ACADEMIC QUALITY COMMITTEE
2:00pm – 4:00pm, Tuesday 8 May 2018
Senate Room, Quadrangle (A14)

Members Present: Associate Professor Wendy Davis (Chair); Dr Tooran Alizadeh (Architecture, Design & Planning); Associate Professor Javid Atai (Engineering & IT); Donald Tochukwu Azuatalam (PG Student); Dr Betty Chaar (Pharmacy); Professor Matthew Conaglen (Law); Professor Rae Cooper (Business); Jane Currie (Nursing); Professor Mark Gorrell (Medicine); Imogen Grant (President, SRC); Dr Mark Halaki (Health Sciences); Rebecca Johnson (Nominee of the President, SUPRA); Associate Professor Tony Masters (Chair of Academic Board); Dr Slade Matthews (Academic Board Representative); Associate Professor Peter McCallum (Director, Educational Strategy) (for Professor Pip Pattison); Craig Napier (Associate Director, Institutional Analytics) (for Kubra Chambers); Associate Professor Kathleen Nelson (Chair, HDRES); Dr Carl Schneider (Academic Board Representative); Associate Professor Alyson Simpson (Arts & Social Sciences).

Attendees: Dr Matthew Charet (Secretary); Professor Ross Coleman (Director of Graduate Research); Hugh O’Dwyer (Policy / Project Officer, DVC (Education)).

Apologies: Kubra Chambers (Director, Institutional Analytics & Planning) (Craig Napier attending instead); Ayman Ellawa (Dentistry); Dr Christopher Hartney (Academic Board Representative); Professor Pip Pattison (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)) (Associate Professor Peter McCallum attending instead).

3/2018

MINUTES

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES
The Chair welcomed Associate Professor Alyson Simpson as representative from the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences and noted apologies as recorded above.

2 PROCEEDURAL MATTERS

2.1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting
The minutes of the meeting held on 27 March 2018 were confirmed as a true record, as presented.

Resolution AQC18/3-1
The Academic Quality Committee resolved that the minutes of meeting 2/2018, held on 27 March 2018, be confirmed as a true record.

2.2 Action Schedule / Business Arising

Mr Khoo circulated a note prior to the meeting relating to the discussion, at the previous meeting, of ghostwriting services and circulated an example of a Chinese-language advertisement offering such services that was posted in a campus bathroom. In discussion, Associate Professor McCallum advised that CIS is aware of this issue and they undertook a campaign in late 2017 to address it, which it might be worth reviving. CIS also have authority to remove offending materials, whereas the cleaning staff may not. The Office of Educational Integrity has also approached a number of providers seeking a web bot to enable detection of services targeting the university’s students. Raising the awareness of students relating to the ethics of using such services (including services purporting to offer tutoring), as well as the practice of uploading completed assessment items to online services, is also an avenue for exploration. Policy reform may be necessary to enable this. Professor Cooper advised that some companies have booked venues on campus to hold information sessions to which students are invited, which are often difficult to distinguish from official University activities. Associate Professor McCallum requested more specific information regarding these sessions to enable appropriate follow-up, and undertook to report back to the Committee at a future meeting.

Regarding Action 6-2018, the Chair tabled a draft form developed to enable capture of faculty-level appeals data. This form distinguishes between appeals related to exclusions from inadequate academic progress and other appeals of academic decisions. It also requests
descriptions of informal appeal processes within faculties and appeal decision-making processes. In discussion, the desirability of an online tool for data collection was raised, and clarification was sought regarding recent communication suggesting the development of a central database for collection of appeals data. Associate Professor McCallum advised that this database is intended for initial use by the Student Affairs Unit, and may be rolled out to faculties in 2019 or later. Several faculty representatives advised that they already distribute some of the information requested, and the Chair assured them that in such instances, a link to the appropriate data would suffice for reporting purposes. It was suggested that the form include a definition of ‘academic decision’, as well as links to the appropriate policies. An explanation of why this data is being requested will be included in the email communicating the request to faculties.

Members noted the updates to business arising.

Resolution AQC18/3-2
The Academic Quality Committee noted updates on business arising.

3 STANDING ITEMS

3.1 Report of the Chair
The Chair advised that she had met with colleagues in Institutional Analytics and Planning (IAP) regarding the course pulse reports, and is interested in exploring the academic performance of students entering the University via the Centre for English Teaching pathway.

Resolution AQC18/3-3
The Academic Quality Committee noted the report of the Chair.

3.2 Report of the Academic Board
The Chair of Academic Board drew the attention of members to the written report of the meeting of 6 March circulated with the agenda, and provided a verbal update on the meeting held on 1 May, a written report on which will be circulated with the agenda for the next meeting. He advised that, in May, Academic Board members noted presentations on the Westmead Strategy, the Student Administration Services Post-Implementation Review, and the quality of learning and teaching.

