PRESENT

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor D McEachern) – Chair
Nominee of the Chair of the Academic Board (Professor B Kirk)
President of the Postgraduate Students’ Association (Ms B Crowe)
Professor H Barrett
Professor B Giles-Corti
Professor J Finlay-Jones
Associate Professor A Lynch
Professor N Morgan
Dr G Parish
Professor S Powles
Professor C Raston
Mr M Thomas
Professor G Yeoh

By Invitation:
Associate Professor J Gregory
Professor P Handford
Dr J Lee
Associate Professor I McArthur
Associate Professor I McLean
Professor D Sampson

Dr J Berman (for Item 6)
Dr C Thomson (as Executive Officer)

Apologies
Dr E Chapman
Professor S Houghton
Professor R Owens
Professor Z Rengel

1. MINUTES – REF F14660

   Confirmation

RESOLVED – 7

To confirm the minutes of the Research Committee meeting held on 17 May 2007.

2. STATISTICS CLINIC QUARTERLY REPORT

Members noted the attached (Attachment RC1) report by the Director of the UWA Statistical Consulting Group on activities of the Statistics Clinic for Postgraduate Research Students for the period 1 January 2007 to 31 March 2007. This Clinic is funded as part of the Central Research Allocation approved by the Research Committee each year.
3. **UWA CENTRE FOR RESEARCH FOR WOMEN – REF F7368**

The Centre for Research for Women was formally disestablished as a UWA Centre on the 18 June 2007. Members noted the attached (*Attachment RC2*) final report detailing the Centre’s activities following its relocation from Curtin University to UWA in April 2006.

4. **REPORT OF THE DEPUTY VICE-CHAIRMAN (RESEARCH AND INNOVATION)**

Research Quality Framework – Ref F13785

The University recently completed a trial Research Quality Framework (RQF) for the Western Australian Telecommunications Research Institute (WATRI), which is a cross-institutional research group involving Curtin University. In conducting the trial draft confidential RQF specifications were provided by DEST and were made available to the research group so that a submission could be compiled. These specifications were essentially left unexplained so that issues to do with poor wording of the guidelines could be highlighted. During the trial the following issues were raised:

- Compilation of the data sets in the required fields which describe the body of work is onerous, particularly when the information is held in different IT systems and is difficult to extract.
- What is required to complete the impact statement is muddled and confused. Even for WATRI this proved to be the case despite this group having a strong history of commercialisation, because the specifications attempt to describe the process of demonstrating impact rather than the outcome.
- There is a major issue with appropriate engagement and cooperation of the research group with the UWA RQF office, which helped to prepare the portfolio. Without this engagement the case for quality and impact is weakened and so identifying ‘Stewards’ for each research group is critical.

Preparations for the RQF are continuing at UWA with the identification of possible research groups. The Socrates IT system has provided the opportunity to aggregate research performance of individuals in each research group to help model the outcome. Discussions are currently being held with Deans to finalise research groups in the lead up to the RQF implementation.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Research) met as a group last month and agreed on some common criticisms of the RQF, including making a request to DEST and the Minister for a postponement of at least a year to accommodate the preparatory work needed in the sector.

Meanwhile the UWA RQF office has already provided DEST with very detailed feedback on their draft RQF specifications and this has had some positive responses on reducing the complexity of the specifications and the data requirements.

5. **UNIVERSITY POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP SCHEME – REF RA/2/803/2**

(a) **Selection Report**

Members noted the report of the University Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (UPRF) Assessment Panel which recommended the appointment of four candidates and two reserves in the 2007 round. At the request of the Chair the Assessment Panel also ranked the top ten candidates it considered worthy of support if additional funding was to be made available for the scheme.

(b) **Policy**

The attached (*Attachment RC3*) report by Professor Tim Auckland collates some recommendations of the 2007 Assessment Panel members for improving the UPRF scheme in future rounds. The recommendations include:
• The Head of School should be required to make a specific statement on the quality and innovative nature of each proposal.

• Promoting at least one UPRF in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences might need to be considered in order to encourage high quality applications from this area.

In considering these recommendations members commented that they would not support the sequestering of awards to particular discipline areas, and that it would be inappropriate to use ARC or NHMRC expert reviews to make judgements about funding proposals. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) requested that members provide him with further feedback on the UPRF scheme so that any changes to the rules might be brought back to the Research Committee for approval before the next round.

6. RECONCEPTUALISING POST-PHD RESEARCH PATHWAYS

The attached (Attachment RC4) position paper was prepared by Dr Judy Berman, Research Development Officer, and proposes two strategies the University might consider to increase the number of postdoctoral researchers at UWA. Members will recall that Research Agenda 2007 was discussed at the February 2007 meeting of the Research Committee where it was suggested that for UWA to improve its research performance it needed to increase significantly the number of research specialist staff employed.

Dr Berman was present at the meeting to talk to her paper, which draws on her own experiences as a postdoctoral fellow as well as experiences of other countries to reconceptualise post-PhD research pathways. As well as conceiving mechanisms for creating new postdoctoral positions at UWA the paper makes some suggestions for developing a coherent programme of policies, processes and practices in postdoctoral education and training at our University.

There was strong support for the concepts and initiatives outlined in the proposal and during subsequent discussion members made the following comments:

• Postdoctoral careers beyond UWA are important because the quality of researcher reflects the quality of training at UWA and helps to forge future external and industry relationships and networks.

• There is an incredible risk for early career researcher pathways, even though the performance of a particular researcher might be good. To have an approach that helps support post-PhD pathways is a powerful message for UWA to be seen as a point of difference.

• There is a suggestion that a 6-year period post-PhD is too long and that there needs to be some encouragement to move to independent funding earlier than this.

• Post-PhD pathways need to support a diversity of the postdoctoral cohort. There are some who will be research leaders and strategic thinkers, but others may be content with conducting research projects under strong direction.

• The paper reinforces the notion that the postdoctoral researcher themselves are important in the University community and should be supported. The issue is how we build a sustainable base of career researchers.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) concluded discussion by thanking Dr Berman for her positive contribution and then asking that if members had any further feedback on the position paper that they provide this to Dr Berman directly.

Confirmed

CHAIR