Macquarie University: Departmental Review

Department of Media, Music, Communication and Cultural Studies

6\textsuperscript{th} - 8\textsuperscript{th} February 2013
CONTENTS

1. REVIEW TERMS OF REFERENCE AND PANEL 3

2. THE REPORT 4

3. LIST OF COMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS 12
   3.1 Governance, Leadership and Management 12
   3.2 Academic Program 14
   3.3 Research 15
   3.4 Research Training 16
   3.5 Staff and Student Profile 17
   3.6 Community Engagement 18
   3.7 Future Directions 19
1.1 Terms of Reference – 2013 External Review

1. Governance, Leadership and Management

Review the effectiveness of MMCCS planning, leadership and management structure, processes and resources.

2. Academic Program

Review the appropriateness of the degrees, programs, and units offered by MMCCS relative to Faculty and University priorities, employer and professional community demands.

3. Research

Review current research outputs, activity, and capability relative to Faculty and University objectives including opportunities for developing research and knowledge leadership.

4. Research Training

Review the HDR program, including admission standards, methodology and skills training, completion times and drop-out rates, supervision and reporting standards.

5. Staff and Student Profile

Review the alignment of the academic, professional, and student profile relative to future objectives and plans.

6. External Engagement

Review the scope, and quality of community/industry engagement, including external/professional contribution to and referencing of, curriculum and research development.

7. Future Directions

Recommend future development opportunities for MMCCS in terms of its resources, research, teaching and community/industry engagement activity.
1.2 Review Team

Chair:
Professor Edward Scheer, University of NSW

External Discipline Experts:
Professor Michael Evans, Southern Cross University
Professor Norie Neumark, Latrobe University

MQ peer:
Professor Martina Möllering, International Studies

Secretary
Ms Ursula Thurgate

2. The Report

2.1 Governance, Leadership and Management

The current Department of Media, Music, Communications and Cultural Studies (MMCCS) is the result of the merger of four separate departments, namely Media, Music, Critical & Cultural Studies, and International Communications, in November 2008. The name of the Department is simply a representation of the four previous departments. The review panel notes that a name change is to be discussed at the Department’s next retreat with a view to better reflect directions of department after restructuring and curriculum review. The biennial department retreat was initiated in 2009 to involve the whole department in planning and decision making for the future. The Department is commended for this initiative as evidence of good leadership, based on consultation and awareness of staff needs.

However it is also noted that while there are opportunities for staff to discuss issues with each other at discipline and sub discipline levels, there are relatively few opportunities for staff to encounter the department as a whole. Few department meetings to discuss issues at department rather than discipline/committee level risk a diminution in the collective sense of the Department’s mission as a coherent whole. It is recommended that the Department have more frequent whole of department gatherings, not necessarily meetings, but opportunities for a sense of collective endeavour to be understood and realized.

In relation to this, the Department’s vision statement should be reviewed. The ‘initial vision’ was to become the “number one department in the country for research, learning and teaching in the area of cultural production and critical inquiry” (SR 10). It is recommended that this language on the vision statement be
reviewed by the HoD and discussed at the retreat with a view to articulating a more precise vision and mission for the department.

The physical arrangement of the new building in which the Department is based has allowed for staff to be housed into hubs based on “research specialisations, creative practice, and theoretical similarities”. (SR 10) This may have positive outcomes for research synergies and joint teaching programs such that over 30 percent of units are currently team taught in the department. The panel commends the Departmental leadership on this initiative and result.

The panel notes that the Department regularly reviews its programs with a view to optimizing staff teaching time and student enrolments. For instance, the Masters of International Communication has been recently reduced from over 25 units, to just 12, with new core units designed into the program and the Cultural Studies major in the BA has also been restructured. The panel notes the ongoing review of the BA Media and Contemporary Music programs and commends the Department for its rigorous schedule of review for all programs and its follow up actions. (see also R12)

The Department is commended for the significant leadership by the HoD in the consolidation of the Academic staff profile in turning fixed term contract positions and fractional appointments into ongoing positions wherever possible. The panel notes that this has increased the Department’s research productivity, HDR supervision capacity, academic service capacity and awareness and compliance with quality assurance mechanisms and University policies as well as creating career pathways for Academic staff that did not have this opportunity prior to this initiative.

