**Macquarie University First Year Experience Unit External Review**

**August 2013**

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**MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY**

**FIRST YEAR EXPERIENCE UNIT EXTERNAL REVIEW**

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**Executive Summary**

The First Year Experience (FYE) Unit commenced operation two years ago. It began as an amalgamation of discreet programs, and a narrative was developed to describe the focus of the Unit. The Unit emerged from a focus on support for commencing equity students, and it is now necessary and timely to expand and embed the associated programs into the faculties and align with other like programs. It is also timely to review the structure and location of the programs housed within the FYE Unit, it will have been challenging to have led a relatively diverse group of programs.

There was a demonstrated appreciation for data and evidence to inform the development and delivery of programs. The FYE Unit is to be commended for identifying the need for a pedagological change that started from a deficit model of service provision and then moved to a success model. The latter included early intervention and establishing an enabling approach for learning support.

It was evident from the information provided that the next developmental phase for the FYE Unit was now required. The move from a social inclusion focus to a focus for all students is essential. At the same time a decoupling of programs and new alignments is needed to ensure the best use of resources, effectiveness and coherence for the University.

The report includes quotes from both the Self-evaluation Report and from the staff and students interviewed during the site visit, with the intention being to capture voice and experience.

This report is for the Sponsor, Professor Judyth Sachs, to use as is appropriate in the context of future developments for the University.

# 1. Background

## 1.1 Objectives – *Inter Alia*

* Consider the alignment of FYE Unit with institutional strategy.
* Analyse intention and outcomes against the FYE strategy to date and the role of the FYE Unit in facilitating these outcomes.
* Consider the appropriateness of existing FYE staffing profile and reporting lines in delivering current and future iterations of FYE strategy.
* Evaluate multiple stakeholder perspectives on perceived role, function and value of FYE Unit and Strategy.
* Evaluate quality and standard of resources and materials developed by FYE Unit.

## 1.2 Terms of Reference

* ***Review fitness for purpose*:** Evaluating whether the services provided by the FYE Unit are consistent with, and effective in, enabling the university to meet its strategic goals.
* ***Review efficiency and effectiveness*:** Assessing whether the resources made and available to, and utilized by, the FYE Unit are employed appropriate to deliver FYE strategy.
* ***Assess FYE Unit Leadership*** and its effectiveness relative to purpose.
* ***Recommend******future development opportunities*** and/or roles for the FYE Unit.

## 1.3 Review Panel Membership

* Dr Kerry Ferguson, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Student Services), La Trobe University, Panel Chair
* Associate Professor Sophie Arkoudis, Acting Director for the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne
* Ms JoAnne Sparks, University Librarian, Macquarie University

## 1.4 Process

The panel prepared for the review and site visit by reading the self-evaluation report, a site visit consisting of presentations and interviews of key stakeholders and personnel occurred over two days. The last session of day two was an initial brief verbal report of findings to the Review Manager, Professor Gail Whiteford. The panel interviewed 14 staff members, two of whom were requested during the onsite visit. Nine students were interviewed as a group. See Appendix 1 for the full list of staff members and first names of the students.

Following the onsite visit the panel prepared the written report, elaborating on the initial findings and expanding on the initial recommendations.

## 1.5 Panel statement

As noted, the panel was provided a self evaluation report, interviewed pre-selected staff and requested further documents which were provided; these are listed in Appendices 1 and 2.

Two extra interviews were also arranged at the panel’s request and it was much appreciated that these staff accommodated the request at such short notice.

The staff interviewed were generous in providing the panel with an honest and thoughtful analysis of their experience and knowledge of the FYE Unit and its associated activities. They had clearly prepared for the interviews and wished to participate fully in order to assist the panel to present a fair and balanced report.

Notwithstanding the considerable information provided to the panel, it represents only part of the story of the FYE Unit and Macquarie University.

