ANU Emeritus Faculty

MINUTES

Minutes of the 80th meeting of the Committee of the ANU Emeritus Faculty held at 3.30 pm on Wednesday 29th November 2006 in the Molony Room, Fellows Lane Cottage, Fellows Lane ANU.

PRESENT: John Molony (Chair), Peter Stewart (Deputy Chair), Nik Fominas, Adrian Brooks, John Sandeman, Barry Ninham, Di Riddell, Angela Giblin, Peter Scardoni (Treasurer) Giles Pickford (Secretary)

1 Apologies

Apologies were received from John Grant and Ian Mathews.

2. Minutes

The minutes of the 79th meeting were confirmed.

3. Business Arising from the Minutes

The Committee noted that "Consensus at Kioloa" had been circulated to the participants at Kioloa, and subsequently to the Faculty with a call for comment. At this stage one comment had been received from outside the Committee membership from Hans Kuhn.

It was agreed that the attached summary of the Committee's findings should be tabled at the AGM for discussion.

4. Reports

4.1 Returning Officer's Report.

The draft report of the Returning Officer was discussed. It was noted that there were eleven nominations for the Committee leaving one vacancy which the Committee would fill by invitation after the AGM. There was some discussion about Office Bearers, but decisions on this matter are made after the AGM.

4.2 New Members

The Committee noted that two new members have joined by right: Professor Diana Howlett (Geography) and John Morphett (ANUTECH). There was a Category 5 application from Dr Ron Wells which it was resolved to accept.

4.3 Water Matters Colloquium

The Chair reported that the Water Matters Committee had met earlier in the morning and that a discussion had been held with Karen Hussey, Chair of the ANU Water Initiative. Agreement had been reached to propose to the two Committees that the ANU Water Initiative Conference scheduled for July 2007 should merge with the ANUEF Colloquium scheduled for August 2007. The Committee resolved to support such a merger and to discuss details at a joint meeting. (*Note: a similar resolution has recently been passed by the ANU Water Initiative.*)

5. Other Business

The Chair indicated that he intended to invite Mark Cranfield, Curator of Oral History and Folklore at the National Library of Australia, to become a member of the Faculty and to conduct an oral history project amongst those founders of the ANU who are members of the Faculty and others. The purpose would be to develop an oral history of the ANU as a project of the Faculty. The Committee resolved to support this approach.

6. Treasurer's Report

The Treasurer table three sets of accounts as follows:

- The ANUEF Accounts as at 29 November 2006 which showed that members' equity stood at $2,952.15
- The accounts of the Energy Colloquium which showed a surplus of $661.37 and an amount of $2,000 outstanding from a late-paying sponsor. The final surplus will therefore be $2,661.37 which will be invested in the ANUEF Education Fund.
- The accounts of the Kioloa Excursion which showed a surplus of $28.61.

The members resolved to accept the accounts, to authorise all payments, and to submit the accounts for audit.

7. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the ANUEF will be the Annual General Meeting and is scheduled for Wednesday 6 December at 5.00 pm in the Molony Room, Fellows Lane Cottage.

GP 1/12/06

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AT KIOLOA

The following members of the ANU Emeritus Faculty attended a half-day Seminar on 8 November 2006 at Kioloa, the ANU's coastal campus near Bateman's Bay.

Adrian Brooks , Law
Angela Giblin, Music
Barry Ninham, Natural Philosophy
Bill Packard, Geography
Dick Barwick, Earth and Marine Sciences
Eugene Wallensky, Geomorphology
Fergus Thomson, Law
Giles Pickford, Literature
Gillie Evans, Political Science
John Molony, History
Mike Rickard, Geology
Nik Fominas, Spatial Science
Paul Coker, Business Administration
Peter Scardoni, Accountancy
Bari Hall, Human Resources Management
Tim Curtin, Economics of Education

What follows is a summary of their findings.

1. THE TEACHERS AND THE TAUGHT led by John Molony

CONSENSUS

Face-to-Face Teaching

The members agreed that face-to-face teaching remains the most appropriate and effective form to communicate knowledge because it is based on the dignity and rights of the individual.

In 1997 an American management expert proclaimed the imminent death of traditional universities and their replacement with 'virtual' institutions. In fact online ventures by

Oxford, Stanford, Yale, and the other British venture known as UKeU have been abandoned while the widely acclaimed U 21, instead of offering a wide range of courses, has become an online business school. Phoenix Online is an apparent success but only in teaching 'no frills vocational degrees in business, technology, and health-care.' The reason given for the decline of the 'virtual' institutions is that students perceive them as 'second-class' and lacking in 'quality.' See Erica Cervini, 'Online courses fail to oust face-to-face relics.' *Australian Financial Review* Education Supplement, 23 October, 2006, p. 35.

Abolition of Teaching Departments

The members expressed their concern at the abolition of teaching departments in some universities and their replacement with interdisciplinary bodies.

Departments are necessary in order that disciplines may be properly understood, developed, and communicated. The potential of a discipline within an academic community is realized through a department in which scholars interact and support each other. Within that same structure students are able to relate positively to their peers, to their teachers and to the wider academic community.

Abolishing departments removes the foundation stone from the academic structure with the result that later interdisciplinary work at the research level risks becoming a house built on sand.

A recent academic review endorsed this judgment. Its authors argued that, at the research level, 'a discipline-defined base' was not needed, but 'as contexts for academic research, (disciplines) remain central.' The reason given was that 'they provide distinctive perceptions of problems and maintain a distinctive methodological rigour with which to approach them.' The review thus argued, that 'Discipline-defined departments in universities are needed to teach fundamentals to undergraduates and research problems and methods to postgraduates.' See 'Review of the Research School of Social Sciences', Australian National University, November, 2006, p. 9.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF FUNDAMENTAL RESEARCH led by Barry Ninham

CONSENSUS

The members were heartened by the Productivity Commission's recent report on Research. For the first time for many years a government instrumentality has grasped one of the essential truths of university research. That is that it is done best when the academic is free to take on a long term investigation, unhampered by the constant need to justify the project with some short term result. It was also agreed that the commercialisation of research is something that should be driven by Business and Industry, not by campus based organisations, most of which have not succeeded in their aims.

3. THE FUTURE OF THE PUBLIC UNIVERSITY led by Adrian Brooks and Giles Pickford

"There has been much argument about the source of productivity growth in the 1990s which has underpinned Australia's long running economic boom. Some give credit to the Hawke and Keating governments while others point to the business-friendly economic management of the Coalition. It could just as easily be argued that the root

of Australia's strong performance dates back to the 1960s, and a substantial investment by the then prime minister, Robert Menzies.

"If education is the root of all progress in a modern society – and especially its relative performance against others – then this past decade of educational neglect will ultimately cost Australia dearly." (Editorial: BRW November 16-22, 2006)

CONSENSUS

The members present were of the opinion that the public universities should be free and open to all qualified matriculants.

The members present strongly supported the idea that decisions as to the governance and structure of the universities, the establishment and continuance of courses, the pre-requisites for entrance, and the qualifications for graduation, should all be made by and within the universities themselves, on the basis of purely pedagogic and academic considerations, without interference from government departments or instrumentalities.

The members expressed concern about the extent to which the freedom of the universities to make decisions on such bases has been constrained in the past by government policy, and by the government's position as provider of funds.

It was noted that 'the power of the purse' which has underpinned past acceptance of government interference may well be diminishing in some of the longer-established universities, and it was hoped that this would be followed in those institutions by a renewed assertion of independence of decision-making.