

Appendix A

The University of Western Australia

ACADEMIC STAFF ASSOCIATION

Notes from the Committee of Management Meeting

Held on **Thursday 25 August in the W1, Winthrop Tower**

Present:	R da Silva Rosa	President	
	S Bunt	Vice President	
	A McKinley	Treasurer	
	D Judge	Secretary	
	S Dobbs	N Kirkham	J O'Shea
Guest:	Professor Paul Johnson, Vice-Chancellor, UWA		
In Attendance:	V Burbank	J Manvell	
Apologies:	M Edele	T Nguyen	

Welcome and apologies

The President opened the meeting and welcomed the committee members. Apologies were noted. Usual Committee business has been set aside for a Q&A with the Vice-Chancellor.

RdaSR: Welcome to Professor Johnson and thank you for coming. You are amongst colleagues here. During this period of change at the university, staff morale is down and there are questions about the change process. This is a conversation between colleagues, not an interrogation. We would like this to be the first of many opportunities for discussion in the future.

What role do academics have in setting policy at UWA?

PJ: What do you mean by "setting"? Let me put this into context. The University is governed by two Government departments (Federal and State), and from here, Senate sets policy, with a strategic plan that holds people to account. The current plan went to Academic Board three times, to try and take the views of the greater university community into account.

RdaSR: After the initial Project Renewal proposal, the period of discussion and extensive feedback only led to one substantive change, that of retaining Faculties, rather than re-naming them Colleges. It seems that the consultation process was followed, but with no-resulting change.

PJ: There were sixteen proposals for faculty structures; these have been whittled down to four faculties. There has been lots of discussion about schools, but the overall view has been for minimal change. Education, for instance, has not been moved to Engineering, as a result of listening to feedback.

VB: How do you see academics and their place in the university?

PJ: Academics are a core part of the university. The difference between a teaching university and a research institute is that one produces human capital, the other uses it. A self-sustaining academy must produce teachers and researchers for the next generation. Universities must train undergraduates and PhD students who challenge orthodoxies and thereby extend knowledge, in the process committing intellectual matricide and patricide as they overturn the assumptions and conventions of their teachers and supervisors. Medical institutes in particular are campaigning to do their own PhD training, which would remove research grant monies from universities, but this is more about using the students as lower-paid staff than producing researchers for the

future. There is a better relationship between the research institutes and universities here in WA, rather than in the eastern states where they are more separate.

DJ: A huge number of academics are dis-spirited and job-seeking, fed-up with being managed as a mid-level institution, not an academic university. Why is this?

PJ: There are fewer resources per academic staff member, so the environment is tougher. Although the Go8 maintain a lower staff/student ratio, it has increased. In 1994, it was 12 or 13 to 1, now it is close to double that.

DJ: So this is not institutional, it is just a world issue?

PJ: The world is not as it once was. The average age of an academic in this sector is 52. It is not the environment that many signed up to and it is a challenge. I have consciously and deliberately been driving change. Some think these changes are unsettling. I am trying to improve the situation overall whilst making the changes sustainable. My personal opinion is that I expect half of Australian universities to not exist in their current form in 10 years' time. We must respond to these challenges to maintain the academic enterprise of UWA. These are profound changes and we must react now to avoid falling off the cliff in 10 years. It is an existential challenge.

We need to provide better service. Our overall performance is poor in student experience, as reported in the Student Experience Survey, relative to the Go8, other Australian universities and overseas. We can't rely on our reputation, which now changes so quickly with the use of social media. There is increasing national and international competition for students.

NK: Isn't the fact that local students are going to other WA universities a worry? Not because of teaching, but other factors?

PJ: Our Student Perception of Teaching and Learning scores are low. I recently visited Rossmoyne SHS, where the average ATAR is above 80%. 40% of students then attend Curtin, 40% UWA and 20% other universities. The students are focused on getting a degree that will lead them into a job. In 2008 and 2012, changes with New Courses were introduced, based on good pedagogical principles at the time, but in hindsight, perhaps not fully assessed against the market. A six year medical degree here will be comparable to a five year degree at Curtin.

NK: Even if the degrees are comparable, why would a student come here when the course costs more? This was raised by academics at the time, but the feedback was not listened to.

PJ: Teaching must be more highly evaluated in the future than it is now. Today's students have direct feedback via social media.

SD: What do you think is the problem with the teaching and learning experience compared to Curtin?

PJ: I can't comment on Curtin but there are three areas identified from our own surveys for improvement.

- 1) In the SURF scores from 2015 and the first semester of 2016, in the units that scored below 2.8 overall, 80% of these units all scored below 2.8 on question 4 "This unit was well-organised". This is easy to fix. Students today in government and private schools are used to a high level of support, which is not the same at university, but units shouldn't be muddled or without essential components.
- 2) All learning material must be available.
- 3) Assessment is not terribly well-done and needs to be improved. Compared to the school system, the speed of feedback is slow.

