reinforced by the decrease in the number of comments received in the 2003 SCEQ on this topic compared to previous years. However, there are some faculties which fail to recognise this as a problem area.

Whilst in Phase One reviews commendations and recommendations on this issue were fairly equally divided (nine commendations and ten recommendations); in Phase Two there were more commendations (9) than recommendations (6). Tutor training, mentoring, addressing cross-faculty quality of teaching, and improving the English language proficiency of staff were mentioned in both commendations and recommendations at Phase Two reviews. It was also noted that there had been an improvement in the quality of teaching between reviews in two faculties.

6.4.2 Staff development

At the Phase Two reviews, one faculty was commended on its support for staff to attend discipline related teaching workshops, and two faculties were asked to consider encouraging staff to participate in teaching programs offered by the Institute for Teaching and Learning. Ten faculties responded to a recent survey that all new staff are required to take the 3 day program offered by the Institute for Teaching and Learning; two faculties do not mandate the course but actively encourage participation.

6.4.3 Teaching and Learning Committee/ Teaching and Learning Plans

At the Phase One reviews, faculties were encouraged to extend opportunities for staff to participate in teaching and learning committees and to involve them more actively in the development of teaching and

learning plans. There were six recommendations on this topic, compared to three commendations. By Phase Two the situation had improved, with five commendations being made to faculties on this issue. These related to placing the Teaching and learning plan on the agenda of faculty retreats, the work of the Teaching and learning committee; involvement of staff in the working parties of the teaching and learning committee; and the development of the teaching and learning plan. The alignment of faculty teaching and learning plans with the university plan and the consolidation of working parties of the teaching and learning committee were the subject of the recommendations in Phase Two reviews.

6.5 APPROPRIATE ASSESSMENT

Three commendations and six recommendations were received on assessment by faculties during Phase One reviews. This increased to eight commendations and eight recommendations in Phase Two. Two faculties were commended on the implementation of recommendations relating to appropriate assessment from Phase One.

Appropriate assessment (i.e. extent to which assessment means higher order thinking and understanding rather than simple factual recall; types of assessment – continuous; summative; formative; exams; marking) features as one of the best aspects of the degree in SCEQ open response comments from undergraduate students in five faculties. It is mentioned as an area in need of improvement in fourteen faculties. It was ranked either second or third in comments received from students in five faculties. Postgraduate coursework students in three faculties mentioned assessment as an area in need of improvement.

As indicated by results from both the Academic Board reviews and the SCEQ open response comments this appears to be an area of weakness across the University.

6.6 APPROPRIATE WORKLOAD

This topic was mentioned in two commendations and three recommendations in Phase One reviews; and in one commendation and one recommendation in Phase Two reviews. Workload is mentioned as an area of concern in SCEQ open response comments received from undergraduate students in all faculties. In 2003, it was the second highest area considered to be in need of improvement in four faculties – two in CHS and two in CST.

6.7 CLEAR GOALS AND STANDARDS

There were more recommendations than commendations relating to clear goals and standards in both Phase One and Phase Two reviews. In Phase Two, one faculty was commended on the implementation of recommendations on clear goals and standards from Phase One. Three faculties all received recommendations in both Phase One and Phase Two reviews, indicating more work needs to be done. CHS faculties received only one recommendation in this area across both reviews. CHASS faculties received the most recommendations across both reviews.

6.8 LEARNING COMMUNITY

This aspect of teaching and learning includes the social experience of being at a university; sense of belonging to a community where learning with other people is a priority; exploration of academic interests with other staff and students; being part of a close-knit faculty/ student group.

With thirteen commendations in Phase One reviews, the presence of a learning community at the University of Sydney appears to be an area of strength. This is substantiated by comments received in the SCEQ open response comments where appreciation of the learning community, particularly by students in the smaller faculties, is listed as one of the best aspects of the degree experience. The only recommendation in the Phase

Two reviews dealing with the learning community related to the need of students enrolled in USydMP to achieve a greater understanding of the program and its culture.

