MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMIC COUNCIL

ACADEMIC COUNCIL MEETING – 2 JULY 2008

Supplementary Agenda

PART 1 – ITEMS FOR COMMUNICATION TO BE DEALT WITH EN BLOC

17. STUDENT EQUITY AND ACCESS INITIATIVES Ref F20761

The attached report on Equity and Access Initiatives has been provided by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) for the information of Council. (Attachment AH)

For noting.

SYLVIA LANG
Acting Academic Secretary
Student equity and access initiatives: a brief progress report

1. **Background:** In November 2007, I made a commitment to bring to Academic Council in mid-2008 a paper on the next wave of equity and access initiatives which UWA could take to improve the proportion of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and under-represented schools. This brief document is a progress report on work towards that.

2. **Languages bonus:** This commitment was made in the context of debate at Academic Council on 7 November 2007 on the languages (LOTE) bonus, which the University adopted to encourage the study of languages in schools and among students entering UWA. Discussion at Academic Council reflected some concern that this would have a small adverse equity effect. This effect could be more than overcome by concerted equity and access initiatives by the University.

3. **Federal government focus on ‘social inclusion’:** The focus of the new federal minister on ‘social inclusion’, including student equity and access, has acted as further encouragement to us to undertake the work on student equity and access to which we were already committed.

4. **Cultural diversity:** Separate from this work focussed on attracting students from under-represented backgrounds to UWA, and preparing them to succeed here, there is other focus on cultural diversity and related issues – such as support and encouragement for activities to promote positive interaction between Australian and international students.

5. **Existing work:** Further initiatives in student equity and access build on a great deal of excellent work which is already being done. This is set out each year in UWA’s report on ‘equity and indigenous access’ for the Institution Assessment Framework. (Equity update and Indigenous Education statement 2006 is at: [http://intranet.uwa.edu.au/page/39222](http://intranet.uwa.edu.au/page/39222) ) UWA’s many existing programs include access, flexible entry, Indigenous student, scholarship, and transition programs. To give just a few examples, these include work by the School of Indigenous Studies in aspiration-raising and preparing Indigenous students for UWA courses (most conspicuously, medicine and law), the Learning Links partnership with three government secondary schools, faculty programs such as Medicine and Dentistry Outer Metropolitan Schools Program, Flexible Entry schemes UWay and CountryWay, and the Student Services programs UniDiscovery, UniSkills (which has recently celebrated its 21st birthday), and UniMentor. Recent developments have included, for example, the commencement of Uni Smart Start at Albany, and the funding by BHP Billiton of ten scholarships for Indigenous students at St Catherine’s College.

6. **Performance:** Notwithstanding extensive and excellent work, the University’s equity and access performance has been patchy. The proportion of ‘low socio-economic status students’ (i.e. lowest 25% of general population by socio-economic status) at UWA was 7.7% in 2001, and declined to 7.5% in 2005. Such declines occurred in all bar one of the Group of Eight universities. Our performance against our own equity targets in the OPP has been disappointing.
7. **Research and reviews:** In 2007-08, a number of research and review activities have been undertaken related to student equity and access. These are important contributors to the development of new policy initiatives in this field. These activities include:

a. A study of student finance issues (including so-called ‘need blind’ systems in leading US universities) undertaken by Mr Jim Mitchell. This was initiated, under the auspices of a Centenary fund-raising planning group chaired by the Chancellor, to assist in planning for a very major drive to raise funds for scholarships through the Centenary appeal. This report was completed in late May, and is being considered by the Student Equity and Access Steering Group (see below).

b. A review of the Excellence Awards and other UWA scholarships, undertaken by a working party chaired by Dr Sato Juniper, under the auspices of the Admissions Committee. This report was initially considered by the Admissions Committee in May 2008, and is being considered by the Student Equity and Access Steering Group.

c. A further study undertaken for Universities Australia by Melbourne’s Centre for the Study of Higher Education, published in March-April 2008 under the title ‘Participation and Equity: A review of the participation in higher education of people from low socioeconomic backgrounds and Indigenous people’. The Vice-Chancellor chaired the committee which oversaw this study.

d. Work by Dr Carolyn Daniel, under the auspices of the Teaching and Learning Committee’s Achieving International Excellence Working Party, on a paper released in June 2008 as ‘The Educational Attributes of Some of the World’s “Top 50” Universities – A Discussion Paper’. This paper presented a strong focus on equity and access as an attribute of international excellence.

e. Further work, commissioned by the Vice-Chancellor, by Professor Paul Miller and Dr Elisa Birch on schools in relation to TER and the prediction of academic performance.

