1. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to seek the approval of the Academic Programs Committee and Academic Senate of the recommendations of the Academic Senate Working Party on Academic Processes and Outcomes.

2. Background

This working party was established by Academic Senate at its meeting on 26 May 2010 to consider ways of addressing three AUQA Panel recommendations (4, 5, and 8):

AUQA recommends that CSU ensure that Academic Senate is better able to actively monitor the quality of academic processes and outcomes across the whole University (recommendation 4)

AUQA recommends that CSU improve its data reporting to ensure that the retention, progress and grade point averages of students from differing cohorts are routinely considered by Senate and academic managers across the University (recommendation 5)

AUQA recommends that CSU’s Academic Senate keep under active review the credit granted within faculties (recommendation 8)

The full details on the AUQA Panel’s discussion of the above recommendations are included in the Academic Senate paper for the May 2010 meeting.

The overall goal of the working party was to make recommendations on initiatives that will enhance the ability of Academic Senate to monitor regularly the quality of academic processes and outcomes across the whole University, including enhanced reporting on student performances in courses and the granting of credit by Faculties. Two related questions are: “how does Academic Senate know that its policies and their related procedures and delegations are being communicated effectively, and followed and embedded into practice throughout the University?”, and “are the reporting mechanisms of current committees of Senate and the Faculties working effectively to allow a regular, timely and comprehensive evaluation of policy compliance across the University?”
At its May meeting, Academic Senate resolved (AS 10/52) that the Academic Processes and Outcomes Working Party (established at AS 10/49, 26.05.10) should include, as part of its deliberations, consideration of the appropriateness of the reporting requirement for Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Deans in relation to confirmation of management’s compliance with the accountability requirements for the implementation of Academic Senate policy.

The membership of the working party comprised:

  Professor B Bradley – Chair of Working Party
  Dr. H Cavanagh, Associate Dean, Faculty of Science
  Dr. A Crampton, Sub Dean Learning and Teaching, Faculty of Science
  Mr C Sharp, Director, Planning & Audit
  Mr D Bedwell, Director, Service Alignment
  Dr N Dreengenberg, Academic Secretary
  Emeritus Professor R Coombes

  A member of the CSU Credit Transfer Database Phase 2 project, nominated by the DVC (Administration)

  Associate Professor J Atkinson, Faculty of Business shall be co-opted to the membership of the working party for consideration of the issues associated with credit.

The working party has also referred to the CSU Academic Senate Self-Review (2008) and the paper on Senate processes prepared for the AUQA visit in late 2009.

3. Discussion

The Working Party has met (by teleconference) on four occasions, resulting in the attached paper with recommendations on how to address the issues outlined above. This paper has also been made available to staff for feedback.

The feedback is generally supportive of the introduction of the Annual Course Performance Report (ACPR), which some view as complementing other major reports such as the annual “discipline” and “research” reports. The introduction of the ACPR is also timely and appropriate given the University’s focus on “courses” (the Degree Initiative, the creation of course teams and course directors, and the emerging University strategic plan which has “courses” as one of its three key themes). There were some concerns about the roles of various parties (Heads of School and course teams), the timeliness of the information, the period required to address satisfactorily the issues identified in the report, as well as the choice of metrics and the decisions on “targets” for various measures (such as retention). However, the Working Party believes that the ACPR will be a “living document” for some time, and will be amended and re-engineered over time, based on the perceived usefulness of the information contained in the report, and other measures and narratives that may emerge as beneficial to course management.
The specific recommendations of the working party are:

**Recommendation 1:** A standing item, “Academic Senate Business” should be placed on every Faculty Board agenda, and Faculty reports to Academic Senate should include details of the Faculty’s deliberations.

**Recommendation 2:** Each Faculty should provide Academic Senate a brief report on “hot topics” of special interest each year. The report will contain information on academic issues of relevance to the Faculty, and any perceived gaps in Senate policies.

**Recommendation 3:** All reports to Academic Senate from Committees and members of senior management should be written reports, included in the agenda papers of Academic Senate.

**Recommendation 4:**

(a) A comprehensive Annual Course Performance Report (ACPR) should be introduced at CSU, with information gathered and summarised for each Faculty by the Office of Planning and Audit. The ACPR should contain, inter alia, comparisons between target performance indicators and actual results for metrics such as student demand, student feedback, and student performances (attrition, progression and graduation) in courses.

