WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

The Chair welcomed members to the first meeting for 2018 and apologies were noted as recorded above.

PROCEDURAL MATTERS

2.1 Terms of Reference

The Chair of Academic Board provided background information related to the creation of the committee and the drafting of its terms of reference. Members were advised that the committee is intended to provide an audit of the quality of the general work of the Academic Board and its committees. In order to enable this, the proposed terms of reference for the committee include reference to the specific standards in the government’s Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015 over which the committee will have oversight. Because the University proposes to revise the manner in which the Academic Board and University Executive undertake faculty reviews – with institution-wide thematic reviews to replace the current schedule of faculty-specific reviews – the committee will also receive and discuss the outcomes of these reviews.

Award course reviews are also intended to fall within the remit of the committee, and mechanisms to enable a regular quality check of current courses are currently being developed in collaboration with Institutional Analytics and Planning (IAP). A template Course Pulse Report was tabled by the Director of IAP, in order to solicit feedback as to the type of institutionally-available data that will allow the committee to assess the performance of award courses without placing an additional administrative burden on faculties. It is intended that the committee will, over time, formulate benchmarks for acceptable performance in order to identify award courses that may be struggling. These annual “health” checks will also facilitate the conduct of more comprehensive reviews on a 5-7 year cycle.

The Director of IAP guided members through the tabled Course Pulse Report template, advising that the report allows for the capture and presentation of data at an institutional level. Statistics on student-related data such as course load, retention and attrition, attendance and so on have been included in the current template, with high-level demographics also presented. Fresh data can be provided whenever the data source is updated, with some sources updated daily and others less frequently. In discussion, members suggested that providing a date on which the data was last updated for each field would be helpful. Linking performance data (such as progression and retention) to entry criteria (such as school of origin, first-in-family or other demographics) would also be helpful, but difficult to obtain with the data sets currently available. For postgraduate students, undergraduate background data may also be available.
The focus of the current data on students was noted, and members were informed that staff data is anticipated to be available in late 2018. The data underpinning the Course Pulse Report will also be available to all staff to interrogate directly via an online portal, and will often allow a finer level of interrogation than will be provided in the snapshot report prepared for the committee. This will allow faculties to undertake their own monitoring of award courses. Data will evolve as the work of the committee progresses and the template is refined.

Members were advised that monitoring of research quality is also within the remit of the committee, but that this is intended for further development later in the year. Non-award study (for example, via the Centre for Continuing Education) is outside the remit of the Academic Board and will not be included in the quality monitoring undertaken by the committee (the Board of Interdisciplinary Studies – chaired by the Chair of Academic Board – has this function). The identification of policies or processes that are not working well, and the quality of HDR supervision, should also be investigated for scrutiny by the committee.

The Chair undertook to liaise with the Chair of Academic Board and the Committee Secretary to develop a work plan for the committee.

**Resolution AQC18/1-1**

*The Academic Quality Committee recommended that the Academic Board approve Terms of Reference, as presented, with effect from 6 March 2018.*

**Action 1/2018:** Develop a work plan for the Committee. **Responsible:** Chair, Chair AB and Secretary. **Timing:** Next meeting.

### 3 STANDING ITEMS

#### 3.1 Report of the Chair

The Chair advised that as this is the first meeting of the committee, she had nothing to report.

**Resolution AQC18/1-2**

*The Academic Quality Committee noted the report of the Chair.*

#### 3.2 Report of Academic Board

The Chair of Academic Board drew the attention of members to the written report circulated with the agenda, and suggested that the creation of this committee is ‘incredibly exciting’ as it is undertaking work never done before at the University. It is also the first Academic Board committee to directly, systematically use data to inform its discussions.

Members noted the Report of Academic Board.

**Resolution AQC18/1-3**

*The Academic Quality Committee noted the report of the Academic Board meeting held on 28 November 2017.*

#### 3.3 Report of the HDR Examinations Sub-Committee

Associate Professor Nelson provided an overview of the work and scope of the HDR Examinations Sub-Committee (HDRESC). She advised that the sub-committee meets monthly to make decisions on the outcomes of contentious doctoral examinations and to confirm the appointment of examiners for doctoral theses, as detailed in the written report circulated with the agenda.

