ACADEMIC QUALITY COMMITTEE

2:00pm – 4:00pm, Tuesday 4 September 2018
Senate Room, Quadrangle (A14)

Members Present: Associate Professor Wendy Davis (Chair); Dr Tooran Alizadeh (Architecture, Design & Planning); Professor Matthew Conaglen (Law); Professor Rae Cooper (Business); Jane Currie (Nursing); Dr Mark Halaki (Health Sciences); Dr Christopher Hartney (Academic Board Representative); Weihong Liang (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); Associate Professor Kathleen Nelson (Chair, HDRESC); Associate Professor Alyson Simpson (Arts & Social Sciences)

Attendees: Dr Matthew Charet (Executive Officer to Academic Board); Dr Glenys Eddy (Committee Officer, Secretariat); Tristan Enright (Manager, Educational Integrity) (for Item 4.1); Sally Pearce (Manager, Special Projects, IAP);

Apologies: Associate Professor Javid Atai (Engineering & IT); Kubra Chambers (Director, Institutional Analytics & Planning); Dr Betty Chaar (Pharmacy); Associate Professor Ayman Ellakwa (Dentistry); Professor Mark Gorrell (Medicine); Professor Pip Pattison (Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)); Dr Carl Schneider (Academic Board Representative); Donald Tochukwu Azuatalam (PG Student);

MINUTES

1 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were noted as recorded above.

2 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

2.1 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 July 2018 were confirmed as a true record of that meeting.

Resolution AQC18/5-1
The Academic Quality Committee resolved that the minutes of meeting 3/2018, held on 10 July 2018, be confirmed as a true record of that meeting.

2.2 Action Schedule / Business Arising

The Committee noted the updates to the Action Schedule to date, and requested the following updates be made to the Action Schedule:

- 2/2018: the HDR APR statistics are complete;
- 10/2018: The Committee had approved the Master of Nutrition and Dietetics course review, but had asked the Faculty for more comment. Matthew Charet has sought and received advice from the Faculty, which will be circulated after it has been seen by the Chair. The Faculty responded that entrance is by merit and does not consider SES status of applicants. Possible changes to the way in which low SES is determined were discussed, including using the school that students attend as an indicator, instead of the practice of using the postcode. Classification of schools is currently according to their postcode, but could be done by Census data. The Chair requested Sally Pearce’s team to investigate and report back on the issue.
- 12/2018: investigation of the possible correlation between HDR scholarships and timeliness of thesis submission is still pending;
- 13/2018: the Chair is to convene a group to prepare guidance documentation for students on how to prepare appeals.
Resolution AQC18/5-2
That the Academic Quality Committee noted the updates to the action schedule.

3 STANDING ITEMS

3.1 Report of the Chair
The Chair reported that the Academic Board was continuing to work with the Risk Management Team to identify and manage risks to academic matters that are the responsibility of the Academic Board. When this work progresses further, it will be brought to the committee for review, consultation, and approval.

Resolution AQC18/5-3
The Academic Quality Committee noted the report of the Chair.

3.2 Report of the Academic Board
The Chair of Academic Board advised that he had nothing to add to the written report.

Resolution AQC18/5-4
The Academic Quality Committee noted the report of the Academic Board meeting held on 12 June 2018.

3.3 Report of the HDR Examinations Sub-Committee
A/Prof. Nelson reported that the quarterly statistics for the second quarter 2018 will be submitted to the next meeting.

Members expressed concern over the cases of plagiarism referred to in the report. The HDRESC Chair noted that these were relatively minor cases – of the sort that are typically referred back to the Associate Dean for remediation, and then reported back to the sub-committee.

A/Prof. McCallum observed that cases of plagiarism detected at the submission stage should be reported to the Integrity Office immediately. If a case does not constitute misconduct, then the student can be asked to show cause, to undergo another performance review, or to correct the thesis before submission. These cases should be reported to the HDRESC.

The Committee discussed several aspects of ethical practice in relation to HDR candidature, and requested information on the following:

1. It was established that not all theses need ethics approval, but some do; guidance is to be sought on how this is determined for individual theses. Associate Professor Nelson noted that students do not always mention their ethics approval in their thesis. The Committee Officer will ask the Ethics Office about the existence of guidelines about which types of HDR theses need ethics clearance.

