VICE-CHANCELLOR'S REPORT TO ACADEMIC COUNCIL

5 March 2008

1. Education

Accreditation by Engineers Australia

The University’s undergraduate engineering degree courses were reviewed by Engineering Australia in 2007. The review, by an Engineers Australia Australian Engineering Accreditation Centre review panel, was extremely comprehensive. The review involved assessment of all aspects of the degree courses and the review visit included meetings with academic staff delivering courses, course leaders involved in course planning and development, students, graduates and external stakeholders including employers. The outcome of this thorough review was a very positive report and recommendation for the re-accreditation of UWA’s undergraduate engineering programs.

2. Research

Shanghai Jiao Tong – Academic Ranking of World Universities by Broad Subject Fields

For the second year the Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Institute of Higher Education has published a ranking of world universities in each of five broad subject fields. This ranking by field is published separately from the main Shanghai Jiao Tong university rankings, which are next due for publication in August 2008.

The subject field ranking lists the top world universities in each of: Natural Sciences and Mathematics; Engineering/Technology and Computer Sciences; Life and Agricultural Sciences; Clinical Medicine and Pharmacy, and, Social Sciences. Individual rankings are given up to 50th position, followed by bands to around 107th. The University of Western Australia was ranked in the top 100 world universities in two of the five areas:

- UWA achieved a ranking of 47 in Life and Agricultural Sciences. This result, while showing a fall from 37th last year placed UWA second in Australia with only three other Australian universities listed. They were:
  - ANU = 40, up from 44 last year;
  - UQ = band 76-107, down from band 52-76 last year; and,
  - UMelb = band 76-107 no change from last year.

- In Clinical Medicine and Pharmacy, UWA was ranked in the band 52-75*. This is the same position as last year and, of other Australian universities only UQ (band 51-75, no change) and the University of Melbourne (band 52-75, up from band 76-108 last year) appeared.

* NOTE: the 2007 index for Clinical Medicine and Pharmacy included a band from 51 to 75 whereas the 2008 ranking included a band from 52 to 75. This is due to two universities being ranked equal 50th in 2008.
Review of National Innovation System

The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, announced on 22 January that the Government was undertaking a review of the national innovation system. The review will be undertaken by an expert panel that will be chaired by Dr Terry Cutler.

As part of the review, the panel will also consider all aspects of the Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Program. It will examine the overall strategic direction of CRCs, looking at the full range of issues, including governance and program design matters, the level and length of funding needed to support the program's objectives, as well as its overall scope and effectiveness.

The review panel will identify gaps and weaknesses in the innovation system and develop proposals to address them. In particular, it will:

- Identify a set of principles to underpin the role and participation of the public sector in innovation.
- Develop a set of national innovation priorities to complement the national research priorities, ensuring the objectives of research programs and other innovation initiatives are complementary.
- Identify regulatory and other barriers to innovation and recommend ways to minimise these.
- Examine the scope for simplifying and reducing program duplication and ensuring that any support provided is well-targeted and easy to access.
- Consider the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Research and Development (R&D) Tax Concession Scheme in promoting innovation and make recommendations to improve innovation outcomes.
- Consider ways to improve the governance of the national innovation system to support higher expectations of government agencies and industry.
- Assess the appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency of the Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Program and make recommendations to improve innovation outcomes.

The panel members are:

- Dr Megan Clark (Vice President Technology, BHP Billiton);
- Professor Glyn Davis (Vice Chancellor, University of Melbourne);
- Professor Steve Dowrick (School of Economics, Australian National University);
- Dr Nicholas Gruen (CEO, Lateral Economics);
- Ms Narelle Kennedy (Chief Executive, Australian Business Foundation);
- Ms Catherine Livingstone (former Chair of CSIRO and Director, Macquarie Bank and Telstra); and
- Dr Jim Peacock (ex-officio, the Commonwealth Chief Scientist).