# 2. Summary of Recommendations

2.1 Develop a First Year Experience (FYE) Strategy and Plan to address all students which is incorporated as part of an overall student experience plan. This would be a whole of University Plan and represent the whole of the students’ experience, including academic, well-being and social.

2.2 We recommend a restructure of Learning Skills staff with a hub and spoke model to be developed. We recommend the hub to be located in the Learning & Teaching Centre (LTC) and the spokes in the Faculties. The hub should comprise of a full time Director for English language development and a full time Lecturer B, who is an English language specialist. We also recommend that the spokes be staffed with one 0.5 faculty academic staff member and one full time Learning Advisor in each of the four faculties, to work together with staff to develop English language curriculum to meet the needs of the faculties, under the direction of the Director of English language development.

2.3 A full evaluation of the mentoring program is recommended and the mentoring reach is extended in first year and beyond. It is suggested the mentor program be strengthened by aligning with other student extracurricular programs, e.g., Global Leadership Program and formal recognition of the students’ contributions be addressed.

2.4 Recommend a structural realignment with staff relocated to the appropriate areas, with the advisory group to determine final location. The panel suggests mentoring staff to be a part of the portfolio of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students) and Registrar, and new Learning Skills roles described in 2.2 to be realigned with LTC. The final configuration should be determined by the Director of the LTC, in conjunction with the Provost, and in consideration of the new Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) position when it is filled. We recommend a hub and spoke structure for the Learning Skills team. The current separate FYE group would be disbanded. A converged service point which includes ‘just in time’ support, and appropriate triage to all student services should continue to be developed under the auspices of the Library. A FYE Co-ordinator is appointed to be located with the DVC Students and Registrar.

2.5 Create an advisory body comprised of key senior stakeholders and give this collaborative group a mandate to develop the strategy for the First Year Experience program.We suggest a strategic plan that captures the themes of the review and reflects the Student Lifecycle. Further, this body would develop the implementation plan responding to the Review’s recommendations. It is necessary to create an advisory body that can implement recommendations that are collaborative and that integrate and align with the areas these stakeholders represent.

# 3. Review Report

## 3.1 Fitness for Purpose; and

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## 3.2 Efficiency and Effectiveness

The University and staff are commended for establishing a FYE Unit. There is a significant body of knowledge nationally and internationally indicating the need to focus on the critical period when students join the University as learners. Higher Education Institutions across the world are acknowledging and responding to the need to understand the needs of students as they transition from secondary to higher education and enter from other pathways and entry schemes. This body of knowledge is generally referred to as the First Year Experience. Retention is a major focus for Universities not only for ensuring the students establish themselves as learners and connect to their University, but that they do so as smoothly as possible through the transition period. This need was recognized by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Inclusion) and the Director of the FYE Unit who recognized and acted upon the need to move from the practices of the previous study skills unit and establish a FYE Unit to address transition and learning support. The staff is commended for the focus on FYE and commitment to transition and identifying learning supports. Moving from a deficit model to a success model is a very positive move for the FYE Unit and is clearly understood and established as a basis for practice for the Unit.

The Unit has been operational for a period of two years, the initial focus of the Unit was on supporting students from a disadvantaged background and arose from social inclusion principles. The understanding being if you get it right for students categorized as equity, you get it right for all students. At several points of discussion with staff it appears that this is still a fundamental principle for the Unit. It is now timely and necessary to broaden the focus to support for all students during their first year and connect to subsequent years and to the post University experience.

It is critical that the focus for FYE is comprehensive and addresses all cohorts and connects to an overarching Student Experience strategy and plan. There is currently a student experience evaluation exercise being undertaken. FYE staff did not mention this review nor did they articulate a connection to the student experience focus of the University.