2. It was unclear whether Annual Progress Reviews (APRs) determine whether ethics approval is obtained as HDR students are progressing through their candidature. The Chair will attempt to establish whether this issue is being addressed at APRs.

3. There was discussion concerning which processes, if any, are in place to guarantee that ethical guidelines are being followed by HDR students. The need for more discussion about when the HDR Centre puts HDR theses through Turnitin was identified. Associate Professor Coleman clarified that any egregious case is sent to the Research Integrity Office, but others that are not passed are either ‘revise and resubmit’ or ‘show cause’. The Chair is to seek further advice from the Research Office and from A/Prof. Coleman about this matter.

It was noted that nine modules are offered for HDR students, including Responsible Research Practice and some specifically on ethics, which faculties may insist that their HDR students complete. It was suggested that faculties in which many students conduct research with human participants could prescribe mandatory modules for their HRD students. Dr Hartney suggested that where coursework is included in research degrees, an ethics component could be included in the coursework.

Resolution AQC18/5-5
The Academic Quality Committee noted the Report of the Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Examinations Subcommittee meeting of 31 July 2018, as presented.
**Action 15/2018:** to seek advice from the Ethics Office concerning which types of HDR theses need ethics clearance and obtain guidelines, if available.

*Responsible:* Committee Officer. *Timing:* As soon as possible.

**Action 16/2018:** to establish whether APRs address ethics approval.

*Responsible:* Chair. *Timing:* As soon as possible.

**Action 17/2018:** to seek advice from the Research Office and/or A/Prof. Coleman concerning the nature of any processes in place to guarantee that ethical guidelines are being followed by HDR students.

*Responsible:* Chair. *Timing:* As soon as possible.

### 3.4 2019 Meeting Dates

Matthew Charet advised the Committee that the Academic Board approved the meeting dates for 2019 at its last meeting. The Committee Officer will circulate the 2019 meeting invitations shortly.

**Resolution AQC18/5-6**

The Academic Quality Committee noted the 2019 meeting schedule for the Academic Board and committees, as presented.

## 4 ITEMS FOR ACTION

### 4.1 Course Review - Psychotherapy

Due to the absence of Psychotherapy representative, this item was held over to the next meeting.

**Resolution AQC18/5-7**

The Academic Quality Committee:

1. noted the submission from the Sydney Medical School of the course review report for the Psychotherapy program; and
2. welcomed the presentation of this review at its next meeting on the 30th of October.

### 4.2 Course Monitoring

The Chair reported that the Committee now has access to the Course Pulse Report dashboard, and requested that the Committee decide on the quantities and values that could serve as triggers for determining when communication with the relevant faculty was warranted.

Members suggested:

- when a large disparity between success and retention was observed;
- the Chair suggested WAM, very low and very high in the first instance;
- enrolment numbers: large numbers and large leaps in enrolment numbers have implications for resources; very small enrolment numbers are prone to data distortion, although this committee is concerned mainly with large numbers in the context of academic quality;
- large changes in enrolment numbers
- the relative proportions of domestic and international students
- large growth in the number of enrolled international students.

Caution was advised when sharing course monitoring data with colleagues; A/Prof. Masters recommended sharing it “in confidence” with University colleagues, but not externally. Sally Pearce observed that, at present, it is shared between some staff in the DVC Education Portfolio and this committee.

The Chair expected the list of quantities to be iterative, and undertook to devise a list of quantities to aid discussion of the meaning fulness of the data at the next meeting.

**Resolution AQC18/5-8**

The Academic Quality Committee noted the update on course monitoring.

**Action 18/2018:** The Chair to devise a list of degree programs with outlying values for inclusion in the agenda for the next meeting. *Responsible:* Chair. *Timing:* for next meeting, 30 October.

### 4.3 Appeals Reporting 2017
The Chair noted that the Committee had received a number of reports for the previous meeting but was still waiting on more submissions to finalise the 2017 report.

The Committee made the following observations:

- The Chair noted significant variability in the number of appeals reported between faculties. She also noted that the comments submitted indicate widespread confusion on behalf of students about some matters, such as time limits and when it is appropriate to use the appeal process.
- The notable percentage of successful appeals can be taken as an indication of faculties’ willingness to consider the student’s circumstances and act accordingly;
- It was noted that deadlines for student appeals of attempts to show good cause are often during January, when many students are not actively engaged with the university.
- Related to the Committee’s discussion concerning the consistency of the application of the appeals process by the faculties, the Chair is to inquire with faculties, where responses were unclear about some procedural details of the “informal appeal” stage.

