MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE SENATE ROOM ON 13 NOVEMBER 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)
Professor S Anderson
Associate Professor S Broomhall
Professor K Miller
Professor J Sweeney
Mr M Thomas
Associate Professor L Vidovich

By invitation in an Observing Capacity:
Professor J Davidson
Associate Professor I McLean
Dr S Stewart

Dr C Thomson (Executive Officer)

Apologies

Dr A Buti
Professor H Barrett
Associate Professor R Cardell-Oliver
Professor K Croft
Professor N Morgan
Professor D Pannell
Professor Z Rengel
Mr T Shanahan

1. MINUTES – REF F14660

Confirmation

RESOLVED – 10

To confirm the minutes of the Research Committee meeting held on 14 August 2008.

2. UWA SUPPLEMENTARY TRAVEL GRANTS FOR NEW ACADEMIC STAFF – REF F896

Members noted the attached (Attachment RC1) final reports of Dr Daniel Franklin, Centre for Forensic Science, Dr Nicola Mitchell, School of Animal Biology, Dr Kym Guelfi, School of Sport Science, Exercise and Health, Dr Scott Stewart, School of Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences, Dr Keith Stubbs, School of Biomedical, Biomolecular and Chemical Sciences, Dr Renee Firman, School of Animal Biology, Dr Jeremy Shaw, Centre for Microscopy, Characterisation and Analysis, Dr Keith Horton, School of Humanities, Ms Lucienne Tessens, Organisational and Staff Development Services, Dr Melissa Thomas, School of Animal Biology, Dr Jennifer Kelley, School of Animal Biology, Dr Anura Amarasinghe, School of Animal Biology, Dr Nicholas O'Toole, Centre for Plant Energy Biology, and Dr Jagadeesh Putta, School of Mechanical Engineering, for their UWA Supplementary Travel Grants for New Academic Staff.
One member commented that in awarding these Travel Grants that an emphasis should be given to presenting a paper or poster at a conference, and it was agreed that in future as part of the final report for staff in receipt of an award the conference should be named, the title of the paper or posted should be identified and the staff member should be required to outline what plans they have for publishing the work presented.

3. UWA POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIP SCHEME – REF

Members noted the attached (Attachment RC2) report of the Assessment Committee to recommend the award of the 2008 UWA Postdoctoral Fellowships.

4. RESEARCH TRAINING IN AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES – Interim Report

Members noted that attached (Attachment RC3) interim report of a Parliamentary Inquiry into the contribution that Australian universities make to research training in Australia, and the challenges Australian universities face in training, recruiting and retaining high quality research graduates and staff.

Some of the major issues raised during the inquiry include:

- Increased funding is needed for research and development;
- Funding is needed for the full cost of research;
- Financial support for postgraduate students is inadequate; and
- Career pathways for researchers are limited.

This report outlines some of the key recommendations for the Australian Government’s consideration, with the Committee’s final and more comprehensive report to feature full discussion of the issues.

5. RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING DATES IN 2009 - REF14662

Members noted the meeting dates for the Research Committee in 2008 are as follows:

- Thursday 12 February
- Thursday 14 May
- Thursday 13 August
- Thursday 12 November

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

(a) Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) Initiative – Ref F23627

The new specifications for the Excellence in Research Australia (ERA) initiative are with the Minister for approval and are expected to be released on 18 December 2008 for a submission date before 30 June 2009.

(b) ARC Future Fellowships and ARC Australian Laureate Fellowships – Refs RA/2/1088/1, RA/2/1107/1

Over the last month there has been a major university-wide drive to maximise the number of quality applications to the new ARC Future Fellowship and ARC Australian Laureate Fellowships rounds, with UWA submitting 66 applications and 12 applications, respectively.
7. MAJOR GRANT ROUND 2009 OUTCOMES – REFS RA/1/31/1, RA/1/54/1

A summary report of the 2009 ARC and NHMRC major grant rounds is attached (Attachment RC4).

The relatively poor result for 2009 major grant round funding has resulted in the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Initiatives) meeting individually with Deans to advise on strategies to improve the number and success of grant applications in future rounds.

A further detailed analysis of the ARC Discovery round is provided in the attached (Attachment RC5) report by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation). Several recommendations are made to help improve the University’s success in future ARC rounds, including setting potential targets for faculties in the number of applications they submit in each round and promoting faculty-based mentor schemes.

During subsequent discussion the following points were made by members:

- It seems that the gap between the top 5 Group of Eight universities and UWA is widening, but there must always be some account for the smaller size of UWA.

- Only 4 UWA faculties had a relatively good performance in the ARC Discovery grant round, but this is not related to the perceived national bias towards some disciplines.

- There is an urgent need to increase UWA’s representation on the national ARC panels.