6.9 LEARNING RESOURCES

Commendations and recommendations on learning resources have been divided into four main areas:

- 1 **General learning resources** – reading packages, unit of study outlines, course materials etc
- 2 **Library services** – print and electronic. Includes access to electronic journals and databases
- 3 **Physical facilities** - computer hardware, lecture theatres, buildings, accommodation.
- 4 **Online learning and resources** (software not hardware) - uptake of online learning by staff and students; use of WebCT, Blackboard and other e-learning programs; support for online learning. NB: The use of the intranet and internet, including faculty and university websites for communication is included in Administration: internet

6.9.1 Learning resources: general

Progress in understanding the importance of quality assurance processes in the development of unit of study outlines and templates is indicated by the fact that there were four commendations on this topic in the Phase Two reviews. This compares with four recommendations and one commendation in Phase One.

6.9.2 Library services

The Veterinary Education and Information Network (VEIN) received commendations in both Phase One and Phase Two reviews. The extension of library opening hours was the subject of two recommendations in Phase One and one recommendation in Phase Two. The merging of libraries was raised as an issue in both Phases of the review but no recommendations were made by Review Teams on this issue.

6.9.3 Physical facilities *See also: Research students – Quality of infrastructure*

In the Phase Two review process, two faculties were commended for their efforts in increasing student access to computer and other facilities, and for finding solutions to lack of space. There were four recommendations on this issue in Phase Two reviews. These related to working towards a university standard for teaching venues, improving off campus access to IT services and infrastructure, monitoring of resources support for postgraduate coursework programs, and computer support for postgraduate coursework students.

6.9.4 Online learning and resources

Between Phase Two and Phase One the number of commendations increased from three to five; and the number of recommendations decreased from ten to seven. Two faculties received recommendations in both reviews; whilst another two demonstrated improvement by having a recommendation in Phase One and a commendation in Phase Two.

Commendations from Phase Two reviews related to:

- The incorporation of ICT into programs;
- Providing access to rural and regional NSW through use of technology;
- Uptake of WebCT; and
- Offering quality teaching using online resources.

Recommendations from Phase Two reviews related to:

- Expanding use of WebCT
- compliance with Copyright legislation regarding digitisation
- Use of internet technologies to improve practicum support
- Research in use of ICT in teaching and learning for community building

6.10 STUDENT PROGRESSION AND RETENTION

Commendations and recommendations relating to the provision and effectiveness of programs to aid students in transition from school to university and from university to work; First Year Experience programs; special programs for advanced students; identification of students at risk of failure or non-completion; and expanding and increasing diversity of student base by targeted recruitment strategies are covered in the commendations are covered in this section.

6.10.1 General issues

General issues relating to student progression and retention were the subject of four commendations and seven recommendations in Phase One reviews. In Phase Two reviews there were two commendations relating to the introduction of an honours program as a pathway to postgraduate and research studies; and the extension of the flexible entry scheme. Recommendations referred to liaising with other faculties on the effects on retention rates of raising the UAI; seeking non-traditional sources of students; and the provision of an induction program for students arriving at non-traditional times e.g. second semester.

6.10.2 First Year Experience Programs

The work of the First Year Experience Working Group to improve the quality of the first year experience for undergraduate students is apparent in the number of commendations relating to this topic in both Phases of the Academic Board reviews. Five commendations were made on this issue in Phase One and two in Phase Two. One recommendation relating to the introduction of a culturally appropriate student preparation program was made during Phase Two reviews.

6.10.3 Talented students programs

At the Phase One review, the Faculty of Engineering was commended for the success of the Advanced Engineering Program and advised to investigate ways in which gaps in student learning, occasioned by missing out on core subjects in the first year of the program could be overcome. This recommendation was repeated in Phase Two.

6.11 OVERALL SATISFACTION

The positive and constructive views held by students on their educational experience (Phase One); and the ability to attract local and international postgraduate students because of the faculty's reputation (Phase Two) were the subjects of the two commendations in this aspect of learning and teaching. During Phase Two reviews, one faculty was advised to investigate means of improving the student experience in general.

7 DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND ACCESS

Although the provision of access to tertiary study and appropriate support for students from a diversity of backgrounds, in particular indigenous students, was discussed during both phases of the Academic Board reviews, it received more emphasis during Phase Two.