There are unclear messages about the FYE unit and the whole student experience and student cycle - the relationship between the FYE unit and the other areas in the university who have responsibilities in this space. There were many instances when the principle of “*FYE is everyone’s responsibility*” was mentioned by those interviewed, and there was also a sense that the FYE Unit projected the view that it was mainly their responsibility. This seems to indicate a disconnection between the work of the FYE Unit and other areas of the University who also provide support to students embarking on their first year of University.

There was considerable feedback and information that suggested the Unit was isolated from other synergetic programs and faculties; this was deemed as less than optimal for achieving the desired outcomes and therefore limiting the effectiveness of the Unit. “*Silo*” was mentioned in several interviews, as was the lack of connection to other areas, resulting in an apparent divide and lack of collaboration. Positive connections were noted in the self-evaluation report, the extent appeared to be overstated relative to the comments made to the panel from other areas of the University.

There was also an absence of comment on connections to obvious areas such as campus life, and given the support and focus for students from disadvantaged backgrounds there appeared to be minimal connection to the Widening Participation Unit and the obvious overlaps were not addressed in either the written materials or in the interviews.

The view of the Head of the FYE Unit and those interviewed diverge on the assessment of the effectiveness or extent of engagement for the work of the Unit. Comments from those interviewed include:

*“Well intentioned stand alone”*

*“Off out there on their own”*

*“Not bringing the rest of the institution with them”*

*“We do not want a pocket of expertise”*

*“Forgotten to take broader stakeholder groups with them”*

*”Purpose of FYE and how interfaced with the rest of the University”*

“*What does FYE Unit do*?”

“*Taking over the whole world*”

It was also unclear if the FYE unit is an academic unit. There was unambiguous information provided to indicate the Unit had scholarly foundations; what was not so clear was the impetus for the research focus and what was the nature of the overarching research agenda. How this agenda and the vision is communicated and prioritized was also not evident.

The unit is not comprehensively viewed as meeting the learning support needs of the faculties. Orientation appears to be limited to the FYE programs and to the social, clubs and student association activities. There is not an overall University approach to orientation. Orientation only appears to be through the mentor program and the UniWISE Academic orientation iLearn Units. This appears to miss a very important aspect of transition and the engagement and co-ordination of Faculty and Discipline orientation.

A clear statement of strategy and alignment across the University is required to underpin the strategy for FYE. It was indicated in the Self-evaluation Report that a Green Paper outlining the new strategic direction for the University was expected in July 2013 which will contribute to the direction of the next FYE plan (2014-2016).

The staff is to be commended for connecting to the Academic Plan of the University. It appears that great effort has been made to locate activities within that plan. The list of activities that married up with the Academic Plan was very extensive and did seem to be ambitious; it did not appear to be prioritized and was insufficiently outcome focused.

The achievements reported and described both in the Self-evaluation Report and via the interviews were not necessarily supported by evidence. In the Self-evaluation report the Unit aspires to be a national leader. While this is a worthy aspiration, no process was articulated to evaluate progress for this goal.

Staff from the FYE unit clearly understood the need for data and how that data would legitimize programs and provide evidence for effectiveness. However, the FYE plan lacked a robust evaluation component to illustrate progress against goals and demonstrate outcomes for students. Overall there was a lack of evidence and benchmarking information provided to the review panel; we could not confirm the achievement of goals and effectiveness of the program.

The staff of the Unit were able to present a coherent account of their specific areas in the FYE Unit. What was not articulated was a clear narrative that explained the rationale for the grouping of the activities and structure of the Unit. For example, it is unclear why the Learning Skills group which is relevant for all students is grouped with the FYE Unit.

First Year Experience is also a broad responsibility that crosses over a number of areas in the University including Student Administration, Well Being, International, Library, Information Technology and Campus Life. Relationships between FYE and each of these areas appears to be very weak and even non-existent. A broader approach to student success including social engagement and belonging seems to be missing.

It has been difficult to understand the various aspects of the Unit’s work; there is an overlap and merging of activities which are variously named as enablers and strategies. Uniwise is a tool but it is also described as a vision and a strategy. The result was that the panel was not always able to draw a distinction between the programs.