(b) The CSU ACPR should be based on the UTS version and modified to suit the needs of the University.

(c) For courses that are performing satisfactorily, the introduction of a comprehensive annual program review process will reduce the requirements of the five-year reaccreditation review.

(d) The ACPR should be trialled in at least one Faculty in 2011, with a view to wider implementation in 2012.

(e) Senate should establish a small group, including staff of the Office of Planning and Audit, to determine the template and the initial metrics to be used in the ACPR.

**Recommendation 5:** The reporting requirements for Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Deans should be expanded to confirm management’s compliance with the implementation of Academic Senate policies. This sign-off could be part of the Annual Course Performance Report (ACPR).

**Recommendation 6:** The Office of Academic Governance should provide induction and training for appropriate users of academic policy to strengthen the University-wide understanding of, and compliance with, Academic Senate’s policies.
Recommendation 7: That the Terms of Reference of a Senate Committee are amended to include the following functions:

(a) to monitor the implementation of the policies of Academic Senate; and,

(b) to consider and provide comments to Senate on:
   - The ACPRs for Faculties, and suggested actions for future improvements
   - Courses that will not require comprehensive five-year review processes
   - Compliance with Senate policies (assessment, moderation, and granting credit)
   - Grade distributions and grade point averages for courses

Recommendation 8: Academic Senate should conduct regular (at least biennial) “self-assessment effectiveness reviews” for Senate and its committees. This process would involve a survey of Senate members on their views about Senate’s performance and members’ overall effectiveness in achieving the terms of reference of Senate and its committees.

Recommendation 9: The University’s internal auditors should include in their audit plan and schedule a review of compliance with academic policy. The internal audit will concentrate on policy awareness and adherence throughout the University.

Recommendation 10: Academic Senate should develop and approve an annual calendar of Academic Senate business, aligned with the University’s planning cycle, which identifies the nature and timing of key agenda items, including reviews of academic policies.

Recommendation 11: Academic Senate should develop a work plan that identifies the necessary actions and responsibilities for supporting the implementation of the Academic Senate calendar of business. The work plan will include timelines for evaluating data and writing reports for Senate.

Recommendation 12: Academic Senate should provide an annual report to University Council on Senate’s broad evaluation of the governance and management of Senate’s academic activities including academic policy development and overall compliance with policy, academic strategic directions, risks confronting the academic activities of the University and standards within courses.

4. Recommendations of this Paper

That the Academic Programs Committee and Academic Senate of Charles Sturt University approve the recommendations of this report.

Professor Ben Bradley
11 November 2010
4. Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to make recommendations that will enhance the ability of Academic Senate to monitor regularly the application of its policies and the quality of academic processes and outcomes across the University, including enhanced reporting on student performances in courses and the granting of credit by Faculties.

5. Background

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) released its second round audit report on Charles Sturt University (CSU) in January 2010. A previous (first round) AUQA report on CSU was completed in 2004.

The 2009 report contained 15 commendations, five affirmations, and 15 recommendations.

This working party was established by Academic Senate in May 2010 to consider ways of addressing three AUQA recommendations (4, 5, and 8):

- AUQA recommends that CSU ensure that Academic Senate is better able to actively monitor the quality of academic processes and outcomes across the whole University (recommendation 4)

- AUQA recommends that CSU improve its data reporting to ensure that the retention, progress and grade point averages of students from differing cohorts are routinely considered by Senate and academic managers across the University (recommendation 5)

- AUQA recommends that CSU’s Academic Senate keep under active review the credit granted within faculties (recommendation 8)

The “Self-Review of Academic Senate (2008)” and the Office of Academic Governance’s “A Description and Critical Appraisal of the Operation of the Academic Senate” are important resources which were also relevant to the deliberations and recommendations of the working party.

Two related questions are: “how does Academic Senate know that its policies and their related procedures and delegations are being communicate, followed and embedded into practice throughout the University?”, and “are the reporting mechanisms of current committees of Senate and the Faculties working effectively to allow a regular, timely and comprehensive evaluation of policy compliance across the University?”
5.1 The AUQA Panel’s Concerns

AUQA Recommendation 4 deals with Academic Senate’s methods of monitoring of the quality of academic processes and outcomes across the University.