In discussion, the impact of the introduction of compulsory units of study to PhD candidature was discussed, and members were advised that the HDRESC has no oversight of this area. The status of Research Training Program (RTP) funding for candidates who exceed four years of candidature was also discussed, with members advising that RTP funding will not be provided for students who complete in excess of this time. To help with the early identification of students in danger of exceeding the time limit, data is available at faculty level and the Annual Progress Review process is also designed to help identify struggling students. Statistics on completion of Annual Progress Reviews were requested, as was clarification as to whether examinations data could differentiate between domestic and international students. The Secretary undertook to follow these up. The definition of ‘completion’ was also discussed, with the current usage of the thesis submission noted as the date of completion. The Director of Graduate Research is
currently modelling the impact of an adjustment of ‘completion’ to the date of the award of the degree.

Resolution AQC18/1-4
The Academic Quality Committee noted the report of the HDR Examinations Sub-Committee, as presented.


Action 3/2018: Inquire as to whether examinations data can differentiate between domestic and international students. Responsible: Secretary. Timing: Next meeting.

4 ITEMS FOR ACTION

4.1 Phase 5 Academic Board/University Executive Thematic Review: Student Wellbeing and Safety

The University Quality Manager informed the Committee that the current proposal is intended to replace the previous process of faculty-focussed reviews, recognising that the former review process imposed a significant data collection burden on faculties for a highly variable outcome. In 2017, the Academic Board and University Executive agreed to an annual focus on a single issue across the institution in a series of thematic reviews. The first theme – student wellbeing and safety – was identified as an area with which the institution has struggled to date. The connections between faculties and professional service units (PSUs) would also be assessed as part of the review process.

In discussion, the University Quality Manager advised that an information pack would be provided to faculties and the review panel prior to the review, containing background information, definitions and the scope of each review. There is also a need to identify and ensure that pressure points (such as repeated concerns or identified deficits) are not downplayed in the review, but are acted upon.

To ensure that recommendations arising from the review are being enacted, it is also planned to revisit each review 9-12 months after completion.

The proposal was endorsed for presentation to the Academic Board.

Resolution AQC18/1-5
The Academic Quality Committee recommended that the Academic Board approve the terms of reference, membership and processes for the review of Student Wellbeing and Safety, as the first theme in the Phase 5 Academic Board/University Executive reviews.

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 Report of the Phase 4 Academic Board / University Executive Faculty Review of the Sydney Law School

The committee received this report but expressed uncertainty as to what it was expected to do with it. The lack of a formally-approved implementation plan was highlighted for inclusion in the terms of reference for future reviews, as was a mechanism for provision and consideration of feedback in a timely manner, with the committee noting that the review on which the current report is based was undertaken in October 2016.

Professor Conaglen advised that the Law School has been awaiting direction as to whether their responses to the recommendations are to be enacted, so to date there has been minimal progress toward implementation of the recommendations. It was agreed that the recommendations as presented in the report should be taken as approved, and that the Law School would be asked to provide an update in early 2019 as to what actions have been undertaken in response to the review.

Resolution AQC18/1-6
The Academic Quality Committee noted the Academic Board/University Executive Phase Four Faculty Review Report.
Action 4/2018: Follow up with Sydney Law School to provide an update on actions undertaken in response to the Faculty Review. Responsible: Secretary. Timing: For first meeting in 2019.

6 OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Any Other Business

There being no other business, the meeting concluded at 3:47pm.

Next meeting: 2:00pm – 4:00pm, Tuesday 27 March 2018
Venue to be advised.

A full copy of the Academic Quality Committee papers is available at: sydney.edu.au/secretariat/pdfs/academic-board-committees/academic%20quality/2018/20180220%20AQC%20Agenda%20Pack.pdf