NOTES OF A MEETING OF THE FACULTY ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICERS/SUBDEANS’ GROUP HELD ON 30 NOVEMBER 2007 AT 9.30 AM

1. REVIEW OF COURSE STRUCTURES: ISSUES AND OPTIONS PAPER - Ref F18620

Sylvia Lang, as Chair, welcomed Professor Ian Reid who gave a brief summary of what had occurred to date in relation to the Review of Course Structures and invited their comments and feedback. Professor Reid indicated that the consultative process was largely complete and that productive discussions had taken place particularly with the faculties. Professor Reid reminded the group that the deadline for responses to the Issues and Options Paper was the end of January 2008. During discussion, the following points were made:

- The deadline for receipt of submissions to the Issues and Options paper was problematic. It was difficult to obtain input from academic staff at this time of year and over the next couple of months as they were tied up with end-of-year issues and then on leave and preparing research grant proposals.
- It was difficult to focus only on academic issues. Knowing the implications of options was important.
- Any transition period would be difficult and must be managed appropriately.
- The FAO/Subdeans’ group was well placed to advise on transition requirements and process.
- Students need to be reassured that their qualifications will be recognised for the purpose of accreditation.
- Elongation of degrees is a recruitment issue which must be well marketed.
- Need to consider what happens to high TER students if they are required to complete a “general” degree before entering a “professional” degree course eg Law. Should high TER students have guaranteed entry?
- Need to market the integrity of our courses.
- How we proceed may depend on reading the trends – ie what is a sufficient qualification?
- Need to separate out what is academically desirable, from what year 12s want, from the financial implications and the availability of staff to do various things.
- No serious consideration had been given to a 2-year bachelor’s degree.
- There may be some support for such a degree in certain areas if completion of a “general” degree became a requirement for entry to a “professional” degree.
- Need to define what we mean by “general” degree and “professional” degree. The distinction was not necessarily clear.
- A general degree goes against what students want – more general units could be introduced gradually over time but students are choosing to do more specialist degrees.
- Care is needed so that any undergraduate degree courses with differing streams do not evolve to the stage where they end up mirroring the current course offerings.
- Whilst it was recognised that attempts would be made to offer more scholarships, there was concern that there may be a significant group of students who would not benefit from these.
- The need for change should be well justified.

In terms of the deadline, Professor Reid noted that, whilst he appreciated the need for some flexibility, other stakeholders were in a position to meet the original deadline and were keen to see the review finalised. Professor Reid remarked that responses to the Issues and Options Paper from faculties and from the FAO/Sub-Deans Group would be pivotal to the decision-making process. Professor Reid envisaged that it would be 2010 and beyond before any major changes were implemented. He urged members to send individual submissions. On behalf of the group, Sylvia Lang thanked Professor Reid.

2. UPDATE FROM ACADEMIC COUNCIL
Sylvia Lang provided an update on the Academic Council meeting held on 28 November 2007. Amongst other things, she advised that there had been wide-ranging discussion relating to the proposed Executive Master of Publication (EMPA). However, as this had not been formally listed on the agenda, a resolution on the matter had not been made. Members noted that, if approved, the course would be offered in collaboration with Curtin University of Technology and in association with the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG). The item would be circulated for Council’s consideration.

3. USE OF DUPLICATE UNITS TO RECORD INTERNAL CREDIT

Members were reminded that, at the meeting of the Group held on 9 November, a proposal regarding the use of duplicate units to record internal credit had been considered. However a final decision on the matter had not been reached and it had been agreed to bring it before the group again. Two members who had spoken in relation to the proposal, one in favour and one against, had summarised their arguments for the benefit of the group as follows:

FOR:

• The transcript is much clearer and easier to understand – this benefits the students both in terms of their ability to read and understand their transcript and also (importantly), it is clearer for prospective employers to read and understand.
• Students (generally) prefer to have all of their units and their marks displayed and we are, after all, here for the students.
• Having all the student’s grades in one course makes it easier to calculate GPAs and WAMs for various purposes. For example, the Law School counts all Law units undertaken when considering Honours invitations, Honours rankings and the award of degree with Distinction. I am sure that this is the same for other faculties especially where a student is simply transferring between single and combined courses.
• All units being credited towards their degree should show up on students’ transcripts.
• With respect to articulating courses, at the moment, a student who goes from, say, a Graduate Diploma to a Masters course has to credit the units completed in the lesser award – the marks do not show up as part of the higher level course.

There is concern regarding fail grades:

• It would be ridiculous to ‘credit’ failed units to a new course. Indeed, students accepted in to a course have a choice of what credit to take with them so I doubt we could ‘force’ them to credit failed units.
• Students could transfer from one course to another to get rid of their failed units.
  o However, it is quite a drastic step to change course just to get some fails off your record. Students would likely only transfer with the simple goal of getting rid of fails if there were two courses in which you could do the exact same things between which they could transfer and if this were the case I think the bigger issue would be the structure of the courses in question.
  o If students are transferring because they are dissatisfied with some components of their course and wish to change to a course in a similar area (e.g. from a Bachelor of Computer and Mathematical Sciences to a Bachelor of Computer Science) why would we want to penalise them for doing poorly in units that it was ultimately made clear they were not suited to? Why would we want students to have failed units haunt them in new courses especially when it is reasonable to say that many students begin their University courses at a time when they are too young to know what they want to do?

No matter what business processes we have in place for all manner of things, there will be pros and cons. We should not be designing business processes for the minority of students who MAY seek to ‘rort’ the system. We should instead focus on the majority of students who would benefit from this change – they will have clearer and easier to understand transcripts, they will be able to see their marks for all units making up their degree and prospective employers will be able to more easily interpret their results.
AGAINST:

- **Appearance of academic record**
  It makes the academic record confusing: the initial impression is that the student has studied for longer than is in fact the case. Then you gradually realize that the same periods of study, and same units, are listed more than once. (I have certainly had this experience with a/recs from one of our local competitors.)