8. **Student Equity and Access Steering Group:** In late April, a Student Equity and Access Steering Group was formed to co-ordinate the process by which strategies for future action by UWA to improve student equity and access are brought forward (including recommendations for inclusion in the OPP 2009-2013, for the student support section of the Centenary fund-raising campaign, and for the proposed paper on the next wave of equity and access initiatives). Amongst other issues, the Steering Group will consider, or recommend other processes for considering,

a. raising aspirations among school students from disadvantaged backgrounds and among their families and in their schools and communities,

b. mature age students,

c. Indigenous students,

d. rural and remote students,

e. students with disabilities and medical conditions, and
f. CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) students, particularly those from new and emerging communities.

The Steering Group, being intended to be a co-ordinating body, is deliberately small, and comprises: Professor Don Markwell (Chair), Mr Peter Curtis, Associate Professor Jane Long, Professor Bill Louden, Associate Professor Darlene Oxenham, Mr Jon Stubbs, Dr Sato Juniper, Dr Judy Skene (member and Executive Officer).

9. **Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund bid:** With an invitation to universities to make expressions of interest for Commonwealth funding through the Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund coming with short notice before the closing date of 26 May, the Steering Group oversaw the quick preparation of a bid under the Fund’s ‘community service projects’ (including ‘social inclusion through aspiration raising activities’) criterion. The UWA expression of interest is for a project entitled ‘Partnerships with Low Socioeconomic Status, Indigenous, Refugee, Regional, Remote and Other Communities which are Under-represented in Higher Education in Western Australia’. The proposed project aims to raise the aspirations of students in communities under-represented in higher education in WA through coordinated support, in partnership and collaboration with these communities (e.g. with schools), with the object of increasing enrolment numbers, particularly in professional subjects. Further work is commencing on the elaboration of this proposal in the expectation of a request from DEEWR, following the recent expression of interest process, for a full proposal.

10. **Provisional entry for mature-age students:** The additional Commonwealth-supported places offered to UWA towards the start of first semester this year have provided the opportunity to develop a trial program to grant up to 30 mature-aged domestic students provisional admission to Commonwealth-supported places in selected single-degree courses. This is an adaptation of the existing Access UWA route for mature age students.

11. **Other related activities:** This work on student equity and access necessarily intersects with many other activities across the University. These include, for example:
   a. The launch by the Vice-Chancellor on 3 December 2007 of the Disability Access and Inclusion Action Plan, and the forthcoming creation of a working party to monitor implementation of it.
   b. The student housing project, which has as its focus the creation through public-private partnership of a minimum of 300 new student rooms in close proximity to the Crawley campus.
   c. Discussion in various forums (e.g. the Teaching and Learning Committee) of the paper by Carolyn Daniel on the educational attributes of ‘top 50’ universities. These discussions to date have evinced particular interest in such programs as outreach to under-represented schools, and student employment on campus (both for student financial support, and to promote student engagement in University life). It is intended that discussion of this paper will contribute to preparation of the OPP 2009-13.
d. Consideration by the Course Structures Review steering group of the equity and access dimensions of the options which it is considering, arising from consultations on the October 2007 issues and options paper Courses for Tomorrow’s World.

e. Likely consideration by the in-coming Director of UWA Extension, Ms Susan Marie, of ways in which Extension can assist in connecting UWA with parts of the community.

f. My suggestion of use of some Learning and Teaching Performance Fund money for ‘transition and access, including bridging programs’.

12. Next steps: The Student Equity and Access Steering Group is continuing its discussion of the studies and issues referred to above (including the reports on student finance, Excellence Awards and other scholarships, and participation and equity), and will make proposals, and encourage the making of proposals through other channels. I will then report more fully to Academic Council in the next few months.

Professor Don Markwell
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education)

19 June 2008