7.1 CULTURAL DIVERSITY: GENERAL

During the Phase Two reviews, one faculty was commended on its student progress rates for students in diversity categories, and one student was advised to consider initiatives to facilitate the move to diversity.

7.2 INDIGENOUS ISSUES

Since the 'Lin Martin' Indicators for the University showed a relatively low level of recruitment and retention of indigenous students, the Phase Two Reviews focussed on the recruitment and retention of indigenous students; student support services; and Indigenous curriculum content.

There were five commendations and six recommendations relating to indigenous issues made during the Phase Two reviews. The commendations showed that some faculties have successful programs in place to increase participation of ATSI students in the undergraduate degree programs, and in the recruitment and retention of indigenous students. Others are improving access to courses for indigenous Australians and increasing knowledge of students about indigenous Australia through the courses offered. The reviewing of content and treatment of indigenous issues in units of study was also commended.

However, the area of marketing, recruitment, enrolling and support for indigenous students continues to be an area of weakness in some faculties, particularly those with high UAI, or in non-traditional or professional disciplines. Faculties were advised to utilise the resources of the Koori Centre as well as liaise with faculties with successful programs for indigenous students.

7.3 EQUITY ISSUES

7.3.1 General equity issues

During Phase Two reviews, faculties were commended on the establishment of an Equity Committee and the provision of female role models for students.

7.3.2 Support for local and international NESB students

During Phase Two reviews, faculties were commended for their support of local and international NESB students, and for the use of diagnostic language testing. Recommendations related to the identification and remediation of NESB and international students at risk, and supporting their language needs.

8 INTERNATIONALISATION

Support for the international student body was the focus of discussion in Phase One reviews, with one faculty being commended on its actions in this area, and five faculties receiving recommendations. During Phase Two reviews, discussions centred on all aspects of internationalisation, including support for international students, internationalisation of the curriculum, and international collaboration and networking. The equal distribution of commendations and recommendations in Phase Two reviews, indicates that whilst some progress is being made, more work is needed, particularly in ongoing support for international students.

8.1 INTERNATIONALISATION: GENERAL

During Phase Two reviews, faculties were commended on their collaborative international research projects; the internationalisation of the program content, and the presence of an internationalisation strategy. Recommendations focused on putting evaluation measures for international initiatives in place; gaining international accreditation for programs; and the development of an internationalisation marketing strategy.

8.2 INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

Providing ongoing support for international students, the presence of an orientation programs for international students, good progress rates for international students and the internationalisation of student cohort were the topics of Phase Two commendations on this issue. Faculties were advised to consider instigating scholarships for international students, liaison between faculties re special programs for international students, the identification of, and remediation programs for, international students at risk, and the development of marketing campaign to attract international students.

9 EXCELLENCE IN RESEARCH

This area of the report is divided into two main aspects:

1. **Faculty research** - *research activities of staff, research plans and the research culture of the faculty*
2. **Research training** - *quality of supervision, quality of infrastructure, research climate, and graduate generic attributes.*

9.1 FACULTY RESEARCH

One commendation and six recommendations were made in relation to faculty research activities during Phase One reviews. Since faculties had to report on their research activities, as opposed to research training, as part of their Phase Two Self Evaluation Report, more emphasis was placed on this issue during discussions. This resulted in a significant increase in commendations and recommendations emanating from Phase Two reviews - thirteen commendations and fourteen recommendations.

At the Phase Two reviews, six faculties were commended for the improvement in their research performance and culture. Other commendations related to the development of doctoral programs, the development of research clusters and research centres, the focusing of the research plan on strategic collaborative projects, and the establishment and presence of research fellowships. Five faculties were advised to consider ways in which the research climate of the faculty could be improved. Other recommendations related to coordination of research activities, holding regular research forums, undertaking research reviews, investigating the possibility of cooperative research projects, and providing leadership in research.

9.2 RESEARCH TRAINING

After the AUQA visit to the University in July 2004, the Review Panel commended the University for the improvements to the management of research training that are attendant on the establishment of the position of Dean of Graduate Studies, including the development of a strong relationship with the Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association². This improvement was also evident in the results of the Phase Two reviews.

