MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE 
HELD IN THE SENATE ROOM ON 10 FEBRUARY 2005 

PRESENT

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor D McEachern) – Chair
Dean of the Graduate Research School (Professor R Owens)
President of the Postgraduate Students' Association (Ms N Mast)
Professor R Bartlett
Associate Professor S Dunlop
Professor J Finley-Jones
Dr J Henry
Associate Professor A Lynch
Dr I Mclean
Profess M V Sargant
Associate Professor K Singer

Dr C Thomson (as Executive Officer)
Ms S Lewis

Apologies
Professor S Houghton
Professor S Morgan
Associate Professor I Watson

Welcome and Acknowledgements
The Chair welcomed new members of the Research Committee, Professor Graham Martin as Chair of the Academic Board, Professor John Finlay-Jones and Associate Professor Kevin Singer. The Chair also acknowledged that this was the last meeting of Dr Gia Parish who is soon to become a teaching and research academic staff appointment at UWA and therefore can no longer hold the position of academic research staff representative on the Committee.

1. MINUTES

Confirmation

RESOLVED – 1

To confirm the minutes of the Research Committee meeting held on 11 November 2004.

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

Members noted the reports of Dr Giacinta Parish, School of Electrical, Electronic & Computer Engineering, Dr Martin Forsey, School of Social & Cultural Studies, Dr Giles Plant, School of Anatomy & Human Biology, Dr Marc Ruitenber, School of Anatomy & Human Biology, Mr Mel Thomas, School of Indigenous Studies, Mr Peter Mills, School of Human Movement & Exercise Science, Dr Emma Glasson, School of Population Health, Dr Srilata Ravi, School of Humanities, and Dr Bonnie Thomas, School of Humanities, for their Supplementary Travel Grants for New Academic Staff.
3. NHMRC EQUIPMENT GRANT SCHEME – REF RA/1/466/1

Members noted the report of the 2004 NHMRC Equipment Grant Selection Panel. A total of $592,552 was allocated by the NHMRC in 2004 and this was used to fund 10 awards. The amount of NHMRC funding to UWA is based on the amount of NHMRC grants won by UWA in 2004. Details of successful applications are available at http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/page/17668.

RESOLVED – 2

That in future NHMRC Equipment Grant rounds applicants be asked to provide details of the location of the proposed equipment.

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

(a) CSIRO Collaborative Fund

Members were informed that there has been a substantial delay in the announcement of the new CSIRO Collaborative Fund for enhancing closer links between universities and CSIRO.

(b) ARC and NHMRC 2006 Funding Rounds – Refs RA/1/31/1, RA/1/54/1

The 2006 major grant rounds of the ARC and NHMRC are underway and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) was pleased to report that there has been a significant change in the behaviour of prospective applicants since the previous round, with more than 50 applications reaching his desk before the end of January.

An ARC grant writing workshop for PhD students in their final year was organised by the Graduate Research School and was very successful with an expected 15 ARC Fellowship applications being submitted in this round. Discussion is continuing as to whether a similar workshop held the same time next year would be beneficial for early and mid-career researchers.

Two ARC schemes currently under assessment are the Federation Fellowships and the Centres of Excellence schemes, with the latter due to move to the interview stage in the first few weeks of March 2005.

(c) WA Premier’s Research Fellowship Program – Ref RA/2/888/1

The University of Western Australia submitted six expressions of interests for the 2005 WA Premier’s Research Fellowship Program.

5. UWA RESEARCH GRANTS SCHEME – REF RA/1/485/1

Members considered the attached (Attachment RC1) report of a meeting of the UWA Research Grants Scheme Convenors held on 4 November 2004. The report provides statistics on the allocation of funding by each of the four discipline subcommittees in 2005, as well as some comparative statistics in the previous two years.

Members were asked to consider several recommendations for amendments to the UWA Research Grants Scheme as detailed in the report. These amendments include a clearer definition for ‘pilot project’ and ‘early-career researcher’, as well as some clearer guidelines for the assessment of early-career researchers and established researchers.

During subsequent discussion the following points were made by members:

- A decision to allow experienced researchers to apply to the UWA Research Grants Scheme is to the detriment of early-career researchers who are trying to build a track record. Experienced researchers are better placed to get research funding from external sources.
• Difficulties were experienced with the previous round because of the definition of pilot project.

• Perhaps the minimum grant size should be increased to $30,000 to reflect CPI and salary increases over the past five years.

• The primary criteria for the award of a UWA Research Grant must be research excellence, irrespective of whether the applicant in an early-career or experienced researcher.