In 2004, the first round Audit Panel recommended that “CSU Academic Senate develop, as a priority, more effective mechanisms for ensuring the consistent implementation within faculties of University policy for ensuring academic quality and standards across all delivery modes and locations”. The recorded “updates” on actions taken since 2004 by the University to address the issues relating to this recommendation suggest that many matters have been considered and actions have been taken. These include: the review of partner and trans-national education programs (helping to ensure the equivalence of the student experiences); the UCPC now monitors reports from Faculties on the delivery of all third party relationships; there are annual reports on student feedback; the University has implemented induction programs for academic staff of teaching partners; and, the introduction of CSU Interact (and mandatory student information).

However, the 2009 AUQA Audit Panel believes that additional work is required by Academic Senate to monitor the quality of academic processes and outcomes across the whole University. The AUQA report noted that, while CSU’s Academic Senate is responsible for the development of academic policies, the responsibility for academic oversight of these policies is devolved to the Faculties. The AUQA report also expressed some concerns about the level of devolution in the course accreditation policy. Academic Senate and its committees may not know whether, and to what extent, their policies are being interpreted and implemented across the University. The report states that Academic Senate, and its committees, should take a more active role in monitoring its policies and their implementation elsewhere within the University. This will involve “using evidence-based approaches to quality assurance and in identifying gaps in policies”.

AUQA Recommendation 5 encourages CSU to improve its data reporting to allow retention, progression rates and grade point averages from different cohorts to be routinely analysed by Academic Senate and academic managers across the University.

Student attrition was an issue mentioned in the 2004 AUQA report (see Affirmation 4 of that report). In its 2009 report, the AUQA Panel notes that the University’s progress and attrition rates for domestic and overseas students remain problematic.

Despite acknowledging the initiatives introduced by CSU to address student attrition (such as the Student Experience Program and the Transitions Project), Affirmation 1 of the 2009 audit encourages CSU to take further actions to identify and deal with the causes of attrition. On page 12 of the 2009 report, the AUQA Panel notes that, since the 2004 AUQA report, “CSU has not reduced its rates of student attrition. Accordingly, the AUQA Panel finds that CSU has not effectively addressed this issue.”

The 2009 AUQA report encourages the University to undertake further analysis of the causes of attrition, and (if necessary) adjust its systems to capture data on alternative entry pathways.

The AUQA Panel also notes that Faculty Boards of examiners compare grades in a subject at different locations, and by different modes of study. However, the AUQA Panel noted that the committees of Academic Senate do not receive reports that would enable them to routinely and rigorously examine: grade distributions to ascertain whether there are abnormal distributions of
grades by cohort, mode of study and location; whether there is any tendency towards "grade inflation"; and whether retention rates vary by cohort and location.

The AUQA Panel urges “CSU to expand its ability to track and review students’ retention and grade performance by cohort and suggests that CSU may find it helpful to examine practice at other universities in this regard”.

In AUQA Recommendation 8, AUQA urges CSU’s Academic Senate to monitor credit granted within Faculties. This issue can be considered and addressed as part of the broader aspects of Academic Senate’s oversight role of its policies and practices across the University. The AUQA Panel noted that CSU has been active in considering ways to improve arrangements for credit transfer in recent years, including ways to address fieldwork subjects. The AUQA report also praised the University’s publicly-available credit transfer precedent database (see Commendation 8).

At CSU, the Faculties have been devolved responsibility for approving credit of specific subjects. The AUQA Panel feels that, although this devolution process is “efficient”, there needs to be a central monitoring process to ensure that the devolution process works well. The Panel suggests that Academic Senate should have a regular means by which it monitors the process for granting credit and for indentifying any possible trends in this area. CSU should also watch closely credit granted by teaching partners. Importantly, the AUQA audit report mentions that the granting of credit for Certificate IV courses needs to be monitored carefully and compared to practices across the higher education sector. In other words, this recommendation suggests that Academic Senate take a more active role in monitoring credit granted by the Faculties. However, this should be extended to include all teaching partners.

5.2 The CSU Academic Senate Response

At its May meeting, Academic Senate resolved (AS 10/52) that the Academic Processes and Outcomes Working Party (established at AS 10/49, 26.05.10) should include, as part of its deliberations, consideration of the appropriateness of the reporting requirement for Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Deans in relation to confirmation of management’s compliance with the accountability requirements for the implementation of Academic Senate policy.