² AUQA *Report of an audit on the University of Sydney*. December 2004. Commendation 15, page 6

Commendations and recommendations on the experiences of postgraduate research students are divided into four main areas, which relate closely to the factor scales used in the Student Research Experience Questionnaire:

- 1. **Quality of supervision** – this includes actual supervision; management of candidature; progress reports; flexibility of program; pressure to complete; and feedback from supervisor.*
- 2. **Quality of infrastructure** – this includes funding/ scholarships; physical resources/ accommodation; industry facilities; technical and lab support; and other resource issues.*
- 3. **Research climate** – this includes induction/ orientation program; isolation issues for students located away from main campus; interaction with other postgraduate research students; collaboration and networking; conference presentations; research community; part of faculty; support of faculty; seminars, workshops; interaction with industry; teaching opportunities/ preparation for academia; and support for part-time/ distance education/ external students.*
- 4. **Generic skills** – this includes the development of University graduate attributes, research skills, technical skills (academic writing, statistics, laboratory etc), expansion of knowledge, the ability to work independently, and support in English language proficiency for NESB postgraduate research students.*

9.2.1 Quality of supervision

A combination of factors has contributed to major improvements in the quality of supervision received by postgraduate research students across all faculties, as evidenced by the reduction in the number of recommendations on this issue between Phase One reviews (15) and Phase Two (2). These include the implementation and take up of the College of Science and Technology ten-point plan on research training, encouragement for supervisors to undertake the Institute for Teaching and Learning Postgraduate Supervision Development Program, and the work of the Dean of Graduate Studies.

Commendations in Phase Two reviews related to the establishment of a monitoring plan for postgraduate research students; increase in research completion rates; initiatives to improve the quality of supervision; and the establishment of a twice yearly formal induction program, which resulted in students appreciating the fact that they were made aware of their rights relating to all aspects of research training, including supervision.

Due to the fact that there was little evidence of improvement in the area of postgraduate research supervision since the Phase One review, one faculty was advised to give this area priority in future planning. Another faculty was advised to investigate ways of providing the necessary structure for timely completion of postgraduate research candidatures.

9.2.2 Quality of infrastructure

In Phase Two reviews faculties were commended for the support provided to postgraduate research students, improvement in resource support since Phase One; and the communication of infrastructure rights to students.

Areas of concern in Phase Two reviews included:

- Infrastructure and accommodation needs of postgraduate research students
- Access to accommodation for part-time students
- Hours of opening of postgraduate research room
- Postgraduate research scholarships
- Resource support for non CRC and international students
- Communication of policies and procedures for conference travel to students

Provision of satisfactory infrastructure to postgraduate research students is an area of weakness across the university. Even in faculties where separate postgraduate rooms are provided, conditions are less than satisfactory. Issues raised by postgraduate research students during Academic Board Review discussions are confirmed by comments in both the 2003 and 2004 SREQ open response comments. These include lack of computers, lack of dedicated desk space, no air conditioning, unevenness of funding distribution (particularly in relation to PRSS and faculty research funds), and disparity in the infrastructure provided by industry and by the university.

9.2.3 Research climate

This area of research training elicited the most recommendations in both Phases of the Academic Board reviews – thirteen in Phase One and eleven in Phase Two. (This compares to two commendations in Phase One and six in Phase Two respectively.) Substantiated by the 2004 SREQ quantitative results, where the University wide Research Climate Scale was the lowest in both the percentage agreement and the -100/+100 tables, this indicates an area of weakness across the university.

Commendations made as a result of discussions during Phase Two reviews related to:

- The development of postgraduate students association
- Strategies for decreasing the isolation of postgraduate research students
- The integration of postgraduate research students into the faculty
- The presence of a supportive research community

Recommendations related to:

- The introduction of formal induction programs
- Allocation of research students to research clusters
- Invitation to postgraduate research students to attend seminars
- Access to teaching opportunities for postgraduate research students
- Reducing isolation of postgraduate research students
- Improving research climate
- Inclusion of Research Roundtable in postgraduate coursework program and extending assistance to postgraduate research students
- Supporting an increase in the numbers of full-time postgraduate research students
- Increase communication between staff and postgraduate research students

9.2.4 Generic skills

The Faculty of Law was commended in both reviews for the introduction of compulsory research methodology courses for its postgraduate research students. This is an area of best practice that could be disseminated to other faculties.