***Recommendation 1:*** Develop a First Year Experience (FYE) Strategy and Plan to address all students which is incorporated as part of an overall student experience plan. This would be a whole of University Plan and represent the whole of the students’ experience, including academic, well-being and social.

***Overall FYE Unit Organisation and Key Areas***

According to the Self-evaluation Report, “The FYE Unit is comprised of 2 “distinct but related” teams, - The Transition Program (Academic orientation and Mentors @Macquarie) and Learning Skills”. The Learning Help Desk and UniWISE are used to deliver programs to students. English Language Programs are a critical theme for which there is overall awareness.

***Learning Skills***

The panel were very impressed by the Learning skills staff. The panel agrees this effort is under resourced relative to the sector and the associated staff/student ratios at Macquarie University are compromising outcomes. Staff indicated they are ranked in the bottom three Australian Universities in this respect.

In this review, we use the term Language Advisors as staff who work within the broad area of English language development, which includes academic literacy and study skills.

The Barthel review conducted in 2012, covered Academic language and learning and proposed 24 recommendations. While these recommendations aligned with the DEEWR Good Practice Principles, it was unclear how they articulated a clear strategic role and implementation. Furthermore, it is not evident how or if these recommendations have been implemented at Macquarie. The review suggested the establishment of an Academic Literacy Reference Group. While this step has occurred, it appears that the reference group has had very little influence on implementing the Barthel Review recommendations. For example, Barthel recommended increasing the number of staff in Learning Skills, yet this has not occurred.

It seems that the Learning Skills Unit does not ‘fit’ neatly within the current structure of the FYE Unit, and it currently lacks any strategic direction. The Learning Skills team is invisible, not legitimised and disconnected from faculties and academic staff. There is a diluted focus with very little uptake from the learning environment. Academics want more of them and want more engagement, the Learning Skills staff want to engage. Yet neither group is able to do so, as the current structures works against collaborative approaches. This creates some confusion between consultation, communication and design of the Learning Skills Unit. They are reduced to bolt-on approaches to academic language and learning which has raised risk issues and a level of concern amongst those interviewed for the review. At the very least Learning Skills seems to be relegated only for first year students as it is located in the FYE Unit. This is contrary to current thinking in the sector and the views of TEQSA, that English language development is a whole of student program experience from entry to completion.

Learning skills do not appear to be embedding academic literacies within units of study. The focus needs to be on curriculum design, currently the story is not jelling with the University. For example, the “Communities of Practice” concept is still very nascent, not easily understood and communication and embedding not sufficiently developed, there was no agreement about what it is and a general vagueness around the concept. No documentation for communities of practice was evident.

The panel did agree that the resources invested in Learning Skills was low and an increase in Learning Advisors was recommended.

According to the report, Learning Skills includes:

* *The Learning Help desk, a triage model, assisted by mentors to give flexible options for students, leverage mentoring, and strengthen mentor leadership roles,*
* *Developing a new iLearn-based literacy site – UniWISE (version 1)*
* *Creating a learning Skills component of training for all mentors*
* *Adoption of a hub and spokes model, linking central program to faculty and*
* *Seeking partnerships with academic partners (teaching 1st year) to develop classroom academic literacies.*

***Learning Help Desk***

The mentors communicated that they felt prepared and supported to resource the Learning help desk. The panel was very impressed by the standard and professionalism of the mentors.

What was not evident was a closing of the loop where themes/multiple incidents of concerns or queries were captured and reported to the relevant areas. Whilst there were regular debriefings through the mentor program there was no apparent systematic method for capturing, monitoring and follow up of this vital information.

A converged Information Service point including just in time support should be for all students, there was some confusion as to who was able to use the program. There appeared to be a divide between international and domestic students and undergraduates and post graduates.

