Feedback and Recommendations

Academic Governance Workshops

13 November and 1 December 2014
Feedback

Academic Governance beyond learning and teaching

Senate’s responsibilities, as articulated in its rules and delegations, extend well beyond those academic matters that relate to learning and teaching. In particular, its responsibilities include advising the VC and University Council on all academic matters and related activities, on measures to safeguard academic freedom, on academic standards and on academic priorities. It also carries specific powers to approve (and monitor the application of) policy in all academic matters and to request and take action on reports on academic matters requested of Faculties, Departments and Operating Units.

However, feedback and empirical evidence indicates that the current Senate agenda is much too focussed on learning and teaching.

Sample Feedback:

- Senate has a relatively good understanding of responsibilities with regard to learning and teaching but is ‘light’ on research
- Senate business must be balanced across all areas of responsibility
- Why is there such a strong skew towards learning and teaching and not towards research?
- Where does research training fit? What focus has there been on higher degree research? There needs to be increased focus to develop process and frameworks.
- Internationalization is a governance challenge. There must be better processes for ensuring that the need for international student income is matched by the quality of international graduates
- Community engagement is a missing piece of Macquarie’s academic governance agenda
- Where does service and engagement come into the Senate agenda?

This concentration is reflected in the subcommittee structure Senate has established to discharge its business. Three of these (SLTC, CSFC and ASQC) focus solely upon learning and teaching, curriculum and academic program quality matters while the fourth (HDRC) engages only with those aspects of the academic research enterprise that relate to our HDR programs (MRes, MPhil and PhD). Since these subcommittees are the primary drivers of Senate’s business, this structural concentration on learning and teaching necessarily drives Senate’s attention in that direction.
The feedback from workshop I provides widespread support for measures to ensure that Senate’s business is well balanced across all areas of its responsibilities, including research, internationalisation and community engagement.

**Planning and managing the business of Senate**

Many have expressed a strong desire for the Senate to devote much more of its time to the bigger picture; focusing on strategic academic policy and governance issues rather than on the minutiae of the University’s operational mechanism. While Senate should be debating and giving clear direction on academic matters, much of the detail sitting below that should be handled by its expert sub-committees, in collaboration with Faculty Boards and the operational management functions of the University. In short, Senate should set the rules and objectives of the game and monitor to ensure they are met.

Over the past few months, Senate has been identifying ways to improve how it does its business. For example, the Senate agenda now contains a “strategy and policy” section which aims to highlight to big ticket items for discussion; it has drawn the items for Senate action out of the sub-committee minutes and promoted them to separate items under the “general business” or “strategy and policy” section; and has replaced full minutes of sub-committee meeting with summary reports, where possible.

Despite these efforts, more must be done to streamline business and ensure that Senate is focussed on determining the academic strategy and policy of the University. For example, the way that we develop and approve academic policy tends to relegate Senate to a ceremonial approval role at the very end of the policy process. This provides it with little opportunity to debate policy drivers and set the agenda for academic policy at the start of a development or review process.

Feedback from participants has suggested that Senate should set the strategic direction and have trust in its sub-committees to deliver on the operational detail and process. Currently Senate members are frustrated when matters that have been addressed appropriately and effectively in sub-committees are then re-examined in Senate meetings without Senate adding any real value. Consequently approval processes can be slower than they need to be.

**Sample Feedback:**

- *Move detail outside of Senate as it prevents Senate from lifting its gaze*
- *Senate to concentrate on strategic matters and have trust in its sub-committees to deliver on detail and process*
- *Senate should not be regulating rather it should be facilitating trust in the sub-committees to do the work that they are charged to do*
- *Have empowered decision makers with appropriate checks and balances. Trust*
decision makers within set (established) limits.

• Governance should proceed in a timely fashion: robust discussion to occur early in the piece.

• There must be better integration between Senate and its subcommittees. Subcommittees to drive issues on to the Senate agenda for early socialization

• Senate to become more pro-active rather than reactive to strategic imperatives

• Senate and sub-committees to provide opportunities for colleagues to engage in areas of interest

• Clear the Senate agenda so that Senate is able to respond to opportunities

• Strategic decision-making – problem with making strategic decisions that haven’t been properly assessed to determine “success” (e.g. introduction of MRes and changes to / penalising of PhD students who don’t finish in 3 years). Risk that students go elsewhere.