10 ENGAGEMENT WITH INDUSTRY AND THE PROFESSIONS

This aspect of a faculty's quality assurance processes was included as a reporting item in Phase Two reviews. The three commendations and one recommendation on this aspect in Phase One came out of discussions during the course of the review interviews and not from specific issues raised by the Review Team in the initial questioning process. Faculty Self Evaluation Reports and discussions during Phase Two reviews revealed that many faculties are working well in their engagement with the industry and professions with many

staff being included on professional and industrial boards; participating in committees; using professional bodies in reviewing coursework and quality of graduates; and involving alumni and foundations in activities.

There were twelve commendations made to faculties as a result of Phase Two reviews. These related to:

- Engagement in professional activities
- Engaging with professions in development of postgraduate coursework programs
- Establishing Centres of Excellence / Research Centres
- Strengthening links with clinical staff
- Engaging with professions in review of quality of graduates
- Continuing professional development
- Establishing links with foundations, alumni and benefactors
- Close ties with profession/ industry
- Leadership role in profession

The eight recommendations related to:

- Focus/ market linkages with professions and industry
- Student engagement in industry particularly in postgraduate coursework area
- Evaluation of effectiveness of engagement with industry/ professions
- Establish database of previous employers for work placements
- Linkages with industry relating to research

11 EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT

During Phase One reviews issues relating to Effective Management arose during the course of discussions with staff. During Phase Two reviews, faculties were required to report on quality assurance and improvement processes in relation to Effective Management as one of the University's strategic goals.

Commendations and recommendations regarding effective management in faculties have been divided into the following aspects:

1. **Leadership and management** – includes leadership qualities of the Dean and senior staff; restructuring of the faculty; change management; planning processes and budgeting.
2. **Workplace environment and culture** – includes staffing resource issues; staffing vacancies; casualisation of staff; staff satisfaction with teaching and learning conditions; faculty culture and sense of community
3. **Communication** – both internal and external to the faculty/ university
4. **Student administration** – includes faculty and university student administration, administration of double degrees, enrolment etc
5. **University and faculty websites** - use of intranet for communication
6. **Other management issues**

11.1 LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management was the focus of a number of commendations and recommendations in both phases of the Academic Board review process. There were twelve commendations in both phases; ten recommendations in Phase One and sixteen in Phase Two. Faculty restructuring, leadership styles, student involvement in committees, committee structures and operational planning, were common themes across both phases of the review process. Those that relate specifically to Phase Two reviews are listed below.

Commendations from Phase Two included:

- Development of collaborative strategies with other faculties and programs
- Successful change management/ restructuring
- Budget/ financial issues
- Risk management performance
- Uptake of FlexSIS
- Administrative support for review
- Student involvement in committees
- Leadership programme involving general and academic staff

During Phase Two reviews faculties were advised to consider ways to improve the following issues:

- Monitoring effectiveness of restructure
- Succession planning
- Budget/ financial issues
- Cross discipline collaboration
- Committee structure and role
- Strategic / operational / change management process
- Communication of management model to staff
- Use of professors in leadership role
- Managing expansion of postgraduate coursework numbers

Despite the good work being undertaken by some faculties in the area of leadership and management there is still room for improvement as indicated by the high number of recommendations compared to other areas. Only the content and structure of the curriculum received more recommendations in Phase Two reviews.

11.2 WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE

Staff workload is an area of weakness across the university as evidenced by five recommendations in Phase One and four in Phase Two. This is especially the case in faculties where there is a heavy administrative workload e.g. in the case of large numbers of casual staff; and also in faculties which have come from non-university beginnings and are still working to relatively high CAE teaching workloads. It should be noted that one faculty was commended for its use of the workloads policy to implement change. Other recommendations in Phase Two related to the engagement of senior staff in management roles and committees, and the strengthening of senior academic staff, including the appointment of additional professors.

