MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE SENATE ROOM ON 23 FEBRUARY 2006

PRESENT

Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor D McEachern) – Chair
Chair of the Academic Board (Professor G Martin)
President of the Postgraduate Students’ Association (Mr B Jardine)
Mr S Anderson
Associate Professor H Barrett
Professor B Giles-Corti
Professor J Finlay-Jones
Professor S Houghton
Associate Professor A Lynch
Professor S Morgan
Dr G Parish
Professor S Powles
Professor C Raston

Dr J Berman (for item 4)
Dr C Thomson (as Executive Officer)

Apologies
Professor R Bartlett
Professor J Cordery
Professor R Owens
Associate Professor K Singer

1. MINUTES

Confirmation

RESOLVED – 1

To confirm the minutes of the Research Committee meeting held on 22 November 2005.

2. OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES PLAN 2006-2008: RESEARCH PERFORMANCE INDICATORS AND TARGETS – F12186

Members recalled that at the May 2005 meeting of the Research Committee there was discussion about the next iteration of the University’s Operational Priorities Plan (OPP). The OPP is the component of the University’s Cycle of Planning and Accountability that provides the link between broad strategic and detailed operational planning by specifying the particular objectives that are to have the highest priority during a three-year period; in this case 2006 to 2008.

The particular research priorities for the 2006-2008 OPP are identified as:

- Improve the quality and impact, and productivity of research and research training:
  - Increase total research income from all sources as a share of the national total and on a per capita basis
  - Improve the impact of research outcomes
- Increase the number of staff publishing in high quality journals
- Increase the number of higher degree by research students and their completion rates
- Improve the quality of HDR programmes and theses

The final stage of the process is to identify the performance indicators and targets for these research priorities, and following consultation with the faculties a draft schedule of targets was noted by members.

Secretary's note: Since the Research Committee agenda was circulated the final schedule of research performance targets for the 2006-2008 OPP was transmitted to Senate and is attached (Attachment RC1).

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

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) gave a brief account of how the changes to the Ministerial positions in both the Commonwealth and State Governments has led to delays in the progress on many significant policy initiatives. This includes the Research Quality Framework and the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) for support of major research facilities to build infrastructure and networks necessary for world-class research to be undertaken in Australia.

4. ARC LINKAGE PROJECTS: CONNECTING WITH INDUSTRY – REF RA/1/490/1

In 2005 a sample of UWA’s ARC Linkage Project grant awardees and their industry partners were interviewed in order to improve our understanding of industry experiences of working with universities, so that the UWA might enhance its external relationships and thereby increase industry funding of research. Two reports were subsequently written; one from the perspective of UWA researchers (Attachment RC2) and one from the perspective of the industry partners (Attachment RC3).

The barriers to successful collaboration identified in the Reports were many and varied, but there is no doubt that the ‘cultural gap’ between academia and industry was recognised by both sides as a significant impediment. There was a consensus amongst researchers that industry, in general, had a poor understanding of academia. Similarly, many Linkage partners pointed to researchers’ limited understanding of industry needs and perspectives.

These Reports suggest a number of possible avenues for improving the attractiveness to industry of collaborating with researchers at UWA, and Dr Judy Berman, a UWA Research Development Officer, was invited to the meeting to speak to this item. Dr Berman highlighted several points:

- There was a need to increase UWA researchers’ understanding of industry perspectives and this could be done in many ways, for example by being more proactive with alumni who are placed in industry and by having UWA researchers recognise the likely barriers to successful industry collaboration.
- One of the significant criticisms by industry of UWA research was that on the whole projects were poorly managed and that perhaps training would be useful in this area.
- Real partnerships with industry must involve regular communication and consultation.
- Capability statements in Schools might be a useful tool for industry to engage with the University community.

Members complimented Dr Berman on her reports and made the following comments during subsequent discussion:
Experience has shown that summer vacation scholarships and Industry breakfast meetings are often a good entry point for engaging with industry.

A flyer on best practice on how to engage with industry or how to obtain an ARC-Linkage partner would be very useful.

Linkage-Project grants are very complex in negotiation and therefore it would be helpful if researchers were forewarned about the complexities before they applied for a grant under this scheme.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) ended discussion by highlighting the need for UWA to increase its industry income as a target for the 2006-2008 Operational Priorities Plan, and that the reports and comments from this meeting would be taken to the University Executive for further discussion.