The membership of the working party comprises:

- Professor B Bradley – Chair of Working Party
- Dr. H Cavanagh, Associate Dean, Faculty of Science
- Dr. A Crampton, Sub Dean Learning and Teaching, Faculty of Science
- Mr C Sharp, Director, Planning & Audit
- Mr D Bedwell, Director, Student Experience Program
- Dr N Drengenberg, Academic Secretary
- Emeritus Professor R Coombes
- A member of the CSU Credit Transfer Database Phase 2 project, nominated by the DVC (Administration)
- Associate Professor J Atkinson, Faculty of Business shall be co-opted to the membership of the working party for consideration of the issues associated with credit.
Academic Senate agreed that the Academic Processes and Outcomes Working Party should conduct the following reviews and analyses:

- the current communication and reporting mechanisms, and the content of reports, to and from Faculty Boards and Academic Senate and its committees,
- the nature of the communication roles and responsibilities of individual members of Senate,
- the options on the content of aggregated course reports on student cohort performance (including grade distributions, retention, progression and graduation) and how these reports should be reviewed and interrogated by Senate and its committees. This will also involve a consideration of student performance reporting practices (such as the annual “course reports”) used at other universities,
- a mapping of current CSU practices of determining and granting academic credit and how Senate monitors the outcomes of the decisions of Faculties and teaching partners (and a consideration of how the CSU credit transfer database can assist in resolving Senate’s oversight role in relation to the granting of credit within Faculties),
- a consideration of good practice elsewhere in the sector (such as by reference to the AUQA good practice database),
- consultations with members of Senate and other relevant University staff.

The working party has also referred to the CSU Academic Senate Self-Review (2008) and the paper on Senate processes prepared for the AUQA second round visit in late 2009.

The Working Party met (by teleconference) on four occasions, mainly to discuss this paper.


3.1 The current communication and reporting mechanisms, and the content of reports, to and from Faculty Boards and Academic Senate and its committees

Decisions made by Academic Senate are communicated widely, and Senate is conscious of the need to communicate its decisions within the University. The following forms of communications to and from Academic Senate and the Faculties occur currently and are endorsed by the working party:

(a) Academic Senate maintains an Academic manual which is the official repository of all Academic Senate policy

(b) Academic Senate has a dedicated action sheets for decisions, targeting those staff and sections who “need to know” of its specific decisions. Any matters that are referred to committees of Academic Senate for action/consideration /response are sent to the Committee Secretary via the Academic Senate action sheet (and minutes) following the meeting

(c) Any matters that are referred to Faculties are sent to Faculty Board secretaries and Deans via the Academic Senate action sheet (and minutes) following the meeting
(d) Any matters that are referred elsewhere (a Division or specific University officer): The Manager, Academic Senate will either send the action sheet (and minutes) or write a memorandum detailing what needs to be done. A memorandum is sent if the person that is asked to undertake the action was not present at the Senate meeting or if the information in the minutes is insufficient to enable the designated person to complete any action.

(e) The Office of Academic Governance has developed a website for Academic Senate. The agenda for the forthcoming Senate meeting (including supporting papers) is posted on the Senate website and a notice is included in What’s News – this usually occurs one week prior to the meeting. The minutes of each Senate meeting are posted on the website (they are usually posted within a week of the meeting). A notice is posted on What’s News to inform staff that they are available.

(f) The committees of Senate (including Faculty Boards) have a standing item on Senate agendas for a report to Senate. Any matters/recommendations that these committees wish to have considered by Senate are included under their report. In addition, the Presiding Officer of the Committee will table a report or provide a verbal report of issues being considered by the Committee. As part of the Faculty Board Report, the Deans table a report at each meeting noting items of interest that are occurring in the Faculty. Each of the DVC’s has a standing item on the agendas for them to give a report – they either table a written report or provide a verbal one at each meeting.

(g) Where there has been a major revision of academic regulations, the Manager, Academic Senate, writes to the Dean, Heads of School and other administration areas to advise them of the changes and provides information about the introduction of the changes.

3.2 Additional Communication Links and Processes to enhance the “Awareness of Senate’s Policies” and the “Monitoring of Compliance with Senate Policies”

(a) Responsibilities of members of Senate and Engagement with Faculty Staff: The Office of Academic Governance’s “A Description and Critical Appraisal of the Operation of the Academic Senate (2009)” report to AUQA stated (page 14) that: “There is scope for enhancing the communication of Senate decisions via its own members and their role within the Faculties and Divisions. There are inconsistencies in the amount of feedback provided to constituencies of members....Academic Senate may need to discuss with Faculties and Divisions what mechanisms they have in place to ensure that they comply with policy...”

