MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE SENATE ROOM ON 14 FEBRUARY 2008

PRESENT

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor D McEachern) - Chair
Nominee of the Chair of the Academic Board (Professor K Simmer)
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) (Professor R Owens)
President of the Postgraduate Students' Association (Mr D Bond)
Mr S Anderson
Professor H Barrett
Associate Professor S Broomhall
Professor K Miller
Professor N Morgan
Professor Z Rengel
Professor J Sweeney
Associate Professor L Vidovich

Standing Invitees:
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Initiatives) (Professor Alistar Robertson)

By invitation in an Observing Capacity:
Dr E Chapman
Associate Professor J Lee
Dr W Maier
Dr S Stewart

Dr J Berman
Dr C Thomson (Executive Officer)

Apologies
Professor K Croft
Associate Professor A Lynch
Professor D Pannel
Mr T Shanahan
Professor G Yeoh

1. MINUTES – REF F14660

Confirmation

RESOLVED – 1

To confirm the minutes of the Research Committee meeting held on 1 November 2007.

2. PRINCIPLES AND RULES OF OPERATION OF UNIVERSITY COMMITTEES, AND MEMBERS’ CODE OF CONDUCT

Members were asked to refresh their knowledge of the Principles and Rules of Operation of University Committees, and the Members' Code of Conduct, which is available at Attachment RC1.

3. RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP IN 2008 – REF F14662

Members noted the attached (Attachment RC2) 2008 membership of the Research Committee.
4. **UWA SUPPLEMENTARY TRAVEL GRANTS FOR NEW ACADEMIC STAFF – REF F896**

Members noted the final reports of Dr Penelope Hawken Plant Biology, Dr David Nelson CPEB, Dr Michael Shane Plant Biology, Dr Danica Cvejanovic Physics, Dr Guicheng Zhang Paediatrics & Child Health, Dr Surya Singh Mechanical Engineering, Dr Aleksandra Filipovska UWA Centre for Medical Research, Dr Oliver Rackman UWA Centre for Medical Research, Dr Chang Yau Hoon Social & Cultural Studies, Dr Chantal Ferguson UWA Centre for Asthma, Allergy & Respiratory Research, Dr William Macdonald BBCS, Larry Neale Business School, Dr Ingrid Laing Paediatrics & Child Health, Dr Nathan Pevlos Surgery & Pathology, Dr Samantha Clarke Plant Biology, and Dr Jason Wu Medicine & Pharmacology, for their UWA Supplementary Travel Grants for New Academic Staff.

5. **STATISTICS CLINIC QUARTERLY REPORT – REF F19621**

Members noted the attached (Attachment RC3) report by the Director of the UWA Statistical Consulting Group on activities of the Statistics Clinic for Postgraduate Research Students for the period 1 July 2007 to 30 September 2007.

This Report is relevant to the meeting because the Statistics Clinic is funded as part of the Central Research Allocation (CRA) approved by the Research Committee each year.

5. **REPORT OF THE DEPUTY VICE-CHANCELLOR (RESEARCH AND INNOVATION)**

(a) **Excellence in Research for Australian (ERA) Initiative**

The new Government has announced expert review in the assessment of research quality under the new Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) initiative, which is Labour's streamlined and simplified RQF replacement.

Research funding will be decoupled from performance in the ERA and the new scheme will be administered by the Australian Research Council. Details of the scheme are still being decided but a consultation period is imminent to ensure a start date in 2009.

(b) **Review of the National innovation System**

The Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, Senator Kim Carr, has announced a wide ranging review of Australia’s national innovation system to be conducted by an expert panel chaired by Dr Terry Cutler.

Currently there are 169 programmes in Australia, across all levels of government, aimed at supporting innovation. The review will allow a streamlining of these programs, reducing fragmentation and improving effectiveness.

A review of the national Innovation System will also ensure a thorough and complete review of all elements of the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) program. Restoring the public good benefit of the CRC program is high on the agenda of the Rudd Government. The next CRC selection round will be held once the outcomes of the review have been considered.

(c) **Visit to India**

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) recently visited India with Professor Barry Marshall in an attempt to explore opportunities for research collaboration. A detailed account was given of the institutions visited, which highlighted the greatest potential for collaboration in India is with the research institutes.