The Department is commended for the active and progressive leadership in the recent development of postgraduate coursework offerings to include the Masters of Arts (Media, Law and Culture) [2012]; Master of Creative Media [2013] and Master of Future Journalism [proposed 2014].

Regarding structures internal to the department: The panel notes that the discipline structure within the department seems to be counter-productive for teaching and learning, interdisciplinary innovation and initiatives, widest staff engagement and development and developing and marketing a Department profile. For example, in the learning and teaching space, confusion and overlap with Program Directors may be impeding the work of the L&T committee. In the research space, the development of research foci is systematically encouraging inter-disciplinarity, while the disciplines may create a counter to these initiatives which are vital to building on the Department’s ERA success.

The panel further notes that Junior staff in particular displayed little engagement/interest in the current disciplinary clusters. It follows that ECR
development may not be served by the present situation. Duties of discipline leaders are likewise problematic. Professional Development Reviews (PDRs) are currently undertaken by Discipline Leaders, some of whom are still relatively junior staff. It is recommended that the department turn to the professoriate to formalize a mentorship and leadership role in this area, and have PDRs assigned to these staff.

The panel further recommends that the current discipline structure be reviewed: that the current groupings be dissolved and reformed to better reflect the interdisciplinary activity in L&T and research and to reverse the impact of ‘missed opportunities’ (staff submission) in the current arrangements. It was noted that given the highly cognate areas of practice across the department and the desire to maintain creative and critical practices alongside each other, that a random process of allocation might be as good as any other in determining the new shape of sub-departmental architecture.

The panel notes that the current functions of discipline leaders include the following:

1. PDRs (with Head of Department)
2. Curriculum Planning
3. TEQSA/Uni Compliance
4. Mentoring/ECR Development
5. Unit staffing
6. Maintenance of space for free discussion
7. Communication (Up and Across)
8. Pedagogical Development/Training
9. Research
10. Technical management and support/infrastructure/planning
11. Administration
12. Program Administration (Management - (Staffing??))

It is recommended that there be a review of the role and appointment of Discipline Leaders, specifically that there be a spill of current discipline leadership positions and that the role of discipline or group leader be revised and clarified. It is recommended that this role be de-coupled from that of the Program Director and that in future this position should be appointed by the Head of Department and that proper advice and training be provided to support these roles.

Regarding the role and responsibility of the Learning and Teaching Director (see also Recommendations under Academic Program below).

It is recommended that the authority of the L&T Director be enhanced, for example, by coupling the Deputy Head position with that of the L&T Director,
and that this role be refined to include oversight of the undergraduate program, the masters coursework programs and the MRES and responsibility for the strategic planning in these programs.

The Department is commended for the recent work of the L&T Director in ensuring that the Department is TEQSA ready and able to respond to the new compliance regime in L&T. It is recommended that the L&T Committee be encouraged to consider matters other than L&T compliance and to include discussion of broader issues relating to strategic planning of u/g program, the Masters Program and the MRes.

Regarding the budget, and notwithstanding faculty based funding models, the Department is commended for the department managing its operations in a manner which allows for the consistent generation of surpluses against budget (in the vicinity of 10 percent of operating budget) each year. It is recommended that the Departmental budget should have some additional flexibility to support initiatives around the new appointments, ERA strategies and opportunities as they arise (see below under Research and Research training).

In regard to the relations to Faculty and University structures, the panel notes some confusion occasioned by double-handling issues arising from Faculty and Dept admin overlap and recommends that any such double-handling issues be periodically reviewed by HoD and Dean with input from relevant admin staff.

Regarding Administrative staff: The panel notes that Departmental admin staff are dedicated and focused on the needs of the Department. They display detailed area specific knowledge and expertise. It is also noted that University and Faculty level administrative decisions are sometimes made without consideration for the impact on workloads on administrative staff at the departmental level. It is recommended that consultation be undertaken with relevant admin staff before decisions and business processes are changed at departmental level.