- **If only passed units are carried across (as now):**
  Although it may seem an attractive idea to display a WAM drawn from all the units contributing to the new course (credited units plus new units), such a WAM is no longer valid, because the portion of it drawn from the credited units would not reflect the previous study reliably or consistently:
  
a) Some students have passed all their prior units and get credit for all of them; for these students the WAM is still accurate.
b) Some students have passed all their units but get credit for only some of them. For these students the WAM no longer accurately reflects their prior study.
c) Some students have passed some units and failed others (after all, unhappiness in the original course is often a reason for transferring). For these students the WAM is significantly manipulated. For instance, someone who completed two semesters of study with a WAM of 2.5 might very probably see that transferred to the new course as a WAM of, say, 4 or 5, simply because the failed units are no longer counted. This is a significant and, to my mind, unacceptable distortion of the true record of previous study.

- Students will be well aware of the potential for massaging their WAM, and will deliberately exploit it by requesting that units with their best marks should be credited across. Faculties, on the other hand, do, and should, select those units for credit that best fit the requirements of the new course. At present, students can be assured that it makes no difference to their WAM; but under a ‘duplicate unit’ system that would change, giving rise to conflict between students and faculties. (Students already do think precisely this way -- see below for a request I received last week.)

- The University’s policy is that students should preferably take all credit for which they are eligible (to complete the new course as soon as possible), but that they are not obliged to do so. Under a ‘duplicate’ system students might well choose to take less credit in order to select only those units that will maximize their WAM.

- A composite WAM unfairly advantages those who have transferred and left their poor marks behind, by comparison with those who have not transferred. There are plenty of students who start off poorly, then change their focus and do better, without transferring to a new course. Their WAM still reflects all their study, including the poor marks, so they are disadvantaged.

- The ‘duplicate units’ system would mean treating previous study at UWA entirely differently from previous study at any other institution. This would be strange and in my view unhelpful, especially in the light of current moves to equate study at another Group of Eight university more closely with our own.

- **If failed units are carried across as well as passed units (as suggested in the paper):**
  This could give a more accurate WAM for the whole study, as it would more fairly reflect the student’s previous performance in relevant areas (e.g. where a student transfers from the BComm/BSc to the BSc, all science units might be duplicated, whether passed or failed, to give a complete picture of the student’s performance in the BSc).
But it would be a radical departure from our previous credit procedures; it would be something quite different, a ‘record of relevant study’ rather than credit.

At present, students are required to apply for credit; but no student is going to apply to have failed units duplicated.

The University's policy that students should take credit, but are not obliged to do so, would have to be changed in order to allow faculties to insist on duplicating failed units.

It would by no means always be clear which units to duplicate. For instance, where two non-science units are being credited as electives at level 1, should one carry a couple of failed non-science units across too? If not, why not?

Faculties might find themselves deciding on unsatisfactory progress in a particular year on the basis of units failed in another course in 1st semester, which then appear as ‘duplicate units’ in the course to which the student has transferred mid year. This would be perfectly fair (as long as the principle of duplication had been applied appropriately) -- but it would be a bizarre outcome.

This system too would mean treating previous study at UWA in a radically different way from previous study at another institution -- even more so than if only passed units are carried across as ‘duplicate units’.

**If we stick with the current system:**

- Our current system shows clearly & economically all the units that are counting towards a particular course, without distorting either the visual impression of length of study or (more importantly) the WAM.

- The student currently gets a WAM for the units actually taken in the new course. This may be higher or lower than it would be under a ‘duplicate unit’ system (depending on whether the student's results are improving or not); but what is important is that it accurately reflects study undertaken in a particular period -- it doesn't conflate the new results with a selection of the previous results.

- Under SRS we had a weighted average for each calendar year, not for the course. A student could take a single unit in his/her final year and have a high weighted average for that year. We were able to work with that, and in fact were sorry to lose it! It showed readily, for instance, whether a student was performing better or worse in later years. Similarly the current credit system shows readily whether a student is performing better or worse in the new course.

- The paper suggests that it would be useful to show the 'duplicate units' under calendar year. They are already shown under calendar year on the transcript, in the course in which they were taken, so the suggestion adds nothing new. It would, indeed, be useful to add the original date of study to credited units on the current a/rec., but chiefly with regard to non-UWA units.

The Acting University Secretary expressed concern that, if the Duplicate Unit system was implemented, credit for previously completed units would be treated differently in the case of students who had completed such units at UWA than in the case of students who had completed them at other institutions. This was not considered to be desirable.

It was agreed not to proceed at this time with the Duplicate Unit system of recording credit for previously completed units.

### 4. REVIEW OF COURSE AND UNIT APPROVAL PROCESS

The Acting University Secretary informed the Group that Marion Bateman, Project Officer for the Review of the Course and Unit Approval Process, had submitted her report which would be considered as part of the Review of Course Structures.
5. OFFERING OF COURSES TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

The group was reminded that, where a faculty intended to make a course available to international students, a recommendation to this effect must be made to Academic Council. In the case of a new course, this was done via the checklists. If a course was already in place and a faculty decided subsequently to make it available to international students, it was not necessary to submit checklists but the proposal must still come to Council. (Faculties are also reminded to discuss the proposed course and fees with the International Centre.)

6. OPTICS

Wayne Betts provided information on OPTICS, a project aimed at improving the provision of enrolment and orientation information for commencing undergraduate students by a combination of hardcopy and online delivery.