11.3 COMMUNICATION

During the Phase Two reviews, one faculty was commended on the noticeable improvements in communication since the Phase One review. Five faculties were advised to consider ways to improve

communication between staff and staff and staff and students. Other recommendations referred to producing user friendly and understandable publications, having a 'state of the nation' address to staff and students, and improving signage in faculty buildings. It should be noted that lack of intra-faculty communication was not confined to larger faculties.

11.4 STUDENT ADMINISTRATION

During Phase Two reviews, four faculties were commended on improvements in the student administration area. Evidence was provided not only through review discussions but also through SCEQ quantitative and qualitative results. Three faculties were advised to investigate ways of improving faculty student administration, and communication links with University administration. The administration of double degrees was also mentioned, with one faculty being advised to provide consistent advice regarding the structure of double degrees. The lack of quality in customer service provision in both university and faculty student administration is mentioned as an area of concern in SCEQ open response comments from all faculties. The lack of communication between student administration in faculties concerned with double degree programs, and uncertainty regarding 'home faculty administration' for Liberal Studies students was also mentioned in a high percentage of comments received from undergraduate students in SCEQ responses.

Based on the above, it appears that student administration is still an area of major concern across the university. It should be noted that some faculties have put in place customer service training and other strategies which have resulted in major improvements in student satisfaction. These should be disseminated to other areas of the university.

11.5 UNIVERSITY AND FACULTY WEBSITES

During the Phase Two reviews, three faculties were commended on the development and design of their websites. There was one recommendation to be more strategic in the use of the Web as a means of communication and that information quality attributes, such as audience, timeliness and up-to-datedness, content and purpose of communication, should be included in its Web strategy.

11.6 OTHER

In the Phase Two reviews, two faculty specific students associations were commended for their valuable work in contributing positively to the student experience. Faculties at two affiliated campuses were advised to investigate the possibility of providing a security bus between their campus and the Camperdown/ Darlington campus.

12 SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

During Phase One reviews issues relating to Service to the Community arose during the course of discussions with staff. During Phase Two reviews, faculties were required to report on quality assurance and improvement processes in relation to Service to the Community as one of the University's strategic goals.

There is a high involvement of service to the community in all faculties. Five faculties gained commendations on their activities in this regard in the Academic Board Phase Two reviews.

13 AREAS OF BEST PRACTICE

Based on information provided during Phase Two reviews, the following areas of best practice have been identified across the university:

- Leadership program in Faculty of Veterinary Science
- Close ties with professions and industry bringing benefits to students in the Faculty of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources
- Implementation of a tutor training program by the Faculty of Arts
- Publication of a digest of Academic Board policies in plain English by the Faculty of Medicine
- Recruitment of indigenous students by the Faculty of Nursing
- Student Preparation Program for international students by the Faculty of Health Sciences
- Review and reporting of trends in the SCEQ, SREQ, and CEQ by the Faculty of Architecture
- Work on the development of a non-linear workload formula by the Faculty of Science

14 PRIORITIES FOR FUTURE ACTION

Areas where the University is not performing as well, and which therefore are considered to be priority areas for action cover a wide range of university activities. Based on the information provided during Phase Two reviews, the following areas for future action have been identified

- **Effective management** – leadership and management, staff workload, and student administration.
- **Learning and teaching** – postgraduate coursework curriculum, assessment, provision of clear goals and standards, and support for local and international NESB students.
- **Implementation and dissemination of Academic Board policies** – particularly in relation to *Parallel teaching of undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students* and *Intellectual Property Rule*.
- **Support for postgraduate research students** – action to ensure equitable infrastructure provisions across all faculties.
- **Indigenous students** – recruitment and support

15 TIF GRANTS

The following TIF grants, based on recommendations from Phase One reviews were identified in Phase Two commendations:

- Best practice in grade descriptors and use of WebCT as mechanism for providing feedback (Faculty of Health Sciences)
- Group work project (Faculty of Science)
- Benchmarking (Faculty of Rural Management)

Rachel Symons
Quality Assurance Officer (Teaching and Learning)
Office of the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning)
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