The panel recognizes that the admin structures are currently under review at Faculty level but recommends to this review that consideration be given to the following proposal: that management of admin workload issues in the Department arising from peak periods and leaves be handled through a DA float at faculty level consisting of a relief admin staff member to provide cover DA leave/absences across the Faculty.

Regarding marketing: The panel also notes that University marketing efforts may be missing the mark and not fully capturing the Department’s potential. Given the new staff profile in the Department, the revised course structures and the world class facilities the panel strongly recommends that marketing for the
Department be undertaken in a targeted manner at Department level with strong input from staff in relevant areas.

2.2 Academic Program

The Department is responsible for the following u/g programs:

BA Media; BA Media/LLB; B Marketing Media; B IT GDD

And the following majors within the BA:

<table>
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<th>Interactivity &amp; Games</th>
<th>MCC</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th>Cultural Studies</th>
<th>Contemporary Music</th>
<th>Arts</th>
<th>Practical Management</th>
<th>International Comms</th>
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The Department has maintained an annual review regime to assess the ‘appropriateness of the undergraduate units and programs within the Department’ undertaken through consultation by the HoD with Disciplinary Leaders and Committee Directors. Careful management has resulted in a distinctive program structure with a variety of offerings optimised for student and potential employer stakeholders. This means that the Department is well positioned to take advantage of the ‘increasing student and University demand for business related skills in creative arts industries’. (SR 15) The Department is commended for this effort and the success of this early phase of its planning. The panel recommends that the current annual review might be replaced by the L&T committee strategic planning process across all the programs (see also Part One above).

The majority of the u/g offerings are showing increasing growth in student numbers and the Department is commended for the Department leadership for creating a growth environment and for ensuring all areas remain viable, eg. the recent reviews of the Cultural Studies area.

The Department is commended for its dynamic approach to the broader social and University context through the expanded provision of ‘People or Planet’ units and its internship program.

The panel notes that the proposed articulations with Sydney TAFE (Music program) and North Sydney Institute (Games programs) into the relevant Macquarie University degrees are currently before ASQC and Senate for approval and notes the SIBT arrangements as well. There is concern about the possible negative impacts of such outsourcing. So while it may not be in the Department’s
remit, it is **recommended** that regular monitoring of these relationships be undertaken for quality assurance purposes and to ensure proper oversight of L&T issues and results.

The Department is commended for the positive actions taken by the L&T Director to enhance participation by Department staff in the area of L&T especially the initiative of an L&T research seminar series within the Department. The panel also notes the ‘compliance fatigue issue’ in this area and **recommends the development of informal structures and conversations about actual classroom practice as well as the more formal committee processes.** (See above under Part one role of L&T committee and R5)

### 2.3 Research

The history of research performance in the Department shows an uneven pattern of productivity with relatively insignificant grant activity and Creative research activity falling away in recent years. Three of the Department’s fields of study qualified for the Australian Research Council Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Initiative 2012 down from four in 2010. There has been significant investment in turning this around with appointments of senior staff and a detailed plan to enhance Research performance in the Department. The Department is commended for taking positive action to enhance Research performance. As a result of this plan, the following research concentrations have been identified:

i. Asia and Pacific Studies  
ii. Cultural Theory and Cultural History  
iii. Music and Sound Cultures  
iv. New Media  
v. Performance Studies  
vi. Screen and Visual Cultures

The panel notes the findings of the Self Review that ‘MMCCS Research is Essentially Interdisciplinary’. (See R I Part 1 above).

The panel notes that the research climate is now well supported by world class infrastructure and recent hires, and recommends that further small investment be undertaken to ensure this translates into successful ARC initiatives. (see part One above). The panel also **recommends** that creative practice researchers be encouraged to take advantage of the facilities in theatre, dance, film, media and music production.

It is noted that over 80% of the Department’s staff members have been classified as ‘research active’ which meets the target of the Macquarie at 50 document and is higher than the Macquarie University average of 74%. The Department is
commended both for achieving this result and for undertaking a series of actions to further enhance this aspect of its research performance. The panel applauds the inventive and systematic approach to evaluating and improving research activity in the Department.

