Notes of a Meeting of the Working Party set up to consider mid-year progress checking held at 2pm on Tuesday 14 November 2006 in the SIMS Meeting Room

Present:
Tanya Aquino
Jacqueline Flowers
Jenny Gamble
Jenny Hopwood
Paul Lloyd
David Norman
Sylvia Lang (Convener)

Members were reminded that the University General Rule relating to satisfactory progress currently defined satisfactory progress over a calendar year and that there was no definition of satisfactory progress over one semester of study. The relevant rule was as follows:

"Satisfactory Progress
1.2.1.29(1) Subject to (2), to make satisfactory progress in a calendar year a student must—
(a) pass units to a value of at least half the total value of units in which they remain enrolled after the final date for withdrawal without academic penalty [see Rule 1.2.1.2(2)]; and
(b) satisfy any additional requirements which a faculty determines and states in its rules.
(2) For students in an honours course or in another course with a research component, the faculty will normally determine whether satisfactory progress has been made having regard to the report of the student’s supervisor."

It was noted that the issue of mid-year progress had been considered extensively in recent years but there had been no decision to move from the status quo. The issue was now back on the agenda primarily for the following reasons:

• the new National Code in relation to International Students requires that course progress be assessed at the end of each study period;

• many of the University’s scholarship conditions provide for payment of the second semester instalment of a scholarship to be conditional on satisfactory progress being made in the first semester.

The working party was reminded that, although it was sometimes necessary to treat international students differently from local students from an administrative perspective, student progress was an academic matter.

National Code Requirements
The Working Party was advised that the Outcome of Standard 10 of the National Code [Monitoring course progress] states as follows:

Registered providers systematically monitor students’ course progress. Registered providers are proactive in notifying and counselling students who are at risk of failing to meet course progress requirements. Registered providers report students, under section 19 of the ESOS Act, who have breached the course progress requirements.

David Norman explained that international students were now assigned a start and finish date and must be enrolled in at least one unit in each study period. An intervention strategy was required for students who were at risk of not completing within their allotted period. The provisions of the Act were designed to protect both students and education providers.
Having examined the detailed requirements of Standard 10, the working party concluded that the requirements of the Standard could be met by way of adjustments to administrative processes and that the existing University General Rules did not need amendment.

In particular the standard required that the University -

- assess the course progress of international students in accordance with its course progress policies and procedures at the end point of every study period;
- must have a documented intervention strategy for “at risk” international students;
- must ensure that the intervention strategy is activated, at a minimum, where the student has failed or is deemed not yet competent in 50% or more of the units attempted in any study period.

Members noted that it was currently possible to check student progress mid-year via the Student Information Management System (SIMS) and to generate warning letters to those students considered to be at risk of failing to make satisfactory progress in terms of the University General Rules. However, as the minimum intervention activation point defined in the Standard (failing 50% or more of points attempted) differed from that used by the University to identify students considered to be at risk (i.e., failing more than 50% of points attempted), a new SIMS rule would have to be written to allow identification of the relevant students. However, as international students were not easily identifiable by SIMS, the rule would pinpoint all students, international and local, who had failed 50% or more of units attempted. It was suggested that there might be no harm in contacting all such students. It was pointed out that difficulties could arise if a students’ progress in a semester breached more than one rule in the system. It seemed likely that manual intervention would be required to ensure the correct outcomes.

Tanya agreed to explore the options in SIMS.

It was noted that discussion was required regarding what the University’s intervention strategies might be - eg counselling.

Attention was drawn to the need in the protocol for the University to have an appeals and complaints procedure in place for students who do not make satisfactory progress and to the requirement that students have 20 working days in which to access such a process. This was not in accordance with the University’s current procedure, which allowed 12 working days, and would present logistical problems for the institution. It was suggested that the University determine whether the other Western Australian universities were able to accommodate the requirement and, if not, what, if anything, might be done about it. Sylvia agreed to follow this up.

It was noted that the issue of monitoring progress in relation to scholarships had not yet been addressed. Also members were keen to explore the more general issue of satisfactory progress in combined courses and how consistency might be achieved in the assigning of progress status. It was agreed that a further meeting of the working party be held to explore these issues.