Whilst the Learning Help desk is located in the library, the library has no clear oversight or management role with the program.

The Learning help Desk with the Triage function being housed in the library sends clear messages that this is a service for all students. It is suggested that this program continue to be developed under the auspices of the University Librarian with a matrix connection to a FYE coordinator.

***UniWISE***

The Unit staff and the leadership had a clear understanding that data was needed to inform the provision of support for commencing learners.

The Report states that “*UniWISE is the backbone of Learning Skills and Transition*”.

There are high expectations by the FYE staff for UniWISE to deliver the vision for the FYE Unit. The investment in UniWISE was striking and the promotion of the focus on UniWISE as a gateway for transition seemed over reaching for the current stage of development of the Program.

The Self-evaluation Report indicated UniWISE began by providing academic literacy resources (Version 1) and now version 2 is stated as “*an institutional platform for transition, skills development (notably academic literacy) and whole of life cycle connectivity. Additionally, UniWISE v.2 has an analytic backend that allows us to measure the efficacy and impact of content on student learning outcomes*.” p.10

The language used to describe UniWISE was alienating and gave no clarity as to the operation of the current version and capabilities and did not allow for a clear picture of the future developments of the Program. Questions posed to the staff presenting UniWISE did not elicit clarity but rather more confusion, and the demonstration didn’t assist. It is obviously a Program that has significant potential and the Unit should be commended for their initiative in identifying a need and beginning to respond accordingly. The panel believed the potential was undermined by the isolation of the Program.

Many comments supporting this view were forthcoming including:

***“****what is it?”*

*“what’s it going to be?”*

*“not there yet”*

UniWISE appears to be a substitute for a strategic framework, driven from the ground up rather than a collaborative top down, bottom up approach. Technology is a tool; it is not a guiding principle. UniWISE was also presented as an ‘Enabler of Engagement’.

The benefits of UniWISE were not evident as expressed in the documentation and the presentation. There was little evidence of the benefits of the academic literacy component of UniWISE and we saw some issues in the extrapolation statements based on the acquired information.

There were many questions about UniWISE – what is the scale and how do the pieces work together? Is UniWISE a welcoming or a learning support tool? UniWISE did not appear to be connected to the Marketing Unit, recruitment or Learning and Teaching areas.

The program appeared over manufactured with a one-size-fits-all approach. The perception of staff interviewed ranged *from it’s a start-up, it’s like a small business, it has big ideas, it seems experimental, it needs traction in the University and it has almost guerilla tactics and a ‘go for it’ approach.*

There were frequent references in the self-evaluation report and from the staff of the Unit to the *“Backend analytics* function of UniWISE.The collection, use and dissemination of the information was poorly communicated. The panel had serious concerns about the collection of data; there were too many data issues expressed including the credibility of the data and institutional usage, privacy issues and informed consent. It was not clear where the data is held and distributed. Some comments suggested it is outside of the institutional approach to data management and therefore creates a potential risk to the University. It was stated that only the owner of UniWISE saw the data and the students, although how this happens was not clear. In a further interview, this statement was contradicted as one faculty member indicated he had seen the data and another had not been given access.

UniWise is potentially collecting massive data. What is being collected and why is it being collected? Is it building a portfolio for research? Collecting data to effectively inform student progress and to form the basis for improvement recommendations, would seem to be the intent and a critical use of the information. However the data is currently not available for this task, including determining at risk students. Currently, at best, the data is isolated with little transfer of information and an apparent lack of trust to share it with colleagues who are clearly partners in supporting learning skills development and the first year experience of students.

Setting up the systems (UniWISE) to get analytic data has been commendable; there now needs to be a focus to determine what data is needed to support the strategic direction. Any collection of data must include: management of risks around individual privacy; application of good practices in terms of security and storage; and finally, the development of clear policies and practices for access and use of the information.