To enhance the flow (and reliability) of information on its decisions, at its July 2010 meeting, Academic Senate (AS10/69) approved a statement on the roles and responsibilities of members of academic committees (see http://www.csu.edu.au/acad_sec/academicsenate/roles-responsibilities.htm)

Regardless of their category of membership (elected, nominated, ex officio), all members of Academic Senate and its committees have a responsibility to “be the communication point between the committee and the member’s School, Faculty, Division...”
or other area in relation to discussions, decisions, policies and other developments of the committee”.

The Manager, Academic Senate, currently is arranging for this information to be included in the letters of appointment for members of academic committees, and will write to academic committee secretaries to request that they have their committees note this information.

Faculty Boards currently discuss Academic Senate issues. For consistency across the University, Faculty staff could be better informed of Senate debates and decisions if Faculty Board agendas contain a standing item called “Academic Senate Business”. This could also enhance participation and engagement with Senate deliberations, and the development of practical policies and related procedures. The Faculty discussion on upcoming Senate debates could be led by a Faculty member of Academic Senate, and comments could be fed back to Senate through the Faculty report. This would help widen the participation in the debates of key Senate issues, and inform Senate members of understandings and attitudes within the Faculties. It could also help to identify “gaps” in policy. As a result, Faculty staff who are not members of Senate may feel more aware of, and engaged with, academic policy development and valued by this process.

**Recommendation 1:** A standing item, “Academic Senate Business” should be placed on every Faculty Board agenda, and Faculty reports to Academic Senate should include details of the Faculty’s deliberations.

In order to further enhance feedback from Faculties and to allow Senate members to understand the key academic issues confronting individual Faculties, each Faculty could be invited to provide a brief report (say, three pages) to one meeting of Academic Senate throughout the year. The report could be devoted to “hot topics” emerging from the Faculty, and would provide feedback to Senate on difficulties of complying with policy (such as granting credit, assessment, moderation). In this way each Faculty could lead the discussion on relevant academic matters (for example research student supervision, admission standards, industry engagement). Over time, this process may increase inter-Faculty discourse and collaboration on significant academic projects.

**Recommendation 2:** Each Faculty should provide Academic Senate a brief report on “hot topics” of special interest each year. The report will contain information on academic issues of relevance to the Faculty, and any perceived gaps in Senate policies.

Further, the flow of communication between the Faculties and Senate could be enhanced if Deans and Deputy Vice-Chancellors were to provide timely written (not oral) reports prior to each meeting of Senate.

**Recommendation 3:** All reports to Academic Senate from Committees and members of senior management should be written reports, included in the agenda papers of Academic Senate.

(b) **Annual Course Performance Reports:** While Academic Senate is responsible for developing academic policies, Faculties are responsible for the oversight of these policies. However, the AUQA Panel was concerned about the level of devolution
(especially in the course accreditation policy). Academic Senate and its committees may not know whether, and to what extent, their policies are being interpreted and implemented across the University. The report states that Academic Senate, and its committees, should take a more active role in monitoring its policies and their implementation elsewhere within the University. This will involve “using evidence-based approaches to quality assurance and in identifying gaps in policies”.

In addition to the suggested initiatives and recommendations outlined in (a) above, one way of addressing these issues is through the introduction of an Annual Course Performance Report (ACPR), similar to the one used at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). A copy of the UTS report is attached. At UTS, the report has been produced annually since 2006 – the UTS report was the subject of a good practice entry on the AUQA database in 2007: [http://auqa.edu.au/gp/search/detail.php?gp_id=2768](http://auqa.edu.au/gp/search/detail.php?gp_id=2768)

UTS recently agreed to allow CSU to use its Annual Course Performance Report as a basis for reporting within CSU (as long as CSU acknowledges UTS (where appropriate) and informs UTS of any improvements).

CSU currently produces a report on discipline performances over three years. The report is produced by the Director, Student Experience Program and is examined comprehensively by the DVC (Academic) with the Deans and the Heads of Schools. Issues are considered and plans are established to address key “underperforming” measures. However, the report does not review course performances.