Resolution AQC18/3-4
The Academic Quality Committee noted the written report of the Academic Board meeting held on 6 March 2018 and the verbal report provided for the meeting of 1 May 2018.

3.3 Report of the HDR Examinations Sub-Committee
Associate Professor Nelson drew the attention of members to the written report circulated with the agenda, advising that discussion of HDR examination times (as discussed by the Sub-Committee) is on the agenda as Item 4.1.

Resolution AQC18/3-5
The Academic Quality Committee noted the Reports of the HDR Examinations Sub-Committee meetings of 3 April and 1 May 2018.

4 ITEMS FOR ACTION

4.1 HDR Examination Times
The Director of Graduate Research informed members that the University’s record of on-time examination completions is sub-optimal. IAP has dissected the candidature patterns of students who exceed minimum duration and identified a number of pressure points, some of which are within the University’s control to address and some of which are not. The analysis identified two primary stages of the examination process at which avoidable delays can minimised: the appointment of examiners and the return of reports by examiners.

Observing that many theses are submitted before examiners have been appointed and that one of the causes of this is the difficulty in finding three examiners who are both suitable and available to examine, one possibility is to reduce the number of examiners from three to two. The desirability of this was discussed, with the observation made that three examiners can eliminate deadlocks and that no correlation has been found between the order of appointment and late return of
reports (the first examiner nominated is as likely to be tardy as examiners second and third). The appointment of examiners who have not previously been approached by the supervisor is also a factor in delay, with unavailability of examiners advised after the thesis is despatched necessitating the repetition of the appointment process; delays to the intended submission date of the thesis also contribute to this. The lack of inclusion of the relevant academic leaders (e.g., Postgraduate Coordinators, Associate Deans Research Education, etc.) in correspondence between the HDR Admin Centre and the supervisor also means that faculties are often unaware of emerging issues.

The Director of Graduate Research advised that over-time completions have a financial impact on the University in funding, resource consumption and lost opportunity (with supervisors unable to take on new students until current students have completed). The key driver to improve examination times remains the student experience, with student survey responses indicating significant dissatisfaction with current examination processes and timelines. Another suggestion to possibly address timeliness is the introduction of a mandatory oral defence; this would provide a defined end-point for each examination and also enable examination of the candidate rather than only the written output. This would have the added benefit of enabling detection of ghostwriting and over-statement of contribution to published sections of the thesis. Oral defence could also overcome problems associated with brief positive reports and may identify issues with poor scrutiny of the thesis. This approach comes with logistical challenges. Videoconferencing is a possibility, especially for interstate or international examiners, which may require investment in suitable facilities.

Members were informed that the University needs to shift its reported date of completion to the date of award, meaning that a thesis will need to be submitted within 3½ years of commencement of candidature and examined within six months to enable award within four years of commencement. The Chair of Academic Board suggested that we might need to introduce absolute time limits for completion of the PhD, as it does not currently have them.

**Resolution AQC18/3-9**

The Academic Quality Committee considered and provided feedback on the options for improving the University’s thesis examination times, in particular:

1. **providing incentives to ensure supervisors complete the examiner nomination form before the thesis submission date;**
2. **transitioning from three examiners to two for doctoral degrees;**
3. **amending the University of Sydney (Higher Degree by Research) Rule 2011 to:**
   a. require PhD candidates to complete within 16 research periods;
   b. establish an expected thesis submission date of 14 research periods;
   c. establish a candidature time limit of 10 years;
4. **developing/implementing a thesis management tool which can help the University better manage examinations; and / or**
5. **changing the default mode of examination from the current review model to an oral, or viva-voce, examination.**

### 4.2 Course Review: PG Nursing

The Chair advised that this submission is a ‘pre-review review’, rather than a review as such, so the paper is missing a number of essential elements (such as the self-critique). Ms Currie concurred that four out of five postgraduate coursework courses had been reviewed in late 2017, with one review still underway, and that Nursing is seeking permission to submit a full suite of reviews in Semester 2. Members supported this proposition.

In discussion, inclusion of elements in the course pulse reports was discussed, and Craig Napier undertook to advise whether the ‘first in family’ data related to first in university study in general or the first to study at the level of the course (in this instance, postgraduate coursework). The inclusion of pathway and cognate degree data would also be welcomed, as would data available via Learning Analytics (unit of study surveys and the like). The inclusion of University averages for all IAP-provided statistics was also recommended.

The possibility was raised of including employment outcomes in the course review process, as well as employee and recruitment agent feedback. It was suggested that collection of this information should be undertaken by faculties, with input from IAP where possible.
The Chair and Secretary agreed to liaise with IAP prior to the next meeting to discuss data collection and reporting.