• There needs to be a review of policy decisions and their impact. There needs to be a closing of the loop to ensure that we are delivering quality programs and the right support in place to effectively deliver on strategic decisions.

Recognition and reward for staff and students

Feedback suggests that those involved in governance committees, whether staff or students, are concerned that their contribution goes largely unnoticed and unrecognised. With everyone facing mounting pressures and workload concerns, feedback indicates that many feel less inclined to participate and contribute to the vitally important governance structures of the University.

Sample Feedback:

• Assigning ‘value’ to colleagues’ participation in academic governance (not just in terms of workload) but also in terms of promotion criteria

• For people to have the time to enable their effective participation in governance committees – eg. staff to reduce teaching load

• It is hard to justify prioritizing the time to devote to Senate activities when assignment deadlines and external work pressures mount – especially if that involvement carries few rewards.

Expectations placed upon Governance committee members

A significant amount of feedback concentrated upon a lack of clarity in the expectations placed upon those engaged in academic governance process. Yet more dwelt upon issues which serve to limit the engagement and empowerment of members of academic governance committees. Many were unclear about their responsibilities between meetings, their role in communicating discussion and outcomes, the mechanisms available to them to bring issues to the table, and the representative nature of their
roles. Some commented upon a lack of training to undertake these roles effectively, and were worried by an absence of ongoing mechanisms to support them in their responsibilities.

Sample Feedback

- *Members of governance committees must be enabled (in terms of both skills and channels of communication) to represent their constituency, including seeking items for the agenda as well as reporting back on outcomes.*
- *More engagement and empowerment for staff and students to bring forward ideas within the governance structure that enables strategic decision making.*
- *Members of Senate to be more pro-active in bringing forward issues for discussion.*
- *Senate and other governance committees to embody a two-way flow of communication and engagement – not just vertical but also lateral lines of communication.*
- *Unclear expectations about what it means to be a member of Senate or Senate sub-committees.*
- *There needs to be clearer rules of engagement and guidance in regards to expectations of elected representatives. For example, there is confusion as to whether faculty elected representatives should be representing personal views or those of the Faculty. There is currently no strategizing between elected members.*
- *Each person on Senate should have equal respect and role on Senate and be expected to participate accordingly.*
- *Senate members must know what their roles and responsibilities are and be capable of delivering on them.*

Genuine Student Engagement

There was general agreement that while students were given a formal role in academic governance processes, they were rarely supported well enough to make an effective and influential contribution. The general view was that students were often asked simply to give a tick of approval to academic policies and strategies without being engaged in the process of developing or championing those positions. Committee processes were seen as difficult for students to navigate and contribute to, with a general feeling that their view would be seen as less relevant than that of a professor. Some students felt that when they put a view strongly it was too easily discounted, and that power imbalances and equity concerns were not adequately addressed.

Student members felt that they were not provided with the resources or training to fulfil their governance role adequately. They mentioned issues of communication both with academic governors and with their student constituencies, commenting that committees simply assumed that they would have access to broad communication networks within the University.
Sample Feedback:

• Students are not well informed about the academic governance structure of the University and the opportunities to get involved. Most students have never heard of Academic Senate.

• Some student representatives on governance committees have been appointed rather than elected to the position. This further adds to the uninformed culture amongst the wider student community.

• Students are not well supported in terms of connecting and communicating with their constituents. In some cases, website information is out of date. As a result, many students end up representing their personal view instead of the student view.

• Students feel that their involvement on governance committees is tokenistic. They are rarely given with the opportunity to raise issues and are not provided with the necessary background information to make an informed decision.

• Facebook/social media and Grapeshot magazine may provide greater exposure of academic governance activities to the student community.

Engagement with Heads of Department

Heads of Department were identified as a key group of academic leaders whose active involvement in academic governance was vital to its future efficiency and effectiveness. Not withstanding their emerging involvement in the Faculty Boards, it was felt that HoDs should have a stronger voice in the academic governance of the University. Often academic decisions were made centrally without any involvement of HoDs, who then had to take responsibility for implementing the resulting policies. In some cases, HoDs were not even made aware of the ramifications (or existence) of new academic policies, student processes, or government regulation. The feeling was that the requirement that each Faculty should have Senate representation that included at least one HoD or Professor did not, in itself, provide HoDs with enough input into academic governance decisions. HoDs were generally not able to get involved in sub-committee work.