(the above detail is taken from the panel’s terms of reference available from http://www.innovation.gov.au/innovationreview/Pages/home.aspx)

The panel will prepare a green paper by the end of July 2008, which will be followed by a response from the Government.

3. Management

VSU Review
The Commonwealth Government has announced it is reviewing the policy of Voluntary Student Unionism as established by the previous Government in July 2006. The Rudd Government believes that the VSU policy has made it difficult for many university students to access amenities and services including childcare; health services; counselling; advocacy and sporting facilities. A discussion document has been prepared examining the financial impact of VSU on institutions, on services, student representation and on advocacy. The paper is available at:
http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/higher_education/policy_issues_reviews/key_issues/VSU/Voluntary_Student_Unionism.htm

Minister for Youth the Hon Kate Ellis MP is leading a series of consultation meetings on the discussion paper in late February and March of this year. UWA will be represented at the Perth consultation meetings by the Registrar and Director of Student Services and by the Guild President. Submissions on the discussion paper close on 11 March 2008.

UWA has maintained a very high rate of students electing to join the Guild of Undergraduates compared with other universities. At UWA this year 75% of undergraduate students have opted to join compared with rates below 50% at some other universities.

4. External Relations

VC’s Visit to Canada
In late February 2008 I travelled to Canada for a second visit as a member of the panel reviewing Canada’s Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC). The NSERC is Canada’s national body responsible for strategic investment in science and technology. The NSERC supports basic university research through grant programs and supports collaborative research through government/industry partnerships. It also provides a range of scholarships. As with the Australian Research Council, the NSERC is government funded and overseen by a Council. It was a considerable honour and a great opportunity to be invited to be a member of the review panel.

Visit to India by DVCRI and Barry Marshall
The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and Nobel Laureate Barry Marshall have returned from a very successful visit to India in February. The DVCRI and Professor Marshall were joined on the trip by Professors Mark Bush, Hema Sharda, Arunasalam Dharmarajan, Kanagasingam Yogesan and Kevin Croft and Mr Kelly Smith. Key events as part of the visit included:
• Visits in Hyderabad to Osmania University (including a meeting with the Vice-Chancellor), the University of Hyderabad and the LV Prasad Eye Institute; and to the National Institute of Science and Technology the National Institute of Immunology and Delhi University in New Delhi.
• Meetings with significant political figures in New Delhi including Rahul Gandhi, General Secretary of the Congress Party.
• A lecture to 600 students by Barry Marshall at the Centre for Cellular and Molecular Biology (CCMB) in Hyderabad.
• A lecture to 1200 students by Barry Marshall at the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi and the signing of an agreement between IIT Delhi and UWA’s Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics.
• The 2008 Burnet Lecture given by Barry Marshall in Hyderabad, arranged by the Australian High Commission as part of the Bio Asia convention.
• Plenary Lecture given by Barry Marshall at the 5th Indo-Australian Conference on Medical Biotechnology at the National Institute of Immunology in New Delhi

The very successful visit has significantly enhanced the University’s relationships in India and has opened the way for high level agreements and collaborations in many areas.

UWA Team wins Google Earth Competition
UWA’s team has won the Google Earth “Build your Campus in 3D" competition. The competition challenged universities in Australia and New Zealand to recreate all or part of their university campus so that it could be viewed using Google Earth. Only three teams were shortlisted, with the other two teams coming from the University of Melbourne. All three teams travelled to Sydney for the announcement of the winner on 18 February. As a result of the competition win, the UWA team’s 3D model of the University campus, developed through the Virtual Universe Project will now be available on Google Earth for anyone in the world to navigate through. This is a great result which will assist in raising the University’s profile internationally.

UWA’s winning team was led by Jay Jay Jegathesan School Manager in the School of Physics (formerly of Computer Science), Chris Thorne and Wong Tzu Yen of the School of Computer Science and Software Engineering and both undergraduate and postgraduate students from computer science, engineering and architecture.

Alan Robson
Vice-Chancellor
25 February 2008