The ACPR could be produced for each Faculty annually and contain a number of key measures/metrics of performance for each course, such as: Demand (UAC preferences, direct applications); Load; Pass rates; Attrition rates (especially first year); Progression rates; Grade point averages; FT employment rate (% Australian residents in FT employment – excludes graduates in FT study); Mean good teaching scale (mean of GTS in student course evaluation questionnaire); and, Mean overall satisfaction. Importantly, CSU could choose the metrics which are important for its own strategic directions, and add narrations and comments from Deans and others (such as course teams). This report would contain performance data on the set of key measures for every course, showing a comparison of each actual measure of performance to an agreed standard or target measure. If the difference between the actual and target measure (say, for first year attrition) is “unfavourable” or trending over time in the wrong direction, then an “alert” would be flagged, and this would require explanation from the Faculty and an action plan to address the issue. In other words, targets could be set for the metrics, and a scorecard for each course could be developed with “colour” schemes (red = poor, yellow = average and green = excellent) and trends could be identified. Deans and course teams will need to conduct a thorough examination of courses that need further attention, and this is likely to involve identifying what aspects of the course (its design, course content, its delivery and support processes) need to be addressed. The intended action to improve the measures could be approved by the DVC (Academic) in consultation with the Dean. In the next year, there should be a follow-up meeting to ascertain whether the performances on the relevant measures have improved. If performance fails to meet minimum agreed performance standards over (say) a two or three-year period, then the Faculty may be required to conduct a full accreditation review proposal at the time of the course reaccreditation point (after five years). Where a course receives no (or very few) alerts over time, the reaccreditation process could be simplified (perhaps requiring only the
approval of the Vice-Chancellor on the recommendation of the DVC (Academic)). In this way, the effort of all involved in the course approval and reaccreditation processes would focus on the under-performing courses. The annual process creates a regular review cycle rather than waiting for the current five-year review cycle which is too long, especially for courses that do not have a formal external review and accreditation process conducted by a professional body.

Most of the data required for a comprehensive report on course performances is available at CSU, and can be compiled centrally by the Office of Planning and Audit. The reports would be available to the Faculties, Schools, the UCPC, the Academic Programs Committee and the Learning and Teaching Committee of Senate and Academic Senate itself. The introduction of the ACPR could help CSU to address the concern of the AUQA Panel which urged the University “to expand its ability to track and review students’ retention and grade performance by cohort and suggests that CSU may find it helpful to examine practice at other universities in this regard”. UTS conducted a trial of their annual performance report before it was introduced across the University and that approach seems sensible for CSU.

CSU could improve the UTS course performance report in the following ways, providing further information for the consideration and interrogation of Senate and its committees. The additional information would also help to address the AUQA recommendation on credit granted by the Faculties. The performance report could contain additional reporting mechanisms, such as:

- a brief statement (say up to two pages) from the Dean on the performances of the all courses, with a brief description of any action plan indicating what issues (such as first year attrition) will be addressed during the next 12 months.

- a checklist (to be signed by the Dean) indicating that they and relevant operating staff have complied with Senate policies, such as the CSU principles of assessment, granting credit and moderation of subjects and courses, as well as statements about any problems encountered in implementing policy, and any possible gaps in policies. This should help to address Senate’s recent resolution (AS 10/52) The Academic Senate agreed to request that the Academic Processes and Outcomes Working Party (established at AS 10/49, 26.05.10) include, as part of its deliberations, consideration of the appropriateness of the reporting requirement for Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Deans in relation to confirmation of managements compliance with the accountability requirements for the implementation of Academic Senate policy.

- a section on grades for subjects and GPAs for courses, as well as explanations for variances (i.e. a report from the Faculty Course Assessment Committee)

- Dean’s comments on teaching partners and any specific issues to be addressed.
Recommendation 4:

(e) A comprehensive Annual Course Performance Report (ACPR) should be introduced at CSU, with information gathered and summarised for each Faculty by the Office of Planning and Audit. The ACPR should contain, inter alia, comparisons between target performance indicators and actual results for metrics such as student demand, student feedback, and student performances (attrition, progression and graduation) in courses.

(f) The CSU ACPR should be based on the UTS version and modified to suit the needs of the University.

(g) For courses that are performing satisfactorily, the introduction of a comprehensive annual program review process will reduce the requirements of the five-year reaccreditation review.

(h) The ACPR should be trialled in at least one Faculty in 2011, with a view to wider implementation in 2012.

(e) Senate should establish a small group, including staff of the Office of Planning and Audit, to determine the template and the initial metrics to be used in the ACPR.

