

MOTION ON NOTICE

ADVICE TO COUNCIL FROM ACADEMIC BOARD

At its meeting 1/03 of 3 March 2003, Council requested advice from the Academic Board on how it proposed to respond to a notice of motion from the University of Melbourne Postgraduate Association (UMPA).

The notice of motion makes two recommendations to Council, one that there be 'an immediate investigation into Faculty practice in breach of statutory provisions relating to credit', the other that current faculty guidelines be revised to accord with the current statute until Council approves any proposed amendments to statutes.

On the first of these matters, all faculties have been asked for detailed comment on two separate occasions, by the Deputy Vice-President of the Academic Board and by the Academic Registrar. As a result of these investigations the Academic Board Officers and the Academic Registrar have concluded that there are three faculties whose current credit practices are in conflict with the statute as it stands. In all cases the difficulty has been in the interpretation of the word 'common' in the current statute, which states that 'if a student has done the whole or any part of the work in a course for a degree or diploma and proceeds to another course the student must receive credit in the new course for any subject already completed which is common to both courses'.

The issue is of particular significance where a student seeks credit for undergraduate subjects towards a postgraduate degree or diploma, or for subjects done in a postgraduate diploma towards a Masters by coursework. The three faculties in question have, in some courses, offered 'exemption' rather than credit on the basis that 'common' meant only 'compulsory' subjects. Students have been required to substitute different electives to make up the full points required for the course rather than receiving credit for subjects listed in both programs.

Faculties in this position will be requested to re-examine requests for credit across a three-year period with a view to taking remedial action towards those students who were incorrectly denied credit on the basis of the statute. This includes currently enrolled students. We will also consider individual approaches from students outside the three-year time period.

The 'Robinson report' of December 2001, which more clearly defines the levels of and pathways between graduate, postgraduate and Masters programs and which requires Masters coursework programs to be comprised of at least 100 points of study at Masters or 500-level, has been progressively implemented through faculties. This will significantly reduce the cause of the problem in future.

The problem will also be addressed by a revised statute on credit which substitutes 'compulsory' for 'common'. The revised statute, which was approved by the Academic Board on 20 March, adopts an approach to credit which makes clear when credit must be given for prior study but does not seek to stipulate all those cases when it might be or will not be. Faculties will still be entitled to exercise their discretion in granting credit if they wish; the Academic Board will retain an ultimate discretion to allow credit in particular cases.

In the meantime, the second recommendation of UMPA is being addressed by requiring faculties to apply credit guidelines consistent with the current statute.

The development of policy in this area has necessitated a review of credit guidelines across faculties. The increased frequency of combined degrees may mean, for example, that there needs to be a consistent policy towards limitations of time after which an individual may no longer apply for credit. These limitations, designed to respect the changing knowledge base of disciplines and courses, vary from three to ten years.