



UWA ACADEMIC STAFF ASSOCIATION

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The Proposed New Academic Career Structure for UWA

The Academic Staff Association is interested in feedback from members on this issue. We anticipate that there may be divided views on these proposals and we need to reflect the views of our members as best we can.

It is clear that some of the proposals have industrial implications and will not be able to be adequately addressed until the next round of Enterprise Bargaining which will take place in 2008. The Academic Staff Association and the UWA branch of the NTEU have resolved to work closely together on these issues.

We are considering holding a joint information and reception of views meeting on the 28th November. At present we feel that it is important that our members understand all the implications of the proposed changes.

The proposals that may create problems include incremental progression, less pay for UWA academics achieving promotion, the role of head of school and dean in promotion and incremental progression, the role of the Professional Development Review, the impact on Academic Board, the breaking down of the teaching-research nexus and the connection between tenure and academic freedom.

Stuart Bunt UWAASA Vice President has raised some of these and other issues in informal observations when asked by the press to provide an immediate response to the UWA proposals, available at <http://hr.uwa.edu.au/hr/publications/discussiondocs>

Review of Discipline Groups

The promised review of discipline groups in 2007 is to be conducted by Professor David Plowman. The Academic Staff Association has been aware of member concerns with the functioning of discipline groups over a long period. We have been involved in a considerable amount of activity to elicit the problems experienced by discipline groups and their heads and to arrive at some potential solutions.

We intend to make a submission to the review and would be interested in members' views on some of the matters that have arisen. Some documentation has been prepared by Sandra Penrose and Dr Sue Broomhall and this may be viewed

New Committee 2007-08 Positions and Contacts

The new committee took office in July 2007. The executive and ordinary committee members are as follows:

President, Prof Raymond da Silva Rosa ext. 2974
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Vice President, Prof Stuart Blunt ext. 2983
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Secretary, Prof Bill Ford ext. 2948
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Treasurer, Dr Allan McKinley ext. 3165
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Members
A/Prof Susan Broomhall ext.2139
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Dr Mark Tibbett ext.2635
Mark.tibbett@uwa.edu.au

Please contact any of these members with your news or concerns.

The committee meets monthly, generally on the second Thursday of the month.

Administrative Officer and Executive Officer

Joanna Manvell has been appointed as the part time administrative officer—contact details as above.

Sandra Penrose has been appointed as the executive officer, working one day a week (generally Thursday). She can be reached on 6488 2487 on Thursdays or at other times at home on 9447 3667.

The Erosion of Academic Representation and Influence on UWA Senate

THEN: As a former UWAASA President and President of the NTEU UWA Branch I have been an observer on Senate for many years. Senate at that time met once a month with the exception of a January meeting. In the “golden years”, my earliest years at Senate meetings, no distinction was made between observers and members in terms of seating and contributions to the Senate meetings. Issues that were closed to observers were rare, once every three years perhaps. The matters that were debated were also highly relevant to the academic community and I was both welcome to, and did, make contributions to every meeting.

At that time there were four academic elected members on the Senate in addition to the Chair of the Academic Board, all of whom made significant inputs to the debates.

The reform of the Senate in 2001 saw the number of elected academics down to three and observers relegated to seating behind the table, except for the DVC who kept appearing at the table. It was obvious that we were being downgraded but I preserved a role as a contributor to academic debate, though there were fewer issues that mat-

tered being brought to Senate for consideration.

The role of the Chair of Academic Board tended to vary with the incumbent, some making a strong support on academic matters while others tended to support the executive regardless. It was during this period that the Union made a decision to contest the elected academic positions which it did with great success.

NOW: Senate now meets only six times a year. The sub-committees of Senate accordingly also meet less often and there is less chance to scrutinise their activities and decisions. There are still three elected academics on the Senate, one elected general staff member, and with the elected members from convocation and student representatives, they can unite on issues of concern to the academic community.

The Chancellor would prefer a much smaller Senate without academic representation. The observers on Senate have now to ask to attend Senate meetings and are excluded from the closed sessions of Senate which form the major portion of each Senate meeting.

Socrates

Socrates appears to have been the source of some confusion and concern. It has largely been established to meet the requirements of the Research Quality Framework which has been established by the Howard Government as a basis for comparison for ranking and funding research in Australian Universities.

One source for confusion has been that while Socrates was established at UWA early in 2007 the final guidelines of the RQF were only issued in September 2007, creating some uncertainty about how Socrates should be configured to meet the RQF requirements.

According to the administration Socrates is simply a compilation of existing data that has long been held by the University. What is new however is the Socratic index of research performance. Individuals have access to their own index and may compare it with the index for their own school or academic level. The index of any individual is available to the executive and within faculties to the Deans and within Schools to the Heads.

There is concern about whether this index is being used as the basis for comparison between individual academics. Members have also expressed concern about the use of Socrates by committees of the University such as the Tenure and Promotions Committee. There is some danger that aspects of performance which are more difficult to

quantify may not carry their due weight in comparisons for any purpose.

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We would strongly advise all individuals to check their record on Socrates to ensure its accuracy.

Fortunately under the RQF arrangements, it is as much in the interests of the University as it is in the interests of an individual that these records are accurate.

Socrates cannot be amended directly by individuals. There are several reasons for this.

The basic data from which Socrates has been compiled would not thereby be amended and if it is a matter of publications, the auditor’s role also has to be fulfilled. Research funding that is not being administered by UWA is a particular source of difficulty and members should assure that all their funding is counted for their index.

More information on Socrates will be available on the UWAASA website.