**Resolution AQC18/3-10**

The Academic Quality Committee endorsed the updated review schedule for award courses in Sydney Nursing School, as presented.

**Action 9/2018:** Liaise with IAP to refine data collection and reporting. **Responsible:** Chair, Secretary. **Timing:** Next meeting.

### 4.3 Course Review: Master of Nutrition and Dietetics

In the absence of a representative from the Faculty of Science, the Chair led discussion of this proposal. It was observed that the average WAM for this course is higher than is typical, likely reflecting the competitive admissions process for the course. Retention is also high, with positive feedback received from employers. Infrastructure support for the program is a concern. The drop in low-SES admissions over the last two years was flagged for interrogation, and a request is to be made for further advice as to how such students are supported by the Faculty. The Chair of Academic Board also advised of his reassurance that this program is accredited, leading to increased confidence as to the quality of the course.

**Resolution AQC18/3-11**

The Academic Quality Committee agreed to recommend that the Academic Board approve the course review from the Faculty of Science for the Master of Nutrition and Dietetics, as amended.

**Action 10/2018:** Request further information from the Faculty regarding the decrease in the proportion of low-SES students admitted, as well as support for such students. **Responsible:** Secretary. **Timing:** Before submission to the Academic Board.

### 4.4 Course Review: Master of Sustainability

It was observed that there is potential duplication between this award course and offerings in Architecture, Design & Planning and Business, which may be worth closer examination. The course model may also benefit from review in combination with these other offerings, with a possible transition into a cross-disciplinary governance structure via the Board of Interdisciplinary Studies.

The lack detail as to changes arising from student feedback and the absence of dates and owners for required actions on the submitted action plan were both flagged as needing further work. It was noted that the implementation plan does not address all of the recommendations arising from the review, and that this needs to be addressed as well. Defined learning outcomes also need to be included.

It was agreed to refer this review report back to the Faculty for further development and representation to a future meeting.

**Resolution AQC18/3-12**

The Academic Quality Committee agreed that the course review from the Faculty of Science for the Master of Sustainability be referred back to the Faculty for further development, to be represented to a future meeting.

### 4.5 Phase 4 Faculty Review: Sydney Conservatorium of Music

The Chair of Academic Board informed members that the Conservatorium engaged positively with the review process, although they had technical issues with collection of some of the data included in the report. It was observed that the funding model for the Conservatorium is different from domestic and international competitors, and that it is a testament to the Conservatorium that it remains competitive with these institutions. It was agreed that the findings of the review were positive.

Associate Professor Nelson extended thanks to the review panel for their positive engagement, and informed members that the Conservatorium continues to progress against its research development and strategy, recently being awarded two ARC Discovery grants. The Chair also observed that the Conservatorium is “punching above its weight” in the HDR student space.
The Academic Quality Committee agreed to recommend that the Academic Board approve the Academic Board / University Executive Phase Four Faculty Review Report for the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, as presented.

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 Unit of Study Survey 2017 Results Summary

The Director of Education Strategy spoke to this paper and drew the attention to several prominent issues. He advised that the University as a whole and many individual faculties did not meet the key performance indicator (KPI) targets in this area, and he asked the Committee to continue to monitor this through the course review process. In discussion, the Chair asked how we might improve the 34 per cent response rate, also questioning the reliability of the available data. Linking survey completion to the release of grades was suggested as a means to increase engagement, and the timing of surveys to close after final exams was also flagged as a possible reason for poor response. The possibility was also raised as to possible bias in survey responses, and the Director of Education Strategy undertook to report back on this. The disappointing figures relating to closing the loop were also noted.

Resolution AQC18/3-14
The Academic Quality Committee noted the Unit of Study Survey 2017 Results Summary.


5.2 Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) 2017 Results Summary

The Director of Education Strategy advised that this paper focuses on opportunities for improvement, with a fundamental take-away being that much of our teaching remains poor. HDR climate and infrastructure also persist as areas of dissatisfaction, which the Director of Graduate Research is developing initiatives to address. Members were cautioned that the GOS is a ‘laggy’ indicator, so it may not reflect recent initiatives in this area.

Resolution AQC18/3-15
The Academic Quality Committee noted the Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS) 2017 Results Summary.

6 OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Any Other Business

There being no other business, the meeting concluded at 4:12pm.

Next meeting: 2:00pm – 4:00pm, Tuesday 10 July 2018
Senate Room, Quadrangle

A full copy of the Academic Quality Committee papers is available at: https://sydney.edu.au/secretariat/pdfs/academic-board-committees/academic-quality/2018/20180508-AQC-Agenda-Pack.pdf