***English Language Programs***

While there is an acute awareness of the importance of English language development for student success, it appears that Macquarie University currently lacks a cohesive and integrated approach to achieving this aim. Part of the challenge lies in the location of Learning Skills in the FYE Unit. Another part of the jigsaw is to develop a Learning Skills Unit that is informed by evidence-based approaches regarding what works, and in turn have the ability to add to research in the area regarding effective practices that integrate more closely with faculties. MU’s English language strategy should capture an integrated approach to English language development from entry through to exit, and linking the Learning Skills Unit with faculty, staff and the triage model in the Library.

During our visit, diagnostic testing was mentioned a number of times. This is a growing trend in Australian universities and also one that is resource intensive. What the evidence indicates about a whole of university approach to diagnostic testing is that it is difficult to mandate for all students and hard to develop a test that assesses all students English language ability. It is also difficult to follow up on students to attend workshops (evidence indicates that students do not find workshops relevant, as they are not linked to their disciplinary learning). The advantages of diagnostic testing are that the institution can identify students who could be at risk of making satisfactory progress and monitor them during the course of their degree. Some consideration should be given to the effective use of resources as this kind of large scale testing can consume significant resources.

One suggestion that would address English language development in the first year, is to explore the feasibility of a Foundation Unit subject in courses. This subject could encompass academic skills within disciplinary learning and identify students who would need support as they progress through their studies.

Evidence suggests that English language development should be occurring within the faculties. We also know that such programs need to have clear leadership and direction, and offer an academic home for staff working within faculties. We suggest that a hub and spoke model for English language development be adopted at MU. The hub to be located in the Learning and Teaching Unit consisting of a Director of English language development at Associate Professor level and a, lecturer B level appointment. The Learning advisors (1.0 EFT per faculty) are located in the faculties coordinated by the hub, which sets up research agendas strategy and directions. Appoint a 0.5 disciplinary academic in the Faculty to co-ordinate the faculty interface and undertake specialized faculty based activities to advance the English Language strategy as informed by the faculty and develop English Language programs to meet the needs of the faculty staff and students. A hub and spoke model would support the effort to up skill academic staff.

***Recommendation 2:*** We recommend a restructure of Learning Skills staff with a hub and spoke model to be developed. We recommend the hub to be located in the Learning & Teaching Centre (LTC) and the spokes in the Faculties. The hub should comprise of a full time Director for English language development and a full time Lecturer B, who is an English language specialist. We also recommend that the spokes be staffed with one 0.5 faculty academic staff member and one full time Learning Advisor in each of the four faculties, to work together with staff to develop English language curriculum to meet the needs of the faculties, under the direction of the Director of English language development.

***Mentors @MU***

“Mentors are great”

The mentoring program appears to be very successful. The online capability and face to face components coupled with tailoring for segments, e.g., the distance education students, indicated a responsiveness and agility of the program to address differences and associated need. The diversity matching of the mentors and mentees was clearly a very innovative and effective component of the program. The students involved in the mentoring program are articulate and reported a program that equips them for the roles of mentor and team leader. The students who were interviewed were very proud to be associated with the Program, were excellent ambassadors for the program and clearly demonstrated the merit and effectiveness of the Mentoring program.

Connecting mentors to students pre-commencement in order to guide and assist students in joining the learning environment is a major strength of the FYE Unit.

The mentoring as a pre-commencement initiative has been positively received as evidenced by the improved take up levels by commencing students.

The levels of participation whilst dramatically increased from 2012 figures does not allow for an in-depth understanding of the effect of the program. For those students who do not elect to utilise the program, there is little understanding of their experience and how is it different from the students who are mentored.

The mentoring program is described as both a leadership program and as a welcoming, commencing initiative. The mentors are involved in providing a help desk in the Library and providing a learning and information triage service. It has provided a “Preferential Employment Scheme” for equity students.

