MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE SENATE ROOM ON 17 AUGUST 2006

PRESENT

Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) (Professor D McEachern) – Chair
Deputy Chair of the Academic Board (Professor D Plowman)
Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Research Training) (Professor R Owens)
President of the Postgraduate Students' Association (Mr B Jardine)
Mr S Anderson
Professor H Barrett
Professor J Cordery
Professor B Gles-Corti
Professor J Finlay-Jones
Professor S Houghton
Associate Professor A Lynch
Professor N Morgan
Dr G Parish
Professor C Raston
Professor K Singer

Dr J Berman
Ms L Robertson
Dr C Thomson (as Executive Officer)

Apologies

Mr S Anderson
Professor G Martin
Professor S Powles

1. MINUTES

Confirmation

RESOLVED – 6

To confirm the minutes of the Research Committee meeting held on 18 May 2006.

2. RESEARCH PUBLICATIONS COLLECTION – REF F658

Members noted the attached (Attachment RC1) notes of a meeting of the UWA Publications Audit Subcommittee meeting held on 4 July 2006 which provide summary statistics on pre- and post-audit publication points by UWA school, as well as useful comparisons between UWA's publication points over time and the rest of the Group of Eight universities.

The notes of the meeting make several suggestions for improving the process of the publication collection which are not of a policy nature.

3. UWA GRADUATES ASSOCIATION TRAVEL AWARDS – F8183

RESOLVED – 7

To approve the award of 17 UWA Graduate Association Travel Awards in 2006 as detailed in the attached (Attachment RC2) selection report. The total value of these awards is $40,200 with
$20,000 of this being provided as part of the Research Committee's Central Research Allocation (CRA).

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

(a) National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS)

The National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy (NCRIS) is a major initiative of the Commonwealth Government to provide researchers with access to the infrastructure and networks necessary to undertake world-class research. It aims to bring greater strategic direction and coordination to national research infrastructure investments and $542 million has been made available through to 2010/11 for this purpose.

On 28 February 2006 the Minister for Education, Science and Training announced the NCRIS roadmap which identifies areas in which Australia should aim to develop, or further develop research capability through significant infrastructure investment. Full details of the NCRIS roadmap can be found at http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/research_sector/policies_issues_reviews/key_issues/ncriis/default.htm. The NRCIS committee has selected facilitators to bring together national collaborative proposals for each of the capabilities identified in the NCRIS roadmap for development in 2006 and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) and other members of the UWA academic and research community have met with the facilitators over the course of the year to discuss likely UWA involvement in the proposed initiatives. The WA State Government has also been engaged as a likely co-investor in the NCRIS priority areas for major research infrastructure investment.

Decisions are likely at the end of October 2006 and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor's (Research and Innovation) account of this State's involvement is that it has not been a successful process, with most of the significant infrastructure being funded in eastern Australia. Indeed, none of the NCRIS Committee members or the National Facilitators is from Western Australia. A residual issue is that the NCRIS Committee is asking for significant co-investment by State Governments and universities, and because this was not made clear at the outset participants have to re-assess their involvement in the initiatives.

(b) Productivity Commission

The Productivity Commission is the Commonwealth Government's principal review and advisory body on microeconomic policy and regulation. It conducts public inquiries and research into a broad range of economic and social issues affecting the welfare of Australians.

The Australian Government has asked the Productivity Commission to undertake a research study on public support for science and innovation in Australia. The background to this is that the Australian Government has identified science and innovation as one of its strategic priorities, recognising its contribution to Australia's economic and social prosperity. The Government's support of science and innovation now exceeds $5 billion annually, and in light of this investment the Australian Government considers that a study of public support for science and innovation is warranted.

Both the Australian Vice-Chancellor's Committee and the Group of Eight universities have commissioned economists to mount a claim for additional funding of research and development in their submissions to the Productivity Commission, and early signs are that the Commission will support this claim in their report to Treasury.

(c) Research Quality Framework

In March 2006 the Minister for Education, Science and Training released the Final Advice on the Preferred Research Quality Framework (RQF) model of the Expert Advisory Group, and announced the establishment of the Research Quality Framework Development Advisory Group
(RQFDAG) to provide advice to the Australian Government on the next phase of the RQF process.

In the second week of August 2006 the RQFDAG released a Guiding Principles document which outlines the RQFDAG's thinking on the broad directions for the proposed RQF assessment of Australia’s research quality and impact. This Guiding Principles document was tabled at the meeting and is attached (Attachment RC3).