RESOLVED – 3

(i) That the UWA Research Grants scheme should continue to be used to support early-career researchers, as well as established researchers undertaking a pilot project.

(ii) To better define the term pilot project to exclude applications that are scaled down versions or sub-components of a current external application, and to introduce a scoring system (1-5) to rate the 'worthiness' of the pilot project to help overcome the difficulty of the past round of ruling some applicants ineligible under this category.

(iii) To use the ARC definition of an early-career researcher, which in the 2006 round is the "first full-time or fractional (at least 0.5 FTE) academic appointment at a university or equivalent (e.g. CSIRO) after 31 December 2000".

(iv) That two separate allocations of funds be provided under the UWA Research Grants scheme, one for early-career researcher (ECR) applications and one for established researchers.

(v) That the subcommittees have the option of not providing feedback to ECR applicants who are deemed unworthy of resubmission, but also have the option of providing feedback to successful ECR applicants at the time of award to help develop their competitiveness in future competitive grant rounds.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) concluded the discussion by informing members that a decision on the likely split of funds between ECR and established researchers, as well as a decision on the minimum grant size, would be brought to the May 2005 meeting of the Research Committee prior to announcement of the 2006 UWA Research Grant round.

6. RESEARCH QUALITY ASSESSMENT FRAMEWORK – REF 6585

Members were made aware of a recent article by Linda Butler (Attachment RC2) which highlights that Australia’s share of ISI publications has increased by 25% in the last decade, but that associated with this trend has been a significant decline in citation impact of Australia publications relative to other countries.

In a response to this and other analyses, the Government, through Minister Nelson, announced in December 2004 details of an Expert Advisory Group that will work on the development of a Research Quality Framework for publicly funded research. The Framework was one of the new measures announced by the Government in May 2004 as part of the Backing Australia’s Ability – Building our Future through Science and Innovation strategy. The aim of the Framework is to develop the basis for a more consistent and comprehensive approach to assessing the quality and impact of Australian research. Following a series of DEST consultations it is likely that a very broad definition of research will be used and measured.

A comparison between The University of Western Australia and The University of Queensland in the Linda Butler article shows that although both universities have broadly similar research interests, in the late 1980s both universities introduced major, but quite different changes to their research management policy; although UWA and UQ both sought to strengthen and enhance their research profile. UWA introduced a formula for distributing a significant proportion of research funding based on publication count, with this methodology ultimately being adopted in the DEST block funding models. UQ on the other hand instigated a strong recruitment drive targeting the brightest young researchers and provided them with a strong research base.
The results of the Butler analysis show that a focus on productivity by UWA has succeeded in lifting our publication output significantly, but that output has been placed increasingly in journals of lower impact, with subsequent loss of relative visibility in the research community. In contrast, UQ’s concentration on staffing strategies has also raised productivity, but this has been achieved in concert with an increase in the impact of its publication output. Other sources of data have confirmed that the impact of UWA’s research has declined particularly for laboratory-based research.

The University of Western Australia has recognised for some years that the current volume-based measures of research output used in the UWA and national budget models are a source of concern, and there is now general recognition that quality drivers need to be introduced to maximise the impact of UWA’s research. Consequently the University has decided to introduce a process to assess the quality of the research output of all eligible academic staff members in faculties by peer review of selected output items. Members recalled that at the October 2004 meeting of the Research Committee there was some discussion about the methodology of routinely assessing the quality of UWA research publications as part of the school review process for possible inclusion in the UWA budget model.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and innovation) updated members on the progress of UWA’s research quality assessment, which has two parts:

(1) Peer assessment of the quality of individual research publications, with all eligible members of the academic staff at UWA submitted their four best publications over the previous seven years to be collated and aggregated at the school level. This collection of publications is likely to occur in the first half of this year, with the Deans to be briefed about the process in the next week.

(2) Peer assessment of the quality of research journals.

Both exercises will be used for internal review only at this stage, with any impact on the UWA budget model to be discussed more broadly within the University community before implementation.

7. RESEARCH COMMITTEE MEETING DATES IN 2005 – REF 06/04/010/052

Members were informed that the meeting dates of the Research Committee in 2005 are to be revised as follows, with four meetings a year as per the Research Committee constitution:

Thursday, 12 May
Thursday, 11 August
Thursday, 10 November
8. ESTABLISHMENT AND REVIEW OF UWA CENTRES

(a) Progress Reports

In accordance with the Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Research and Training Centres (available at www.research.uwa.edu.au/centres/), the following progress reports for UWA centres were received:

i. Centre for Entrepreneurial Management and Innovation (CEMI) – Ref F4578, GSM, UWA Business School, established to December 2007 (Attachment RC3).

ii. Western Australian Centre for Semiconductor Optoelectronics and Microsystems (WACSOM) – Ref F5173, School of Electrical, Electronic and Computer Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics, established to November 2008 (Attachment RC4).

iii. Centre for Applied Dynamics and Optimisation (CADO) – Ref F1249, School of Mathematics and Statistics, Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics, established to November 2004 (Attachment RC5).