How the mentoring program works in relation to international students is also relevant as it currently does not engage with these students. If a separate approach is in place for international students, then this support needs to be understood and coordinated as a whole of university effort. Both domestic and international students are on campus, attending classes and utilizing the academic and student services available. Triaging their needs should be seamless.

Mentors @ MU runs the risk of being a closed ecosystem, the program would benefit by being aligned to other programs at MU such as PACE. The program aims were stated as both for students’ transition needs, and also as a leadership program for the mentors and team leaders. If it is a leadership program - what actual credit or recognition do they receive (formal or informal)?

Determining the best fit for locating the Mentoring Program will depend on the major purpose of the Program.

***Recommendation 3:*** A full evaluation of the mentoring program is recommended and the mentoring reach is extended in first year and beyond. It is suggested the mentor program be strengthened by aligning with other student extracurricular programs, e.g., Global Leadership Program and formal recognition of the students’ contributions be addressed.

## 3.3 FYE Unit Leadership

The staff interviewed from the FYE Unit showed high levels of commitment to the work of the Unit. Their appreciation for the need for a focus on First Year, presented as transition and learning supports, was evident. The majority of the staff were also able to consider the next stage of development and alignment for further growth and embedding of these areas into faculties.

The Leadership of the Unit appeared dispersed with no apparent strategic direction for the projects operating under the FYE Unit.

The Transition group seemed to be in two distinct groups either focused on Mentoring or UniWISE. UniWISE in particular appeared to need closer management to integrate into the faculties and student wellness and performance, and in particular to align with the ”well-being engine” program. The management of the data needs to be part of the overall data management of the University. UniWISE was referred to as “*a runaway horse from the team pulling the cart*” and there were several references to risk of the data being managed as it is currently.

There appear to be gaps in staffing capacity, insufficient learning skills staff, and at times junior staff tasked with responsibilities at very senior levels of the organization, including a junior staff member providing a briefing for the Governing Body.

There is not enough senior direction and no one is joining the dots was the impression of the panel. There also appeared to be uncoordinated job creep with supervision of some staff appearing to be laissez-faire including an apparent organizational naiveté exhibited several times throughout the interviews.

A culture of “us” and “them” was evident with a wall between academic and non-academic staff apparent. The process around consultation and policy development was described as “*defensive*”, “*siege mentality*”, and a “*bunker approach*”. “*Doesn’t need to be like this”, “we’re all on the same team*” were comments expressed.

It seemed a ‘hodge podge’ of areas have been hobbled together under the FYE Unit. Part of the implementation and organizational issues to be addressed is decoupling and structural alignment.

The University requires a whole of University approach to the students’ First Year Experience; it currently lacks a coherent leadership model for this agenda.

The work is impressive; their current isolation undermines embedding it in the organization. A statement in the Self-evaluation Report captures the culture that has arisen, in reference to the limitations of only being able to service first year undergraduates, when approached to deliver support in later years and to postgraduates, *“…has resulted in alternative and inferior programs being established, and without any alignment with what we consider good practice. (In the worst cases, these programs set up against our advice- have then come and demanded we supply them with resources, and even our mentors!)”*

## 3.4 Future Development Opportunities

With major changes in positions, appointments and changes to structures already underway, it is timely to reconsider the structure and associated strategies for the FYE Unit.

There is a relatively new position of Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students) and Registrar in place and a new Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) position commencing later in the year. This affords the opportunity for new alignments, new structures and extension of collaborative relationships.

The panel was impressed with the apparent success of PACE, there were several references to PACE being the basis for a model for the FYE focus, “*it is enabling, owned by the Faculty, understood by students and the responsibility of everyone.”*

This work is everyone’s responsibility; the effort needs to be decoupled, realigned and channeled into different areas of the institution. There is a need to develop a devolved model and structure.

The First Year Experience Unit should not deliver every activity. An alternative structure could be established to have a guiding and coordinating role instead, which drives institutional strategy and planning.