- UWA researchers need to increase their exposure in the Eastern States, especially with ARC peers, so that their work is well known prior to submitting an application for funding.

- There has been a substantial decline in the number of successful grants won by sole Chief Investigators (from 65% in 2001 to 25% in 2009) and so collaboration is of increasing importance.

8. OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES PLAN 2009-2013

A progress report on the development of the Operational Priorities Plan (OPP) 2009-2013 was considered at the Senate meeting held on 27 October 2008, and a copy of this progress report is available at

The Research Executive has met and developed the attached (Attachment RC6) research and research training objectives and implementation strategies to form part of the OPP 2009-2013. These objectives have been discussed widely by groups across the University, including the Vice-Chancellor’s Advisory Group, the Senior Managers’ Forum and the University Managers’ Forum.

There are substantial challenges in formulating the new OPP, including the current global economic climate downturn and how this is likely to impact on the University’s aspirational target of becoming a top 50 university.

It is the intention to subsume the Academic Profile into the OPP in this new version so that the OPP will also articulate the University’s research priorities for 2009-2013. While UWA has a history and tradition based on being a comprehensive, research-intensive university, there is nonetheless a need, in light of the University’s limited resources, to provide appropriate focus and direction to our research activities.
It is therefore proposed to concentrate on a limited number of strategic research areas and a number of emerging and seed priorities while continually improving the quality of research discoveries, publications and research productivity. These strategic research areas and emerging and seed priorities have been determined in consultation with key stakeholders including major input from the faculties.

The strategic research areas are:

- Plants, animals, agriculture and environment (including managements of natural and agricultural systems).
- Exploration, production and utilisation of minerals, oil and gas.
- Fundamental bio-medical and translational approaches to health.
- Indigenous knowledge.
- Bio-engineering and bio-imaging.
- Neurosciences (including psychology).

The areas of emerging and seed priority are:

- Metrology and measurement
- Educational measurement
- Organisational behaviour
- Medieval and early modern studies
- Australian literature
- Radio astronomy
- Green chemistry
- Social policy, public policy and international studies
- Marine and ocean studies

The Chair invited members to comment on the OPP 2009-2013 draft research and research objectives and implementation strategies, as well as the proposed strategic research outcome areas and areas of emerging and seed priority. One member suggested that the use of Thomson ISI as the database of citation metrics was unreliable, at least in some disciplines. It was agreed that any database was potentially flawed but that the Thomson ISI database was used in the Jiao Tong world ranking and therefore it was relevant for this exercise.

9. DEFINITION OF RESEARCH ACTIVE

A working party was convened by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) to look at the conjunction of the different elements of research active, including research publications, research income and HDR student load and completions, and how this might be impacted by academic level and discipline. The purpose was to propose a framework in which Faculties can review their definitions of research active within the context of some generally accepted principles.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) reported that the parameters for determining the Socratic Index as a measure of research active using the Socrates system is in process, but emphasised that this would not impact on the drivers of the research component of the University budget model. The likely result is a common set of parameters for determining research activeness across all faculties, but that the definition is likely to vary across disciples.
ITEM FOR THE ATTENTION OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL FROM A MEETING OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE HELD ON 13 NOVEMBER 2008

10. UWA RESEARCH AND TRAINING CENTRES

(a) Centre for Petroleum Geosciences

Members were asked to consider a proposal to establish the Centre for Petroleum Geosciences as a UWA Research and Training Centre in the School of Earth and Geographical Sciences, Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences. The proposed Centre aims to act as a focus for research and training in petroleum geosciences and establish UWA as a major player in this growing field. The Director of the Centre will be the new appointee to the Chevron-Woodside funded Chair in Petroleum Geosciences. The proposed Centre involves collaboration of staff from SEGS with CSIRO and WA-ERA, and potentially with the Geological Survey of WA, Curtin University of Technology, and the Australian School of Petroleum at the University of Adelaide. It has the support of the Head of School and Dean and a budget of over $3 million over five years.

RESOLVED – 11

To endorse the attached (Attachment RC7) proposal to establish the Centre for Petroleum Geosciences for a 5-year period from 1 January 2009 and to forward this application to Academic Council for their approval.

(b) Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies

Members were asked to consider a proposal to establish the Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies as a UWA Research and Training Centre in the Faculty of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities. The proposed Centre aims to serve as a highly visible vehicle to promote quality research and build research capacity in the area of Medieval and Early Modern Studies. It involves collaboration predominantly amongst staff in the Schools of Humanities and Social and Cultural Studies with others from a range of disciplines. It has a budget of around $350,000 over three years, including VCDF support, and the proposal has the support of the Dean.

RESOLVED – 12

To endorse the attached (Attachment RC8) proposal to establish the Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Studies for a 3-year period from the current date and to forward this application to Academic Council for their approval.

Confirmed

CHAIR

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