2.4 Research Training

The Department currently has a total of 90 HDR candidates with 16 students undertaking a PhD in Creative Practice in Music, Film, Media or Writing. Enrolments are stable in most areas and completion times are trending downwards and impressively, have been decreased to below 4 years candidature. The Department is commended on this result, evidence of its generally good management of the HDR area, support for HDR students and strong supervisory culture.

To further enhance the HDR work the panel recommends an expanded role for the HDR committee to assist with matters beyond the administration of admissions, for example, to draft exam guidelines for creative practice.

The constitution of this committee should also be reviewed with disciplinary reps replaced by research area reps. The panel recommends that a budget line be created for creative practice examinations to facilitate a visit to campus by examiners where required.

The Department is commended for its plans to address concerns over the HDR intellectual climate in particular the plans for regular seminars, enhanced interaction with visiting scholars and the iLearn website forum. The panel recommends that the Department appoint a staff member to coordinate research seminars to avoid overlap and overload.

2.5 Staff and Student Profile

Staff profile: The Department is commended for achieving 12% growth in continuing staff, the large proportion of conversions from casual and the 3 new level E positions, all evidence of a proactive response to enhancement of the staffing profile in the Department.

Yet there is also a potential problem with uneven investment in the staff profile of the Department. The panel recommends that when looking at future staffing, a balance be sought between ERA driven appointments and appointments that support the comprehensive research and teaching profile of the Department.

For example, the performing arts area needs greater visibility and consideration of staff resources given the designation of Performance studies as one of the
Research foci. The technical resources are available but the staffing is not adequate to fully capture the potential of this area of the Department’s operations.

**Student Profile:** Enrolment numbers in most areas are strong and trending upward. Anecdotal evidence suggests u/g students tend to come from the local area. Some further research into marketing programs to a wider area is a recommended.

The Department is also commended for its SBS mentorship program.

The panel recommends that the Department identify areas for development of social inclusion strategies in relation to student profiles: for example, the place of indigenous students in programs such as Performance studies and consideration for access.

Staff/Student ratios: There was some uncertainty about the accuracy of the figures made available to the panel. The panel recommends that this uncertainty should be corrected and accurate information obtained to inform Faculty and Departmental management about actual ratios. From the evidence, ratios are still too high in MMCCS but trending in the right direction.

### 2.6 External Engagement

While the Department is involved in a number of external engagement activities from public symposia, performance events and film screenings to mentorship and intern programs involving industry partners, there is clearly scope for much more active engagement in these areas. A re-focussed engagement with relevant industry led by the HoD, will further develop research culture as well as provide work related learning experiences for students. Better informed and involved strategic partners might also avoid the pitfalls associated with the perception of a re-active University reluctantly delivering ‘vocational training’.

It is recommended that staff be formally encouraged to activate personal industry networks with the oversight/coordination of the HoD. The panel also recommends that the department develop infrastructure led partnerships to exploit the facilities and infrastructure at its disposal. The panel recommends against the department’s developing further facility hire arrangements which may consume significant staff time for minimal return but rather to leverage partnerships with relevant industry groups perhaps in the form of linkage grant activity.

The panel commends the internship program and the creation of the external advisory board and recommends that the advisory board be established for all
departmental programs as a whole rather than simply for one of them. However the panel recommends that particular attention be given to the activation of industry connections in relation to the new Journalism program.

2.7 Future Directions

The Department now enters its second life cycle in a secure and strong position with excellent resources, innovative, hard-working and dedicated staff and, overall, a great deal to admire and envy in what it has and does. Much of the work of consolidation in staffing and u/g programs has been successfully completed and mechanisms are in place to enhance the Research output in the near future. The statements in this report about future directions are made in acknowledgement of the significant work already done and the quality of the plans already in place for the next phase in the life of the Department.

The new programs will require some careful nurturing and in the case of the future Journalism program it is unclear how much planning has already occurred. The panel had some questions about this and recommends that they be considered before and during undertaking this development: is it to be created as a niche program; has market research with industry been undertaken; is the planned program tailored to produce graduates that fit the emerging profile of the profession; are industry figures to be involved in teaching? These questions along with the suggestion that Arts Journalism be considered as a possible niche occupied the panel’s thoughts on the future.

To sum up, the panel asks the Department to consider the above document as a device to ensure that the diversity of the Department’s administration, its service, teaching and research is supported and maintained, to ensure that its potentials in all areas are unlocked and celebrated and to ensure that the next phase of its life is as productive and dynamic as the previous.

3. List of Commendations and Recommendations

3.1 Governance, Leadership and Management

C1 The biennial department retreat was initiated in 2009 to involve the whole department in planning and decision making for the future. The Department is commended for this initiative as evidence of good leadership, based on consultation and awareness of staff needs.

R1 In relation to this, the Department’s vision statement should be reviewed. The ‘initial vision’ was to become the “number one department in the country for research, learning and teaching in the area of cultural
production and critical inquiry” (SR 10). It is recommended that this language in the vision statement be reviewed by the HoD and discussed at the retreat with a view to articulating a more precise vision and mission for the department.

**C2** The physical arrangement of the new building in which the Department is based has allowed for staff to be housed into hubs based on “research specialisations, creative practice, and theoretical similarities”. (SR 10) This may have positive outcomes for research synergies and joint teaching programs such that over 30 percent of units are currently team taught in the department. The panel commends the Departmental leadership on this initiative and result.

**C3** The panel notes the ongoing review of the BA Media and Contemporary Music programs and commends the Department for its rigorous schedule of review for all programs and its follow up actions.

**C4** The Department is commended for the significant leadership by the HoD in the consolidation of the Academic staff profile in turning fixed term contract positions and fractional appointments into ongoing positions wherever possible.

**C5** The Department is commended for the active and progressive leadership in the recent development of postgraduate coursework offerings to include the Masters of Arts (Media, Law and Culture) [2012]; Master of Creative Media [2013] and Master of Future Journalism [proposed 2014].

**R2** Professional Development Reviews (PDRs) are currently undertaken by Discipline Leaders, some of whom are still relatively junior staff. It is recommended that the Department turn to the professoriate to formalize a mentorship and leadership role in this area, and have PDRs assigned to these staff.

**R3** The panel further recommends that the current discipline structure be reviewed: that the current groupings be dissolved and reformed to better reflect the interdisciplinary activity in L&T and research and to reverse the impact of ‘missed opportunities’ (staff submission) in the current arrangements.

**R4** It is recommended that there be a review of the role and appointment of Discipline Leaders, specifically that there be a spill of current discipline leadership positions and that the role of discipline or group leader be revised and clarified. It is recommended that this role be de-coupled from that of the Program Director and that in future this position should be
appointed by the Head of Department and that proper advice and training be provided to support these roles.

R5  It is recommended that the authority of the L&T Director be enhanced, for example, by coupling the Deputy Head position with that of the L&T Director, and that this role be refined to include oversight of the undergraduate program, the masters coursework programs and the MRES and responsibility for the strategic planning in these programs.

C6  The Department is commended for the recent work of the L&T Director in ensuring that the Department is TEQSA ready and able to respond to the new compliance regime in L&T.

R6  It is recommended that the L&T Committee be encouraged to consider matters other than L&T compliance and to include discussion of broader issues relating to strategic planning of u/g program, the Masters Program and the MRes.

C7  The Department is commended for managing its operations in a manner which allows for the consistent generation of surpluses against budget (in the vicinity of 10 percent of operating budget) each year.

R7  It is recommended that the Departmental budget should have some additional flexibility to support initiatives around the new appointments, ERA strategies and opportunities as they arise.

R8  In regard to the relations to Faculty and University structures, the panel notes some confusion occasioned by double-handling issues arising from Faculty and Dept admin overlap and recommends that any such double-handling issues be periodically reviewed by HoD and Dean with input from relevant admin staff.

R9  It is recommended that consultation be undertaken with relevant admin staff before decisions and business processes are changed at departmental level.

R10 The panel notes that the admin structures are currently under review at Faculty level but recommends to this review that consideration be given to the following proposal: that management of admin workload issues in the Department arising from peak periods and leaves be handled through a DA float at faculty level consisting of a relief admin staff member to provide cover DA leave/absences across the Faculty.

R11 The panel notes that University marketing efforts may be missing the mark and not fully capturing the Department’s potential. Given the new staff
profile in the Department, the revised course structures and the world class facilities the panel strongly recommends that marketing for the Department be undertaken in a targeted manner at Department level with strong input from staff in relevant area.

3.2 Academic Program

C8 Careful management has resulted in a distinctive program structure with a variety of offerings optimised for student and potential employer stakeholders. This means that the Department is well positioned to take advantage of the ‘increasing student and University demand for business related skills in creative arts industries’. (SR 15) The Department is commended for this effort and the success of this early phase of its planning.

R12 The panel recommends that the current annual review might be replaced by the L&T committee strategic planning process across all the programs (see Part One above).

C9 The majority of the u/g offerings are showing increasing growth in student numbers and the Department is commended for the Department leadership for creating a growth environment and for ensuring all areas remain viable, eg. the recent reviews of the Cultural Studies area.

C10 The Department is commended for its dynamic approach to the broader social and University context through the expanded provision of People or Planet units and its internship program.

R13 The panel notes that the proposed articulations with Sydney TAFE (Music program) and North Sydney Institute (Games programs) into the relevant Macquarie University degrees are currently before ASQC and Senate for approval and notes the SIBT arrangements as well.... It is recommended that regular monitoring of these relationships be undertaken for quality assurance purposes and to ensure proper oversight of L&T issues and results.

C11 The Department is commended for the positive actions taken by the L&T Director to enhance participation by Department staff in the area of L&T especially the initiative of an L&T research seminar series within the Department.

R14 The panel also notes the ‘compliance fatigue issue’ in this area and recommends the development of informal structures and conversations about actual classroom practice as well as the more formal committee processes. (See above under Part one role of L&T committee).
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C12 The Department is commended for taking positive action to enhance Research performance.

R15 The panel notes that the research climate is now well supported by world class infrastructure and recent hires, and recommends that further small investment be undertaken to ensure this translates into successful ARC initiatives. (see part One above).

R16 The panel also recommends that creative practice researchers be encouraged to take advantage of the facilities in theatre, dance, film, media and music production.

C13 The panel notes that over 80% of the Department’s staff members have been classified as ‘research active’ which meets the target of the Macquarie at 50 document and is higher than the Macquarie University average of 74%. The Department is commended both for achieving this result and for undertaking a series of actions to further enhance this aspect of its research performance. The panel applauds the inventive and systematic approach to evaluating and improving research activity in the Department.

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R17 To further enhance the HDR work the panel recommends an expanded role for the HDR committee to assist with matters beyond the administration of admissions, for example, to draft exam guidelines for creative practice.

R18 The constitution of this committee should also be reviewed with disciplinary reps replaced by research area reps. The panel recommends that a budget line be created for creative practice examinations to facilitate a visit to campus by examiners where required.
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R19 The panel recommends that the Department appoint a staff member to coordinate research seminars to overload overlap and overload.

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R20 The panel recommends that when looking at future staffing, a balance be sought between ERA driven appointments and appointments that support the comprehensive research and teaching profile of the Department.

R21 Enrolment numbers in most areas are strong and trending upward. Anecdotal evidence suggests u/g students tend to come from the local area. Some further research into marketing programs to a wider area is a recommended.

C17 The Department is commended for its SBS mentorship program.

R22 The panel recommends that the Department identify areas for development of social inclusion strategies in relation to student profiles: for example, the place of indigenous students in programs such as Performance studies and consideration for access.

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R24 The panel also recommends that the department develop infrastructure led partnerships to exploit the facilities and infrastructure at its disposal.

C18 The panel commends the internship program and the creation of the external advisory board.

R25 The panel recommends that the advisory board be established for all departmental programs as a whole rather than simply for one of them. The panel also recommends that particular attention be given to the activation of industry connections in relation to the new Journalism program.