MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE SENATE ROOM ON 20 MAY 2004

PRESENT

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor D McEachern) – Chair
Chair of the Academic Board (Professor D Haskell)
Dean of Graduate Research School (Professor R Owens)
President of the Postgraduate Students’ Association (Ms N Mast)
Professor R Bartlett
Professor S Berners-Price
Associate Professor S Dunlop
Mr W Harrison
Dr J Henry
Professor S Houghton
Dr J Johnston
Dr G Parish
Professor S Powles
Professor M V Sargent
Associate Professor A Ward
Associate Professor I Watson

Professor M Bush
Associate Professor A Dench
Dr P Finnegan
Associate Professor K Ilett
Mr F Morgan
Professor G Stewart
Dr J West

Dr C Thomson (as Executive Officer)
Ms S Lewis
Mrs C Casey

1. MINUTES

Confirmation

RESOLVED – 5

To confirm the minutes of the Research Committee meeting held on 12 February 2004.

2. SUPPLEMENTARY TRAVEL GRANTS FOR NEW ACADEMIC STAFF – REF F110

Reports Received

Members noted the reports of Dr Margaret Giles, Centre for Labour Market Research, Dr Barbara Cook, Centre for Natural Resource Management, Dr Ben Marwick, School of Social & Cultural Studies, Dr Peta Clode, Centre for Microscopy & Microanalysis, Dr Peter Franklin, School of Paediatrics & Child Health, Dr Johanna Pluske, School of Agricultural & Resource Economics, Dr Michael Gillan, School of Economics & Commerce, Dr Roderic Pitty, School of Social & Cultural Studies, Dr Shari Forbes, Centre for Forensic Science, Dr David Crew, School of Physics, Dr Nicole Gorham, School of Physics, Ms Siew-Kim Khoo, School of Paediatrics & Child Health, and Dr Robert Woodward, School of Physics, for their Supplementary Travel Grants for New Academic Staff.
3. UWA POSTDOCTORAL RESEARCH FELLOWSHIPS – REF RA/2/803/2

Members noted that the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) had executively approved the recommendations of the 2004 University Postdoctoral Research Fellowships (UPRFs) subcommittee to offered UPRFs to:

Dr S Humphries (School of Animal Biology and Centre for Water Research)
*Title of project: Flow-mediated responses to environmental change in suspension feeding animals.*

Dr N J Mitchell (School of Animal Biology)
*Title of project: Calls and constraints: do male frogs signal direct benefits?*

Dr C Smith (School of Biomedical & Chemical Sciences)
*Title of project: Building supramolecular architecture using benign chemical technologies.*

Dr J L Heazlewood (School of Biomedical & Chemical Sciences)
*Title of project: Protein modifications in plant mitochondria: towards functional proteomics.*

Two reserves candidates were also approved.

4. NHMRC EQUIPMENT GRANTS – REF RA/1/466/1

Members noted 23 applications were received in the 2004 NHMRC Equipment Grant round requesting $1.67 million of funding. Eleven applications were recommended for funding totalling $674,120 and these recommendations were executively approved by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

Minor policy changes for the next round were also approved including a clearer definition of an early career researcher, a specified 2-4 pages for applicants to address the selection criteria and a better definition of ‘collaborative gain’.

5. WHITFELD FELLOWSHIPS

Members recalled that in the 2004 budget of the Graduate Research School approval was given for 10 Whitfeld Fellowships to encourage the timely completion of PhD theses and to enable candidates to write up publications during the period of thesis examination. Due to the nature of these awards they are to be paid as a fellowship at the rate of a half-time (0.5) Level A Research Associate (step 1) appointment, which provides a salary of approximately $20,000 per annum for a maximum of six months during the examination period.

Members

RESOLVED - 6

to approve the attached (Attachment RC1) conditions for the awards of the Whitfeld Fellowships subject to final drafting by Legislative Committee.