Following the review of UWA centres in November 2003, Academic Council gave this centre one further year to operate, to November 2004, pending the appointment of a new professor of applied mathematics. The progress report requests a further extension to 30 June 2005 as the new professor has only just arrived and will need time to review CADO’s operation.

RESOLVED – 4

To recommend approval for a further extension of the establishment of the Centre for Applied Dynamics and Optimisation to 30 June 2005, with a final report due by this date, and a full new proposal to re-establish CADO to be submitted by 30 June 2005 should re-establishment be desired.

iv. Centre for Contemporary Asia (CCA) – Ref F7367, School of Social and Cultural Studies, Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, established to November 2004 (Attachment RC6).

Following the review of UWA centres in November 2003, Academic Council gave this centre one further year to operate, to November 2004, and suggested an internal review to clarify the centre’s directions.

RESOLVED – 5

To recommend approval for a further extension of the establishment of the Centre for Contemporary Asia to 30 June 2005, in order to develop a comprehensive strategic plan to take the centre in a new direction.

v. Centre for Remote and Rural Oral Health (CRROH) – Ref F1267, School of Primary, Aboriginal and Rural Health Care, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, established to June 2005 (Attachment RC7).

Establishment of this centre was approved to 30 June 2005 as it had funding from the State Department of Health until then.
RESOLVED – 6

To recommend approval for a further extension of the establishment of the Centre for Remote and Rural Oral Health to 31 December 2005, as a result of Department of Health funding being continued for this period.

vi. Rural Clinical School (RCS) – Ref F3088, School of Primary, Aboriginal and Rural Health Care, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, established to December 2006 (Attachment RC8).

vii. Centre of Excellence in Natural Resource Management – Ref F794, Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, established to December 2005 (Attachment RC9).

(b) Final Report

viii. Australian Institute for Education (AIE) – Ref F7393, Faculty of Education, established to November 2004 (Attachment RC10).

Following the review of UWA centres in November 2003, Academic Council gave this centre one further year to operate, to November 2004, with a new proposal required should re-establishment be sought. The Dean of Education does not wish the AIS to be continued.

RESOLVED – 7

To recommend the disestablishment of the Australian Institute for Education as a UWA Centre.

(c) Proposals for Re-establishment of Centres

ix. UWA Centre for Medical Research (CMR) – Ref F3467, Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, established to December 2004 (Attachment RC11).

A report on the activities of the CMR for 2003-4 is attached, in accordance with the Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Research and Training Centres, together with a proposal for its reestablishment for a further 5-year period. This is supported by the Dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry.

RESOLVED – 8

To recommend the reestablishment the UWA Centre for Medical Research for a further 5 years to 31 December 2009.

x. Centre for Land Rehabilitation (CLR) – Ref F7400, School of Earth and Geographical Sciences, Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, established to November 2004 (Attachment RC12).

A report on the activities of the CLR for 2004 is attached, in accordance with the Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Research and Training Centres, together with a proposal for its reestablishment for a further 5-year period. This is supported by the Dean of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences.

RESOLVED – 9

To recommend the reestablishment of the Centre for Land rehabilitation for a further 5 years to 31 December 2009.
(d) Reports Outstanding

xi. **Australian Centre for Geomechanics (ACG)** – Ref F7394, Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics, established to November 2004.

Following the review of UWA centres in November 2003, Academic Council gave this centre one further year to operate, to November 2004, with a new proposal required should re-establishment be sought.

To date no new proposal nor progress report on the ACG’s past activities has been received.

**RESOLVED - 10**

That the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) write to the Centre Director requesting that a new proposal for the reestablishment of the Australian Centre for Geomechanics be submitted in accordance with the *Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Research and Training Centres*.

xii. **Reference Centre for Australian Salt Lake Biota** – Ref F188, Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences, established to April 2005

To date no progress report on this Centre’s activities over the past 2 years has been received.

**RESOLVED - 11**

That the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) write to the Dean of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences asking for just cause as to why the Reference Centre for Australian Salt Lake Biota should not be disestablished.

Confirmed

CHAIR

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