Workload was a significant factor in HoDs deciding not to seek involvement in academic governance activities at the University level.

Sample feedback:

• A discussion must be had around the leadership of the Departments and where they feed into the governance structure of the university.

• Further thought needed regarding how to engage heads of department in academic governance. HoD is one of the hardest jobs in terms of the breadth of responsibility but minimal opportunity exists to have a voice in the broader executive/management and academic governance structure.

• Senate and sub-committees should be more inclusive of Heads of Department
Macquarie’s evolving governance structures

The planned role of Faculty Boards was not well understood. Many had questions about how their responsibilities relate to those of Senate, would they be academic governance or management committees, how their areas of responsibility relate to those of Faculty executives, and would committees such as Faculty LTCs and SQCs persist. How would clarity be developed in the role of Faculty Boards, how would delegations from Senate be managed, and how quickly would they be expected to take up and discharge their full responsibilities.

Sample feedback:

• *Need for clarity on what the role of the various governance bodies is and how they all fit together into the governance structure.*
• *There needs to be integration of Faculty governance structures with those of Senate.*
• *Faculty Boards also need to have the same discussions as Senate, but they must be focused on the faculty perspective. Faculty Boards need to be genuine and not just a soap box for Executive Deans.*
• *There needs to be fully implemented delegations of authority between Faculty Boards and Senate*
• *Need a way to collect and collate ideas for consideration by Senate. Faculty Boards should help here.*
Recommendations

Academic Governance Beyond Learning and Teaching

• Transfer the *Quality Enhancement Committee*, making it a governance committee reporting to Academic Senate.
• Establish a formal *Research Committee* of Academic Senate
• Complete the Senate review of the Higher Degree Research Committee (HDRC). Transfer any operational management responsibilities and merge Programs and Examinations Sub-Committee (PESC) into HDRC.
• Instruct HDRC review to advise Senate on the advantage / practicality of a single governance committee for Research and Research Training.
• Establish a working party to consider the transition of HDR examination to Faculties.
• Task the Chair of Senate, DVC-I and DVC-CE&A with developing recommendations to ensure that Senate is appropriately advised on internationalisation and corporate engagement matters.

Managing and Planning the Business of Senate

• Introduce a *Senate Steering Committee*, to organise and prioritise its agenda, monitor and support its sub-committee processes, and approve routine academic governance matters.
• Revise the policy review and approval process, to ensure early and well-briefed engagement with Senate while delegating greater responsibility to sub-committees.
• Complete the development of a comprehensive academic risk register. Make risk assessment and prioritisation an explicit responsibility of all sub-committees - and provide risk training.
• Establish a working party to identify the responsibilities of Senate that can be authorised to Faculty Boards and develop a timeline for that transfer.

Committee processes

• Establish a formal set of principles to govern all sub-committees of Senate, from which all Terms of Reference are derived.
• Develop a common business and secretarial support model for all academic governance committees (supported by governance services).
• Establish a much more robust process of reflective self-assessment and review to apply to all academic governance committees.
• Establish a timetable of member led business and make time in committee
meetings for that business.

**Student engagement**

- Develop a PACE unit, or module, focussed on supporting and rewarding student academic governors.
- Adopt the title “Student Fellow” for student members of Senate, its sub-committees and SAB.
- Formally recognise the contribution of student fellows on their transcripts and in letters of reference from Senate.
- Pair each student fellow with a mentor from the committee on which they serve.
- Establish a VC’s award for student governance contributions.
- Establish a formal timetable of student led business.
- Establish a budget to compensate students who engage in commissioned governance work.

**Communication and consultation**

- Establish a series of Vice-Chancellor and Chair of Academic Senate staff / student academic governance forums.
- Develop common guidelines to encompass all academic governance consultation processes.
- Develop a formal communication plan for Senate and its sub-committees.
- Redesign the Senate website to focus on hot topics.
- Introduce a searchable database of Senate and Faculty Board resolutions. Adopt a social networking platform for governance Q&A.
- Provide support for the communication needs of student and staff representatives - to facilitate better two-way communication with their constituencies.

**Miscellany**

- Establish a working party to develop a mechanism for ensuring that Heads of Department are better represented in the academic governance process.
- Pursue the review of the ex-officio / elected / professional staff balance on Senate. This process to conclude in first quarter 2015.
- Organise for Faculty elected members to meet between meetings and bring forward matters to populate a “business without notice” section of the agenda.