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

(a) Australian Research Council and National Health & Medical Research Council Matters – Refs RA/1/31/1, RA/1/54/1

Rejoinders are due shortly for both the ARC Discovery-Projects and NHMRC Project grant rounds and rejoinder fora will be held in mid-June 2004.
The next round of ARC Centres of Excellence (CoE) has been confirmed in principle with the formal announcement being dependent largely on the date of the federal election. It is likely that Expressions of Interest will be called in September with full submissions in December. In anticipation of the impending CoE round prospective applicants were encouraged to apply for application support through the UWA Fledgling Centre scheme.

Results are still pending for the most recent round of ARC Federation Fellowships and ARC Research Networks.

(b) Cooperative Research Centres – Ref 01/06/005/008

Stage 1 of the Round 9 Cooperative Research Centres is now complete and the following applications in which UWA is a participant have been invited to progress to Stage 2:

- Australasian Invasive Animals
- Asthma and Airways
- Climate Risk Management
- Micro and Nano Technologies
- Materials Fabrication and Infrastructure Engineering
- Organic Food and Farming Systems

7. BACKING AUSTRALIA’S ABILITY: BUILDING OUR FUTURE THROUGH SCIENCE AND INNOVATION

On 6 May 2004 the Prime Minister announced Backing Australia’s Ability – Building our Future through Science and Innovation (Backing Australia’s Ability 2). This is a new package totalling $5.3 billion over seven years from 2004/05, which builds on the initial 2001 Backing Australia’s Ability investment of $3 billion over five years to 2005/06.

Further details of the new package are available at http://backingaus.innovation.gov.au/default2004.htm. In summary the key features include:

- $305 million extra for the CSIRO National Research Flagships which brings CSIRO into the Backing Australia’s Ability programme for the first time.
- A new $1 billion Commercial Ready programme that merges a number of existing measures to create a one-stop-shop for business to access innovation support.
- $200 million extra for the National Health and Medical Research Council to assist independent medical research institutions.
- $542 million for a National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy to provide world-class infrastructure.
- $38.8 million for a new Maths, Science and Innovation Teaching initiative that will involve research bodies and undergraduates in primary and secondary school classes.
- $7.2 million to coordinate and focus research in support of Australia's counter-terrorism needs.

In addition there is continued or expanded measures from the original Backing Australia’s Ability package:

- $100 million extra for the Commercialising Emerging Technologies (COMET) programme.
- An extra $1.19 billion to maintain the Australian Research Council National Competitive Grants programme.
- $554 million for the Research Infrastructure Block Grants.
- $251 million for the National ICT Australia initiative.
- Continuation of the R & D tax concessions introduced under Backing Australia’s Ability.
- $57.9 million for Australia’s Biotechnology Centre of Excellence, the National Stem Cell Centre.
- $65 million extra for the Cooperative Research Centres which will have a stronger commercial focus.
The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) outlined the questions facing UWA in the context of BAA 2 which include:

- The University’s relationship with the independent medical institutes in view of the $200 million extra funding for the NHMRC to assist with research infrastructure.
- The University’s relationship with CSIRO and the national flagships program.
- The need for an alignment of the UWA research capabilities with the National Research Priorities. As a comprehensive university UWA is well placed to take advantage of future initiatives through CSIRO flagships and the national priorities.
- The design of a national research assessment exercise (RAE) for quality assurance of research output and how this intersects with UWA’s own RAE experience.
- A closer involvement of industry in research and how this relates to the CRC program which will have a stronger industry focus.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) then turned his attention to some comparative statistics on UWA’s recent research performance. The attached (Attachment RC2) summary compares UWA’s performance in 2003 and 2004 against the ‘Big 5’ (University of Queensland, University of Sydney, University of Melbourne, University of NSW and the Australian National University). The UWA average FTE lecturer level B and above is approximately 0.60 of the ‘Big 5’ average. Therefore, in absolute terms if UWA performs above 0.6 on any indicator then it is performing better than the ‘Big 5’. The figures show that UWA is generally performing above the average for NHMRC project grants and below the average for ARC Discovery-Project grants. For ARC Linkage-Project grants the dollars funded are below the average despite higher application numbers and a higher number of grants won, and this is likely to reflect a systemic problem of poor budget justifications.