It is suggested a FYE Co-ordinator to be located with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students) and Registrar to have a co-ordinating role and to build a framework. The role does not include delivery of the programs but rather coordinates and drive policy. This location and role would establish the connections of FYE with Student Experience and other units and develop a plan that is owned by the University.

***Recommendation 4:*** Recommend a structural realignment with staff relocated to the appropriate areas, with the advisory group to determine final location. The panel suggests mentoring staff to be a part of the portfolio of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students) and Registrar, and new Learning Skills roles described in 2.2 to be realigned with LTC. The final configuration should be determined by the Director of the LTC, in conjunction with the Provost, and in consideration of the new Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) position when it is filled. We recommend a hub and spoke structure for the Learning Skills team. The current separate FYE group would be disbanded. A converged service point which includes ‘just in time’ support, and appropriate triage to all student services should continue to be developed under the auspices of the Library. A FYE Co-ordinator is appointed to be located with the DVC Students and Registrar.

The panel suggests that the Provost coordinates a senior advisory body consisting possibly of Deans, Associate Deans, University Librarian and Pro Vice-Chancellors to discuss student experience strategy, determine a decentralized model of operation and agree upon a central governance model. The Strategy needs to come from above and be a staged and multi pronged approach, an under and over strategy.

An advisory body should reflect the collaborative approach required to focus the outcome on a quality student experience. We suggest the following members are included:

* Gail Whiteford
* Jonathon Wylie
* JoAnne Sparks
* Sherman Young; and
* Ian Solomonides

The panel suggests the Chair is Jonathon due to his role in overseeing Student administration.

We suggest the Advisory body also reviews the collection of data and the associated risks.

***Recommendation 5:*** Create an advisory body comprised of key senior stakeholders and give this collaborative group a mandate to develop the strategy for the First Year Experience program.We suggest a strategic plan that captures the themes of the review and reflects the Student Lifecycle. Further, this body would develop the implementation plan responding to the Review’s recommendations. It is necessary to create an advisory body that can implement recommendations that are collaborative and that integrate and align with the areas these stakeholders represent.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1 – List of staff and students interviewed

**Staff:**

In order of interviews:

Dr Justin Dutch, Director, First Year Experience Unit

Ms Deidre Anderson, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Students) and Registrar

Mr Darren Peters, Director, Campus Wellbeing and Support Services

Mr Jonathon Wylie, Deputy Registrar

Professor Gail Whiteford, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Inclusion)

Dr Rebekah Wegener, Acting Manager, Transition Programs

Mrs Misha Monsted, Transition Program Officer

Professor Judyth Sachs, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost

Ms Tessa Green, Manager, Learning Skills

Mr Joshua Dymock, Learning Skills Advisor

Mr Ian Solomonides, Director, Learning and Teaching Centre

Associate Professor Sherman Young, Associate Dean (Learning and Teaching), Faculty of Arts and Chair of the Academic Senate Teaching and Learning Committee

Associate Professor Jenny Donald, Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning), Faculty of Science

Dr Richard Reed, Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Social Inclusion)

**Students:**

The following students held a range of roles in the mentoring program including mentor, mentee and team leader, they were also from a range of faculties:

Enver, Valiant, Dillon, Kate, Kevin, Michelle, Rebecca, Julia, Hamish

## Appendix 2 – Extra List of reports, charts and papers provided to panel

1. Academic Operational Plan 2010-2014
2. Student Wellness and Performance: Mapping of Goal, Outcomes and Key Factors
3. Our University A Framing of Futures (Green Paper: S Bruce Dowton MD)
4. How to Embed Discipline-Specific: Discourse Learning through Communication, Faculty of Business and Economics
5. PACE Hub and Spoke Staffing Model
6. Framework for Evaluating Student Experience
7. Evaluating Macquarie University’s HEPPP-Funded Programs. A Research Proposal: Executive Summary, Dr Richard Reed
8. Macquarie Academic Plan