In response to a question about how faculties might be able to coordinate with the links and partnerships being established on such visits, the Deputy Vica-Chancellor (Research and
Innovation) informed members that three faculties were in fact represented on the tour. In addition to research collaborations, another aim of the visit was to attract high quality researchers and students back to UWA.

6. RESEARCH REVIEW 2007

The University of Western Australia has set itself the goal of being one of the top 50 universities in the world in the next 50 years. Towards this goal the Deputy Vice- Chancellor (Research and Innovation) produced the attached (Attachment RC4) report which considers appropriate benchmarks to help understand the base from which UWA can achieve this goal.

The conclusions drawn from the paper are summarised on the last page of the Report and highlight UWA’s strong research foundation from which to respond to the challenge of becoming a top 50 university. Members considered the Report and during the course of discussion the following points were raised:

- On research input measures UWA had the third fastest growth in external research income for the period 2003-2006 (see Table 5). However, UWA is at risk of falling behind the Go8 on Australian Competitive Grant income, particularly for ARC discovery grants which are the core of fundamental research in the Australian system.

- UWA's performance on research output measures was far less convincing. The analysis shows that UWA has the lowest percentage increase in publication numbers of the Go8 over the period 2003 to 2008 (Table 18). DEST weighted publications per academic staff FTE has UWA ranked 10th behind Macquarie and Wollongong. Even more concerning is UWA's fall in rank on citations per staff FTE from 1st in 2003 to 6th in 2006.

- There needs to be encouragement to publish in Thomson ISI rated journals, as well as Science and Nature, if UWA is to improve its position on the Jao Tong world university ranking. To this end, the Vice-Chancellor introduced last year a reward of $10,000 for every published article in Science and Nature.

- There is a need to hold workshops with UWA academic staff to promote good publishing practice and to engender a culture of publishing.

- The UWA Research Grants Scheme should require applicants to list citations and journal impact factors against each publication listed on their track record.

- There is a significant number of mid-career researchers at UWA who do not win grants, and the role of the new Pro Vice- Chancellor (Research Initiatives) together with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) will be to provide mentoring and support to improve this.

- Increasing publishing numbers is not a trade off between quality and quantity. The reality is that UWA is under-performing in both areas.

- A question was raised about why ANU was ranked so highly on citations counts. This is possibly linked to ANU researchers being cited sooner and further analysis will be done to establish this.

The discussion concluded with the Chair thanking members for their input and asking them to begin to initiate discussion in their own faculties about what more can be done to encourage staff to publish their research findings.
7. REPORT FROM THE UWA SENIOR LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

The UWA Senior Leadership Programme was held on 7 and 8 February 2008 with the theme “Connecting to the world – how can we best do it?”. During the two day retreat participants were invited to reflect on how the University can strengthen its international standing, particularly in the areas of teaching and research.

Professor Robyn Owens provided a brief overview of the issues raised at the Retreat that impact on research and research training at UWA. The retreat began with an overview of UWA's current performance given by the Vice-Chancellor, which highlighted a poor investment year in 2007 and an another anticipated this year which will see a reduction in general purpose funds in the University’s operating budget of more than $30 million in each if these years. The Vice-Chancellor also reemphasised his goal to be in the top 50 universities in the world in 50 years, and introduced a shorter term target to be in the top 100 universities in the world at the end of his term as Vice-Chancellor in 2012.

Over the two days of the Retreat much of the discussion that related to research focussed on the things UWA needs to do to improve our ranking to move the top 100 universities. The key components for improving our ranking were indentified as:

- Attracting highly cited researchers.
- Publishing in Science and Nature.
- Generating more publications in Thomson ISI rated journals.

Professor Owens also identified specifically the issue of building the best intellectual communities at UWA. In a recent survey of higher degree students undertaken by the Graduate Research School the majority of respondents rated the research ambience in their school as poor, and this is a cause for concern.

During discussion members made the following additional comments:

- The University’s recent poor investment return will almost certainly impact on the University’s use of strategic funds to address areas of priority, and this will need to be recognised when the 2009-2014 Operational Priorities Plan is developed.
- The University needs to do more to publicise its research outcomes and their impact to the wider community.
- One of the major hurdles facing academic staff is how they can undertake research with other conflicting demands on their time, such as teaching and administration. The University should be doing more to facilitate staff productivity in research.

The Chair concluded the meeting by thanking Professor Owens for her account of the UWA Leadership Retreat.

Confirmed

CHAIR