Resolution AQC18/5-9
The Academic Quality Committee noted the reports on 2017 Faculty-level appeals data, as presented.

Action 19/2018: the Chair is to make inquiries with faculties regarding informal appeal details and report back to the Committee. Responsible: the Chair. Timing: as soon as practical

4.4 Educational Integrity Trend Report, Semester 1 2018

A/Prof. McCallum commented on the increase in overall incidents of academic misconduct, and the increasing incidence of concerted targeting of students by external companies offering tutoring, but which are, in reality, channels into ghost writing. He reported that the proportion of cases involving international students was higher than for domestic students. Despite offering workshops for the former, the gap between the two is still large. However, the recidivism rate is low. A/Prof. McCallum noted that strategies have been implemented to deal with the intense amount of activity by these external companies. He intends to stress to students the risks inherent in using these services. For instance, cases of blackmail have been reported by other universities.

Some of these companies present themselves in a manner that suggests a connection with the University. It was suggested that these companies might be reported to ASIC or the ATO. A/Prof. McCallum observed that the University needs to implement its own student support processes to counter the methods of academic dishonesty and contract cheating. However, it was reported that, throughout the University, problems encountered with the reporting system discouraged staff from reporting suspected cases. One suggestion was to create deep connections with the University’s international student communities through mentoring programs and other means.

It was noted that permitting students to engage editors had inherent risks. Editing might disguise students’ problems, such as poor writing skills, and some think it is better to receive a poorly written essay to assess a student’s performance and needs, rather than to receive a polished one. The conditions under which editing was acceptable were considered. For instance, cases of blackmail have been reported by other universities. It was noted that these appeals should be reported to the Academic Board. A/Prof. McCallum suggested that this area remain open for discussion, stating that he is not intending to change policy immediately.

Resolution AQC18/5-10
The Academic Quality Committee:
1. discussed and noted the Educational Integrity Trend Report for Semester 1 2018; and
2. recommended that the Academic Board note the report.

4.5 Student Experience Survey (SES): 2017 Results Summary

Items 4.5 and 5.1 were discussed together. Committee made the following comments concerning the 2017 Student Experience Survey results:

• low response rates: the Chair commented on the noteworthiness of low response rates, and observed that the perception exists that the surveys elicit the more polarized responses;
• data bias: the Committee had previously discussed checking student satisfaction data for bias, particularly as it relates to the gender of teachers. A/Prof. McCallum has communicated with Kathryn Bartimote-Aufflick about this and will follow this up. Sally Pearce suggested that this might be within the purview of new Vice-Provost;
• satisfaction vs quality: in interpreting the survey responses, the difference between student satisfaction and academic quality needs to be borne in mind;
• feedback: in the USS, feedback to students has been the worst performing item for some time. Action needs to be taken to educate students about what constitutes feedback. This has been done in FASS with good results.
• closing the loop: the ‘closing the loop’ average is very low; it might be that this is understood differently within the University;
• writing skills: the level of writing capacity exhibited by the University’s undergraduate students was seen as needing attention; the fact that minimal writing is required of some students in their undergraduate degree was noted; one suggestion was to develop an OLE on writing skills;
• A/Prof. McCallum observed that the AQ Committee can both make observations using data correlations between cohorts and specific recommendations to the DVC Education.

Resolution AQC18/5-11
The Academic Quality Committee discussed the Student Experience Survey (SES): 2017 Results summary report, as presented, making the observations recorded above.

Action 20/2018: the Chair to follow-up with Kathryn Bartimote-Aufflick and Professor Colm Harmon about potential bias in USS results. Responsible: the Chair. Timing: As soon as possible.

5 ITEMS FOR NOTING

5.1 Unit of Study Survey: 2018 Semester 1 Results Summary
Items 4.5 and 5.1 were discussed together (notes in 4.5).

Resolution AQC18/5-12
The Academic Quality Committee noted the report on Unit of Study Survey 2018 Semester 1 results.

6 OTHER BUSINESS

6.1 Any Other Business
There being no other business, the meeting concluded at 3.59 pm.

Next meeting: 2:00pm – 4:00pm, Tuesday 30 October 2018
F23 Level 5 Function Room

A full copy of the Academic Quality Committee agenda papers is available at: