Dear Bill

Following the recent approval (by circular) by Academic Council of the paper on the “Scope of responsibility of Faculties and BCS in relation to the review and approval of postgraduate coursework courses”, it is perhaps timely to now address the membership of the BCS and contemplate how the BCS might best manage the approval process.

The BCS constitution essentially gives it two roles: one, to consider and recommend to Academic Council on policy with regard to coursework degrees; and two, to consider and recommend to Academic Council on specific proposals from faculties for all coursework units, majors and courses.

The first role is straightforward. In its more complex second role, in order to discharge its academic governance function, while acknowledging the expert academic role of faculties, the Board, with Council’s approval, currently exercises its responsibilities through its Standing Working Party on Postgraduate Coursework. At the course level, the scrutiny is straightforward, focusing primarily on structural issues and issues of adherence to Academic Council rules and policies for postgraduate coursework. With regard to units the Board will in future only review 10% of unit proposals. This will ensure that it fulfills its QA role in academic governance for the Council, but does not overly intrude in faculties’ academic management.

There is an opportunity to streamline further the management of these functions with the appointment of a Dean of Coursework Studies. The responsibilities of the Dean as advertised include “course development and approval” for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses, and it is suggested that through the Dean, it would be possible for BCS to delegate responsibility for steering straightforward course proposals direct to Council when it was clear the proposal was fully aligned with the University’s policies and rules for postgraduate coursework. Any proposal with departures from University policy would be discussed initially with the Faculty concerned and if identified issues are resolved, the proposal would pass direct to Academic Council, and if not, the proposal would be discussed at BCS. And importantly, at that meeting of BCS, the Dean of Faculty or nominee would attend for discussion.

This proposition meets four objectives:

i. it further streamlines the management of the approval process,
ii. it directly involves the new Dean of Coursework Studies in the approval process
iii. it recognises greater faculty ‘ownership’ of postgraduate coursework,
iv. it involves all faculties in meetings of BCS without unduly expanding its standing membership

You may wish to circulate this memo to BCS for comment on Thursday, as a potential enhancement of current practice.

Regards
Peter