5. COMMERCIALISATION TRAINING SCHEME

Members noted the attached (Attachment RC4) Issues Paper forwarded by DEST on the creation of around 250 awards each year for higher degree by research (HDR) students to study full-time for the equivalent of one semester to obtain a graduate qualification in fields such as commercialisation of research and management of intellectual property. These awards will be delivered through a new programme called the Commercialisation Training Scheme (CTS), with $5 million to be allocated annually for CTS stipends worth $12,325 and CTS tuition fees worth $8,000 to the host institution.

In 2006 the nominal allocation of CTS awards to UWA is 13 and discussions are being held with the Go8 universities as well as other WA universities about a joint approach to the provision of training in this area. UWA is already well placed to provide this training since the Graduate Research School and the Office of Industry and Innovation have a commercialisation training programme for HDR students as part of their student experience. One member commented that it would be beneficial if all HDR students at UWA were required to undertake some training in intellectual property and commercialisation.

6. UWA SUPPLEMENTARY TRAVEL GRANTS FOR NEW ACADEMIC STAFF – REF F110

The UWA Supplementary Travel Grants for New Academic Staff is a scheme that provides funds for academic staff recently appointed at the University to present a paper at a national conference outside Western Australia. The Guidelines for the Scheme can be found at http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/page/77465.

A question has been raised recently by a new academic staff member as to whether the Supplementary Travel Grants can be used to attend international conferences, which are often high profile but more costly to attend.

RESOLVED – 2

To endorse the proposal to allow Supplementary Travel Grants for New Academic Staff to be used for international travel, but due to limited funds to leave the maximum grants size at $750.
ITEM FOR THE ATTENTION OF ACADEMIC COUNCIL
FROM A MEETING OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE HELD ON 23 FEBRUARY 2006

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

Members had before them the attached (Attachment RC5) notes of a meeting of the Convenors of the subcommittees to assess the UWA Research Grants Scheme, which was held in November 2005. At this meeting there were several recommendations for minor changes to the guidelines for the UWA Research Grants Scheme and these have been incorporated into the new Rules and Instructions to Applicants for Funding in 2007.

Additionally, a change to the eligibility criteria of the UWA Research Grants Scheme is proposed which only allows early career researchers to apply for funding under the Scheme. It is suggested that in the upcoming round early career researchers should be defined as having been awarded their PhD or equivalent qualification after 31 December 2000. In previous rounds, up to 30% of UWA Research Grants have been awarded to more experienced researchers to fund low cost projects or pilot studies.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) introduced the item by explaining to members that $1.42 million was allocated annually under the UWA Research Grants Scheme as part of the suite of research support schemes of the Central Research Allocation (CRA). Other CRA research support schemes include University Postdoctoral Research Fellowships, Re-Entry Postdoctoral Fellowships, travel awards for new academic staff and salary supplementation for ARC and NHMRC Fellows. In this context there is a need to ensure that the limited resources provided by the CRA schemes are used to maximum benefit to ensure that research careers are nurtured. The UWA Research Grants Scheme is important because it allows researchers early in their careers to have a sustained period of research to build their track records so they are then competitive for external funding. Increasing the number of early career academic staff applying for major grant rounds such as the ARC and NHMRC is a good way of increasing the University’s research income in order to meet 2006-2008 Operational Priorities Plan performance targets.

This item was discussed at length by members who made the following key points:

- The lead time for researchers winning external grants in their own right may vary between disciplines, so perhaps the definition of early career researcher should be increased from 5 to 8 years after the award of their PhD.

- Support must be given to mid-career researchers more than 5 years post-PhD who have still not won an external grant, particularly since international reputations are built on the need to earn external research income.

- In some UWA schools the UWA Research Grants Scheme has been used as an incentive for encouraging applications to external agencies, because a failed external research grant application can still be considered in the same round of UWA Research Grants.

RESOLVED – 3

(i) To endorse the attached (Attachment RC6) revised Rules and Instructions to Applicants in 2007, which includes a change to the eligibility criteria which only allows early career researchers to apply for funding under the scheme.
(ii) To endorse the establishment of a Working Party to examine the issue of how to support the careers of mid-career researchers, particularly those that have not yet won an external research grant.

CHAIR

Confirmed

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