3.3 Sign-off on Compliance with Academic Senate’s Policies and Improving Awareness of Policy

The Self-Review of Academic Senate (December 2008) stated that “The Academic Senate and its sub-committees have an important audit role, and staff and sections can be held to account by the Senate in its areas of responsibility. However, this is a high-level compliance activity, which needs to be matched by detailed accountability mechanisms at the management and operational level.

“For example, while a Dean or Divisional Head may be accountable to Academic Senate in the broad sense for implementing Senate decisions and policy, in what way is this then translated down to the operational level in terms of individual members of Faculties and Divisions? Is there accountability (e.g. in performance management) for compliance with the policies of the Senate in the design and carrying out of operations? Because Senate does not act at this operational level, it is essential that there be a management-type accountability to ensure that decisions and policy are actually flowing through to the detailed operations of the University.

“Put another way, senior staff should not be responsible for the Senate regulation areas such as admission, credit, progress etc. But this is a separate question to their own staff being accountable to them for embedding these policies within operations. It’s possible that the common complaint that staff “don’t know” about Senate policy, and this is why they aren’t implementing it, is largely the result of an absence of this more detailed operational accountability. Much of the feedback given to AUQA by CSU staff for the first audit, about Senate, was along the lines of there being a lack of communication – Senate needed to do more to make people aware of its decisions. This is fundamentally not a communication issue, it’s a management issue. If decisions are being actively implemented within sections, then people automatically know what the decisions are.”
Duty statements for senior academic staff include a requirement that they are responsible for upholding and implementing CSU’s academic regulations. Letters of appointment of teaching academic staff refer to accountabilities under the academic regulations. In order to monitor this, Senate has suggested that the DVC’s and Deans should provide Senate with an annual report on management’s compliance with accountability requirements for the implementation of academic policy.

*This working party believes that there is considerable merit in implementing such a reporting requirement.*

Staff do not need to understand every detail of every policy. However, staff must be encouraged to take seriously the policies approved by Senate, and to work in accordance with their requirements.

To monitor compliance with policy, Deans and Deputy Vice-Chancellors could sign a statement (as part of the Annual Course Performance Report) indicating the extent to which academic policies of Senate have been observed in their areas of responsibility, as well as providing details of any difficulties encountered by them in implementing policy directives so that these issues may be considered by the relevant committee of Senate.

**Recommendation 5:** The reporting requirements for Deputy Vice-Chancellors and Deans should be expanded to confirm management’s compliance with the implementation of Academic Senate policies. This sign-off could be part of the Annual Course Performance Report (ACPR).

Moreover, University systems must be established and amended in accordance with policies and any subsequent approved changes to those policies. In this way, staff cannot act outside the requirements of policies because the system will not allow them to function in ways contrary to policy. The Office of Academic Governance could also provide induction and training for the main users of academic policy (to strengthen awareness of policy, and the understanding of how it is developed and approved, and how to deal with changes in policy).

**Recommendation 6:** The Office of Academic Governance should provide induction and training for appropriate users of academic policy to strengthen the University-wide understanding of, and compliance with, Academic Senate’s policies.

### 3.4 Other Suggested Academic Senate Initiatives to enhance Communication Links between Academic Senate, Faculties and other areas of the University

In addition to the recommendations above, the following initiatives could help Academic Senate to strengthen the relationships and communications among the University Council, Senior Executive, the Deans, and staff.

Firstly, the roles of one of the committees of Senate could be amended to include oversight of policy implementation, to receive and interrogate ACPR’s developed for the Faculties, and to review grade distributions and grade point averages of courses and subjects which do not have grade distributions within certain ‘acceptable’ or "expected" ranges. In other words, the terms of
reference of either the APC or the L&TC could be amended to allow one of these committees to consider and provide comments to Senate on:

- The ACPRs for Faculties, and suggested tactics for future improvements
- Courses that will not require comprehensive five-year review processes
- Compliance with Senate policies (assessment, moderation, and granting credit)
- Grade distributions and grade point averages for courses

This would address the AUQA Panel concern that the committees of Academic Senate do not receive reports that would enable them to routinely and rigorously examine: grade distributions to ascertain whether there are abnormal distributions of grades by cohort, mode of study and location; whether there is any tendency towards "grade inflation"; and whether retention rates vary by cohort and location”.