During subsequent discussion the following points were made by members:

- As a comprehensive university UWA’s ARC performance should be better than it is and it was suggested that one reason might be our lack of recent success with ARC Federation Fellowships and ARC Centres of Excellence.
- It would be interesting to do an assessment of UWA’s performance against the ‘Big 5’ disaggregated at the school or discipline level.
- The State’s isolation could be a factor in UWA’s lack of success which impacts on our ability to network and connect with the decision makers; although this appears to have had no affect on our NHMRC performance. Certainly this may be a factor in UWA’s ability to develop and recruit research leaders.
- There is no doubt that part of the University of Sydney’s strong performance is because they have one or two dedicated grant writers devoted year round solely to this activity.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) concluded by inviting members to feedback any further thoughts or comments on the comparative statistics and the BAA 2 package.

8. **UWA RESEARCH GRANTS SCHEME – RA/1/485/1**

At the UWA Research Grants Scheme Convenors meeting on 13 November 2003 recommendations were made about improving the clarity of the 2004 guidelines and application form. In addition there were other issues raised that the Research Committee was asked to consider and following discussion it was

**RESOLVED – 7**

(i) that the scheme remain open to all researchers and that established researchers be required to provide details of the pilot project and a justification as to why the project cannot be funded by other sources. In addition, established researchers will be required, in accepting the grant, to certify that an application for external funding will be made in the following year for the same project;
that feedback will only be provided to early-career researcher applications which are not of sufficient quality to be funded. Applicants can then revise the application and resubmit it for further evaluation;

(iii) that publications should be provided for the previous five years plus the year of application; and

(iv) that reporting for the UWA Research Grants scheme should include a brief report by 31 March in the year following the completion of the award and then a more detailed final report after three years.

9. UNIVERSITY POSTGRADUATE AWARDS – REF 10/12/002/021

The Dean of the Graduate Research School introduced a proposal to increase the number of University Postgraduate Awards (UPAs) in order to achieve the growth in Higher Degree Student numbers which is forecast in the University Academic Profile. The actual quantum of funding for UPAs from the Central Research Allocation was increased last year to allow a growth in UPA numbers from 49 to 81 by 2006. It is anticipated that a further proposal to increase this number to 100 by 2008 will be made, and that this will be coupled with a suggestion of joint funding arrangements with schools and faculties. Essentially the UPAs would be allocated as half scholarships and it will be left to the local areas to decide whether they will combine the half scholarships to make a full UPA or whether they will co-fund the scholarship from other sources. Members agreed that faculties needed to undertake a cost benefit analysis of this new funding model, but generally speaking all areas would expect to benefit because the total pool of UPA funding was increasing.
10. NOTING OF A DECISION TAKEN BY CIRCULAR

The following item was circulated for consideration on 3 March 2004.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR SEMICONDUCTOR OPTOELECTRONICS AND MICROSYSTEMS (WACSM) – REF F5179

Members were asked to consider a proposal for the establishment of the Western Australian Centre for Semiconductor Optoelectronics and Microsystems (WACSM) as a UWA centre located in the School of Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering, with the Director reporting to the Head of School. This centre has already received $1 million of State Centres of Excellence in Science and Innovation funding and has the support of the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics.

Members were referred to sections 3 and 6 of the Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Centres in their consideration of this proposal. The Guidelines can be found at http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/policies/data/page/14363/CENTRES.RTF.

RESOLVED - 8

To endorse the attached (Attachment RC3) proposal for the establishment of the Western Australian Centre for Semiconductor Optoelectronics and Microsystems (WACSM) as a UWA centre located in the School of Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering for a period of five years from the date of execution of the Centres of Excellence funding agreement of 25 November 2003, and forward it to Academic Council for their consideration and approval.

Confirmed

CHAIR

/ /