In summary the RQFDAG has suggested changes and further refinements to the RQF model as follows:

- Research Groupings will be the unit of assessment and three options are being considered:
  - Institutions select their own research groupings for assessment, with the institution having discretion over how many groupings and which staff are included for assessment;
  - All research active staff should be included in the submission for groupings for assessment against all relevant Research Fields Courses and Disciplines (RFCD);
  - Institutions must submit groupings for all RFCD Codes in which the institution is research active, but will have discretion over which staff to include for assessment in these groupings.

- The basis of assessing research impact will be an Impact Statement of no more than ten pages, which includes a statement of claims against impact criteria, up to four case studies for the Research Grouping, and a list of end-users who can be contacted as referees.

- Peer review assessment of research quality should be supplemented by the use of selected quantitative measures that will assist, not replace, the peer review process.

- Attribution of research outputs and researchers should be with the institution at which a research grouping is employed at the census date for the RQF collection.

An institutional response to the RQFDAG Guiding Principles will be provided by 25 August 2006, and will not deviate from UWA's previous position that the quality of research is paramount and that this can be substantiated by appropriate international benchmarks rather than a costly research assessment exercise.

5. UWA RESEARCH QUALITY ASSESSMENT - REFS F12353, F13785

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) presented an overview of the recently completed UWA Research Quality Assessment (RQA), which included a presentation of the data aggregated at the faculty level. This is the first publicly available account of the process and the results are encouraging because they show that not only is there a large number of UWA staff submitting publications for assessment, but of these 53% are rated by peer review to be in the top 30% of publications in their discipline, with 22% of these rated in the top 10% of publications.

The results show implicitly that UWA’s quantitative driver of counting publications is not a major factor in driving publication practice in lower impact journals. There is a correlation between the level of publication activity, the research quality score given in the RQA and the amount of funding awarded from external research grants. In fact UWA's publication numbers are in decline compared with other Go8 universities and this needs to be rectified.

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation) outlined that the next steps in the process would be that a paper and summary statistics would be released to Heads of Schools and Deans in the next week for discussion.
6. ESTABLISHMENT AND REVIEW OF UWA CENTRES

(b) Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Research and Training Centres – New Application Form – Ref F1257

A new application form has been developed to streamline the process for review of proposals to establish UWA Research and Training Centres. This was in response to user requests, and includes all the details required in section 5 of the existing Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Research and Training Centres which can be found at http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/page/72953. The Guidelines have been revised by reducing the detail in section 5 on Information Required in Application to Establish a UWA Research and Training Centre as this is now included in the application form, and by removing a redundant section 4 on the Procedure for Submitting Proposals for Conditional Approval.

RESOLVED – 8

To approve the attached (Attachment RC4) revised Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Research and Training Centres and new application form (Attachment RC5).

(c) Proposal to Establish the Advanced Timber Concepts Centre – Ref F8393

A proposal to establish the Advanced Timber Concepts Centre as a UWA Research and Training Centre within the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts was considered by members. The Centre involves collaboration with the Forest Products Commission WA and has the support of all parties.

It is proposed that the Centre be established until 26 February 2011 as the Joint Venture Agreement is for a 5-year period from 27 February 2006.

RESOLVED – 9

To endorse the attached (Attachment RC6) proposal for the establishment of the Advanced Timber Concepts Centre as a UWA Research and Training within the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Sciences until 26 February 2011, and to forward it to Academic Council for their approval.

(d) Proposal to Establish the Centre for Eco-hydrology

A proposal to establish the Centre for Eco-hydrology as a UWA Research and Training Centre within the School of Environmental Systems Engineering was tabled at the meeting and considered by members. The Centre has the support of the Dean of the Faculty of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics, and the Dean of the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences.

RESOLVED – 10

To endorse the attached (Attachment RC7) proposal for the establishment of the Centre for Eco-hydrology as a UWA Research and Training Centre within the School of Environmental Systems Engineering for a period of five years, and to forward it to Academic Council for their approval.

(e) Reports Received

UWA Centres are required under the Guidelines for the Establishment and Review of UWA Research and Training Centres to produce two interim reports and a final report during their five year period of operation. Over the last six months, a number of UWA Centres have
provided either interim reports or a final report in accordance with the *Guidelines*. These reports are attached (Attachment RC8) and members noted that they had been reviewed by Research Services and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation).

Confirmed

CHAIR

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