

ACADEMIC SENATE COMMUNIQUE



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEWCASTLE
AUSTRALIA

10 MARCH 2021 MEETING

MATTERS DISCUSSED

Actions undertaken under urgent business by the PAS since the last meeting of the Academic Senate were reported. Of particular note was the approval for the continuation of the Adverse Circumstances Procedure COVID-19 policy waiver for 2021 as well approval of administrative changes to the Academic Senate Sub-Committee Terms of Reference and Standing Orders of the Academic Senate to reflect the recent change from faculties to colleges.

In his report, the Vice-Chancellor informed members that the University is making preparations to ensure compliance with the Government's Foreign Relations Bill, which takes effect in March 2021. It was noted that Kate Ramzan is leading this work and, it was suggested, could attend a future meeting of the Academic Senate to provide a more detailed update.

An update on the delivery of the Enabling Change program was provided. It was noted that progress is well underway within the newly formed Colleges and discussions with Schools and Divisions are continuing, with consultation papers due to be released in March. Members were encouraged to complete the change management training, noting it provides an overview of the steps to be undertaken to implement the change process.

There were two strategic items relating to Academic Matters for discussion: the report and recommendations of the External Review of Academic Governance (including a draft implementation plan), presented by PAS; and Equity in Higher Education National & Institutional Strategy (presented by Professor Penny Jane Burke).

The PAS provided an overview of the External Review of Academic Governance (the Review), its report and recommendations (19), together with preliminary implementation Plan prepared with input from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic to identify sponsors and proposed timelines for completion. A high level overview of the recommendations was provided, noting that once approved, it is proposed that the Teaching and Learning Committee and Research Committee, in addition to a number of smaller working parties (comprised of Academic Senate and sub-committee members and/or other individuals with specialist expertise), progress specific recommendations.

There was a query in relation to Recommendation 4 and the proposed development of a Service Teaching Policy. DVCA advised there is a need to develop a common understanding and agreed framework for the University and suggested a change in terminology to 'Expert Teaching'. Regarding Recommendation 6 and the proposed review of the policy architecture in relation to teaching and learning, it was noted there can be a tendency to try and 'fix' policy by deriving a new policy rather than having a good understanding of where the University's policies are failing.

The Director of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) spoke to a presentation on 'Equity Policy, Strategy and Practice'. Mobilising the collective expertise, leadership and regional connections that exist across the University will enable the institution to build on its success in this area. There was discussion around how to be better prepared for the equity challenges of different disciplinary groups. It was noted that there are equity initiatives across the University which could be applied more broadly across the organisation. It was raised that the External Review recommendation that there be a review of the teaching and learning policy architecture presents an opportunity for leadership and input from the Academic Senate to consider how equity can be better integrated within the policies and frameworks that drive our activity. It was noted that the Academic Senate will continue to be kept informed as this work progresses.

The 2020 Academic Senate Annual Assurance Report, and the Annual Academic Senate Member Survey 2020 results were presented for discussion and noting by PAS. The 2020 Report showed that that Academic Senate had substantially fulfilled its functions noting a partial compliance in relation to function (j), which relates to 'conducting internal and external institutional benchmarking to support best practice'. It was raised that extensive institutional benchmarking activities are being undertaken, through both Strategy Planning and Performance and Academic Excellence and there are metrics available in relation to retention, load and admissions trend. It was agreed that the Academic Senate would need to consider what institutional benchmarks it may wish to see and any interested members were encouraged to seek expressions of interest to participate in a focus group to consider this. The Director, Strategy, Planning and Performance and Pro Vice-Chancellor Academic Excellence advised they would both be happy to provide regular reports to the Academic Senate.

The results of the Academic Senate Member Survey indicate whilst the majority of respondents are satisfied with the content of the reports provided, there is also an appetite for opportunities to provide input into more strategic issues facing the University, academic outcomes and performance.

The DVCA&VP presented a paper updating on Covid-19 and Policy Waivers for 2021, noting that the University will return to the usual grading scale from Trimester 1 2021 and the WC (Withdrawn Covid) administrative code will no longer apply; that formal examinations will continue to be replaced with alternative assessment items not requiring on-campus participation and may include an oral examination ('Viva') if there are integrity concerns.

Contact

For more information, email Academic Senate Services: academicsenate@newcastle.edu.au or the President of Academic Senate: PAS@newcastle.edu.au.

Next meeting – 11 May 2021