Further, amending the terms of references of the committee would address AUQA’s concern that “there needs to be a central monitoring process to ensure that the devolution process works well. The Panel suggests that Academic Senate should have a regular means by which it monitors the process for granting credit and for indentifying any possible trends in this area. CSU should also watch closely credit granted by teaching partners.”

**Recommendation 7**: That the Terms of Reference of a Senate Committee are amended to include the following functions:

(a) to monitor the implementation of the policies of Academic Senate; and,

(b) to consider and provide comments to Senate on:

- The ACPRs for Faculties, and suggested actions for future improvements
- Courses that will not require comprehensive five-year review processes
- Compliance with Senate policies (assessment, moderation, and granting credit)
- Grade distributions and grade point averages for courses

Members of Senate should benefit from a regular “self-assessment” review of the effectiveness of Academic Senate, its committees, and their individual members. The main goal of the survey would be to evaluate the effectiveness of Senate (and its committees) in achieving their terms of reference and work plans over the last year or so (once implemented comparisons can be made to the previous survey results). The survey would help Senate to identify emerging trends and issues, areas of concerns that need attention (such as the ability of Senate committees to prioritise, the actual and expected workloads of committee members, possible gaps in policies, possible improvements to processes of Senate committees, the adequacy of information provided to Senate committees, and Senate’s policy communication and policy monitoring procedures). These types of surveys have been useful in assisting Boards of Directors to identify how well the Board is performing, the ability of the Board to focus on strategic matters, gaps in the skills of Board members, professional development possibilities for Board members, and the adequacy of information provided to it for decision-making purposes. Other universities have introduced this process as part of a “collegial quality management framework”. It could be conducted annually or biennially, and would allow Academic Senate to understand better the way it conducts it activities and its relationship with key stakeholders within the University, and enable Senate to review and revise its work and reporting framework as well as those of its committees.
The Working Party believes that Academic Senate would benefit from a similar “self-assessment” approach. There are many good examples of survey instruments and processes in the sector that could serve as a basis for deriving an approach for the members of the CSU Academic Senate.

**Recommendation 8:** Academic Senate should conduct regular (at least biennial) “self-assessment effectiveness reviews” for Senate and its committees. This process would involve a survey of Senate members on their views about Senate’s performance and members’ overall effectiveness in achieving the terms of reference of Senate and its committees.

The internal auditors at other universities have included within their audit plan and annual work schedule specific reviews of the “awareness and compliance” of Senate policies across the organisation (such as compliance with assessment policy in Schools). The audits would not be “academic” reviews as the internal auditors do not necessarily possess the skills and knowledge to undertake such reviews. The audit would be concerned with testing whether various parts of the University are aware of specific policies and have put in place systems to comply with Senate’s policies.

**Recommendation 9:** The University’s internal auditors should include in their audit plan and schedule a review of compliance with academic policy. The internal audit will concentrate on policy awareness and adherence throughout the University.

There are other initiatives that would assist the workings of Academic Senate and help to provide for improved planning of its work and the conduct of its responsibilities. A published calendar of important activities and an annual work plan would assist in achieving these aims. These tools are used elsewhere and have demonstrated successful outcomes.

**Recommendation 10:** Academic Senate should develop and approve an annual calendar of Academic Senate business, aligned with the University’s planning cycle, which identifies the nature and timing of key agenda items, including reviews of academic policies.

**Recommendation 11:** Academic Senate should develop a work plan that identifies the necessary actions and responsibilities for supporting the implementation of the Academic Senate calendar of business. The work plan will include timelines for evaluating data and writing reports for Senate.

Finally, the Presiding Officer of Academic Senate is a member of the University Council. Therefore, it would be prudent for Senate to provide Council with an annual report on its activities, emphasising policy development and compliance with policy, past and future academic strategies of the University, risks confronting the academic work of the University (and how those risks will be addressed), academic standards for courses offered, and research achievements and directions. The report would also provide a brief summary of the work of the Senate since the last report as well as planned activities for the coming year.

**Recommendation 12:** Academic Senate should provide an annual report to University Council on Senate’s broad evaluation of the governance and management of Senate’s academic
activities including academic policy development and overall compliance with policy, academic strategic directions, risks confronting the academic activities of the University and standards within courses.

5. Recommendations of this Paper

That the Academic Programs Committee and Academic Senate of Charles Sturt University approve the above recommendations.

Professor Ben Bradley
11 November 2010
(prepared by Emeritus Professor Robert Coombes)