**Response to Review of English**

A review of the Department of English took place on 5-6 June 2012. The report of the panel was broadly extremely positive and gives the Faculty a good deal of confidence in the current direction of the Department. At the same time, the panel drew attentions to areas where there was the potential for further improvement. The Department will be holding a retreat in mid September to discuss the report and its recommendations in detail and to formulate an action plan.

Response to specific recommendations:

1. English to be represented on Faculty research Committee (p.3). **Not agreed**. In 2010 the Faculty’s committee structure was reviewed to clarify the difference between deliberative and executive committees, to improve terms of reference and reporting lines and to make a clear distinction between representative and expert committees. The research committee is an expert committee and so it is not appropriate to recommend that a particular department should have a seat. Members of the department can apply to join the committee as seats become vacant.
2. Reduction of unit offerings (p4) **Agreed**. The English Department offers a substantial diet of units and this puts pressure on workload especially when the student load is falling (by 7% in 2012). Plans are in place to trim offerings strategically, especially via unit rotation and sharing. This is a process which is also being enacted in some other departments with a view to offering more streamlined degrees with simpler structures.
3. More activity in the pursuit of grants especially for junior staff (p. 6). **Agreed**. See commentary on research culture below.
4. Use of external consultant in grant writing (p. 7) **Agreed** subject to budget.
5. Promotion of greater cohesiveness among HDR students (p.8) **Agreed**. The Department already has a lively programme of readings and research seminars, and plans are underway for a student-led HDR social and research committee.
6. Greater flexibility in levels of appointments and re-advertisement if necessary (p. 10). **Agreed** subject to budget. Recent appointments have been deliberately made a more junior levels and the Faculty’s policy is already always to re-advertise if suitable candidates do not present themselves.
7. Replacement of senior staff with research active appointments at grades above B. (p.10). **Agreed** subject to budget. However, less senior staff can have strong track records and policy is always to appoint research active staff. Two recent appointments have been made specifically to address needs in the provision and development of online teaching and learning and this may be reflected in this recommendation.
8. Recruitment beyond Macquarie pool (p.10). Policy and practice have always been to advertise nationally and internationally, and to appoint the best candidate.

**Agreed**.

1. Enhancement of Departmental brand (p12). **Agreed** subject to budget.
2. Better community engagement. (p 12) **Agreed**.
3. Enhancement of public profile within and without the University (p.12). **Agreed**.
4. There are some other recommendations on pp. 13-15 however because of the different format employed it is not clear if these are intended as formal recommendations or notes of clarification to the text. If the former the first three are not contentious and the one concerning the need to recruit high profile researchers to ‘carry leadership of research’ is especially noted and agreed subject to budget. The suggestion that the Department should rename itself (p. 15) is **not agreed**. The name of the Department has been the subject of scrutiny and debate over a number of years, and will be retained, as it has been found to be transparent and marketable, especially as ‘English’ is the sole compulsory HSC subject in NSW.

The panel added a second report which has been made available to QEC. This drew attention to the confidential submission prepared by the AD Research. The Committee will note that the panel had some serious concerns with this submission. It is unfortunate that the panel chose not to raise these at the time either with the AD Research herself or the Executive Dean and it is difficult for the committee (the submission itself being confidential) to evaluate either the submission or the validity of the panel’s response to it. In dealing with this I sought the Chair of the Panel’s permission to see the submission and I shared this with the Head of Department. I then went through the submission and tried to align it with what the panel itself said about research in the department and my own views of research in English – bearing in mind that the views of the panel and of the AD Research are only inputs into a more general process. Having done that I held separate meetings with the AD Research and the Head of English to discuss their perceptions and then held a joint meeting in which I asked the AD Research to show the evidence base for her submission as she saw it and the Head of Department to respond. From this meeting came an agreed document written by the AD Research and this is attached to this report. The most significant issues of the confidential submission are re-expressed in this new report and I have shown how they are keyed onto points made in the panel’s report which reflected them very closely. This episode – as does a comment made by a panel member about another submission in my meeting with the panel - confirms my own doubts about the value of our current system. I would recommend instead a broader and standardised agenda for meetings with various stakeholder groups and a revised process for the production and agreement of the self assessment document to ensure all stakeholders are fully consulted and get input (this should not weaken the responsibility of the Head of Department).

**Action**

1. **QEC is asked to receive and approve this report.**
2. **QEC is asked to consider possible revisions to the review process.**

Professor John Simons

Executive Dean of Arts

2/8/12