SB: I have three teaching awards but low SURFs. Few students look at material on-line or attend lectures. The focus at the moment is to keep students happy and the "customer" is always right. Studying IS hard and the push should be for students to be work ready. There is a disconnect between the two.

PJ: The idea of "work ready" needs a national discussion with employers, who also need to be "graduate ready". Work ready should not mean training students for a specific job. Undergraduate studies provide depth and breadth for a degree. The Australian Foundation for Youth last year predicted that Year 12 students from 2015 would experience five different careers and seventeen jobs in their working life. Students must be educated for a

career, not trained for a job, ensuring that graduates have intellectual self-confidence, acuity and the ability to solve problems.

SB: Most students don't like open-ended questions.

PJ: There are more SURF scores above 3.4 than there are below 2.8. Not all students give negative feedback.

DJ: On-line learning encourages weaker students to not engage face to face, they don't learn the real time engagement and problem solving required for the future.

PJ: Are students the problem or us? If students can ignore learning materials and not turn up to lectures, but still pass, then the problem is in assessment. Academic standards should be divorced from management. Academic Board should have authority over (academic) standards and the Promotions Committee over academic staff. TEQSA accreditation last year means that we are required to report on quality, standards and student progression. The review of assessment procedures showed significant inconsistencies across the university.

AMcK: There is often less than a 30% response to SURFs. How can you lend credence to this? The respondents tend to be from both extremes so there is bias.

PJ: It is a common lament that students don't turn up to lectures. I think this is a shame. The reasons are many, jobs, family life, availability of study on-line etc. How do we as an academic community respond to student life today?

JO'S: There was major disruption when the Octagon was booked out for a week mid-semester, and this had not been thought through. Many academics are not happy; they feel under-valued and under-appreciated. The life of an academic is still a good life, but goodwill has been lost, as when people say they are not coming in on Open Day. There is an implicit feeling that they (management) don't care and don't appreciate us. Do you think you have the confidence of the staff? Do you care? Ten years ago, we may not have known what management was doing, but we trusted them. Do you think you have the trust of the academic staff? Academics are the core of this university and we need to know you actually care.

PJ: I believe I have the confidence of some staff, and some of the more senior staff. I don't think anyone would have the confidence of all staff, particularly when change occurs. Change is uncomfortable and unavoidable. There was "no generous back pocket" for the Vice-Chancellor when I arrived. The curriculum change was a good pedagogic move, not a great market one, but in 2008 when decisions were made, the market was regulated. The introduction of the new curriculum in 2012 coincided with deregulation of student numbers (the 'demand driven system'), and that has made student recruitment more competitive.

SB: Is Senate the problem? It used to be a parliament, now it is a board of directors from the business world who hold most of the meeting in secret. There is little academic expertise on Senate (the V-C is an academic) and academics are no longer privy as to why decisions are made. Is Senate forcing through change?

PJ: I don't see interference in academic matters on Senate. Academic matters are the responsibility of Academic Board. The change is happening right across the university sector. Councils and Senates are now conscious that they carry fiduciary responsibility. This was less so up until 2012, because there was guaranteed funding, but now this funding is contestable. The sector has moved from financially stable to financially volatile and financial issues are much more important. We are audited by the State, and in the last five years, there has been a big change in audit processes from assessing finances to risk (for example IT). External circumstances have driven change in University Senates Australia-wide; this is not particular to UWA. It is a volatile environment, and we try to mitigate the volatility but issues of currency and visas for instance, are outside our control.

VB: Who makes these ten year projections?

PJ: The OECD, Council of European Universities amongst others. The theme is disruption, resulting from technology and student behaviour. Personally, I think higher education is massively fragmented and the major change will be in market structure. There will be new non-university operators, high brand and high profit, operating on-line with economy of scale, particularly in information and data sciences. Google and Apple are already entering this market, and the impact will be like that of Uber and Airbnb. Colleges will be licensed to deliver tutorial support and existing infrastructure will be used e.g. High school labs which could be accessed outside normal school hours. How can we resist this? By growing the graduate size of the university.

DJ: How will the Renewal Project be evaluated, particularly with the proposed changes in administration? Melbourne University cut staff in 2011 and then ended up hiring even more staff a year later, but mostly in central staff not in faculties.

PJ: We must take administrative trivia away from academics and systemise by changing processes.

1pm: The Vice-Chancellor had to leave for another appointment. The President thanked him for his time.

In further discussion, RdaSR proposed sending the VC an email on behalf of the Committee, thanking him for his time and cc'ing Senate.

The Committee will also consider agenda items for ACC.