

Meeting with students of the School of Architecture and Planning

Tuesday 4th September 2007

Responses to issues raised

Present:

- Eight representatives of the School of Architecture and Planning (SoAP) student body
 - Representative of the AUSA: Bethany Maples (Administrative Vice President)
 - University representatives: Professor Raewyn Dalziel (Deputy Vice Chancellor- Academic); Professor Sharman Pretty (Dean- National Institute of Creative Arts and Industries (NICAI)); Professor Jenny Dixon (Head of SoAP- NICAI); Robyn Hill (Faculty Manager- NICAI)
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Questions posed by student representatives:

1. What is the University/ Faculty vision for the School? What was Professor Deamer's vision for the School? What were the points of "deep misalignment" as described by Professor Deamer at a farewell function to students? How are successes and failures of the vision measured? Does the vision for the School align with what the architecture profession believe is fit for a school of architecture?

2. Why were the students not communicated to about Professor Deamer's resignation? How does the Faculty make decisions in the context of not knowing what the students want?

3. The students would like to see greater trust and goodwill between the Faculty and SoAP staff and students, and greater collaboration to ensure that the University/ Faculty know what is good for the students. How could this be achieved?

4. Stated goals in the NICAI annual plan 2007 include:

- 'Recruit and retain high quality staff and student body, striving to create equal opportunities for all those of ability to succeed in a University of high international standing'
- 'Create a culture that encourages academic and general staff to meet their full potential'
- 'Create and maintain an outstanding learning environment'
- 'Create and promote a student environment that is welcoming, enjoyable, stimulating, encouraging students to reach their full potential within a climate of academic excellence'
- 'Engage Alumni and friends in mutually supportive and productive relationships'

The actions of the Faculty at times appear contradictory to its stated aims. Why is this?

5. The National Visiting Panel (NVP) outlines some issues concerning the relationship between the Faculty and School:

"The panel identified significant challenges currently facing the Faculty and the School that largely hinge on the matter of human resource management...there is a significant schism between the vision for the School held at the level of the office of the Dean and a confidence in and ownership of that vision at School level.... the panel observed that there were significant opportunities for the School in the University's NICAI vision but that management of that change between Faculty and School has resulted in a disenfranchising of staff and students in the School".

In this context, are the School and Faculty ultimately sustainable?

Responses:

I.

What is the University/ Faculty vision for the School?

The NICAI vision is as follows:

'To become a national centre of excellence and innovation in contemporary creative arts and industries research, education and practice through advancing excellence in each of the disciplines represented, and through the development of synergies inspired by and responding to the unique cultural heritage, the people, the environment and the international positioning of Aotearoa'.

The University established NICAI in 2004 after extensive consultation within the University, the relevant professional institutes, and the wider professional and creative communities. The move to establish NICAI allowed the University to better position itself internationally, aligning itself to important developments and trends in creative arts and industries pedagogy, research and practice and to better connect to its local context with regard to national resource allocation, demographic change, the employment environment and other opportunities. Most importantly it connected the creative arts and industries disciplines within the University opening up opportunities for new research and collaboration.

The University made a significant investment in the establishment of NICAI, following a period of significant under-investment by the University in the creative arts and industries disciplines. The University and Faculty are fully committed and working actively to achieve the vision and have every confidence that this will be achieved. Some results are already evidenced, in the discipline of Architecture, by the substantial increase in average quality score in the national Performance Based Research Fund between 2003 and 2006, the awarding of the maximum five-year professional accreditation received by the Architecture programme late last year, and student performance in international competitions. A very significant milestone, the development and approval of the new Master of Architecture (Professional), was a joint effort by the University, Faculty and School and represents a significant amount of investment in and commitment to the vision.

What was Professor Deamer's vision for the School? What were the points of "deep misalignment" as described by Professor Deamer at a farewell function to students?

Professor Deamer was aware of the University's Strategic Plan, the NICAI vision, and the School's Annual Plan from the commencement of the search process. The vision and strategy of NICAI and the multidisciplinary School of Architecture and Planning were clearly and repeatedly communicated in writing (through strategic and annual plans, and policy and procedure documents) and in discussion, formally and informally with the Dean, the former Heads of School, and other staff. Professor Deamer reviewed the 2007 Annual Plan for the School of Architecture and Planning, prepared by her predecessor, and seemed to share the goals and objectives of the Plan. As we are just entering the new planning cycle for the Faculty and the School, there had not been the opportunity for Professor Deamer to set out and test her vision for the School. We are therefore not aware of the sources of the misalignment that has been referred to.

How are successes and failures of the vision measured?

At University, Faculty and School levels, annual plans are developed, aligned and coordinated. All of the plans are public and transparent documents available on the University website. There is significant opportunity for input and consultation with staff before these plans are finalised at each level. Progress against the plans is formally evaluated twice a year through a reporting process.

Does the vision for the School align with what the Professors believe is fit for a School of Architecture and Planning?

The School of Architecture and Planning is closely engaged with the profession through a number of formal and informal mechanisms and has a positive relationship with architects, planners and urban designers in New Zealand and beyond. Many of our staff have key roles in the profession and the community (e.g. the NZIA, the NZPI, the Auckland City Council's Urban Design Panel), which attests to the standing with which they are regarded by their professional peers. The School is also significantly dependent on members of the profession to contribute to the teaching programmes, particularly in studio and design work, and the University is extremely grateful to those members of the profession who make themselves available for these activities within their busy schedules.

The University consulted the profession when establishing NICA and SoAP and more recently sought guidance and industry feedback on the MArch(Prof) proposal. The University will continue to work closely with the profession to ensure that the School's programmes are relevant and of high quality.

Professor Deamer's resignation, while unfortunate, has no bearing on the ongoing relationship with the profession, or on the fine work that is occurring within the School.

The Faculty is looking to establish a School Advisory Board to further strengthen the relationships and facilitate dialogue.

2.

Why were the students not communicated to about Prof Deamer's resignation?

It is not usual for the University to send out broad communications to students about staffing changes. However, it is usual for the University to contact any research Masters or PhD students who are being individually supervised by a departing staff member. All such students were contacted and appropriate plans were put in place to ensure continuity for the students.

The structure of the School of Architecture and Planning is prescribed through the University structure, and will not change as a result of Professor Deamer's resignation. Professor Dixon, who has significant experience as an academic leader in the university context, has been appointed as Head of the School. An international search for a Professor of Architecture to replace Professor Deamer will commence before the end of the academic year.

The School provides discipline-specific leadership within this structure. At present these roles are filled by Dr Sarah Treadwell, as Deputy Head- Architecture Professional Programmes and Ms Marilyn Higgins as Deputy Head Planning- Professional Programmes.

How does the Faculty make decisions in the context of not knowing what the students want?

The Dean holds forums with students in each school in the Faculty once a semester to inform students of new developments, activities and opportunities and to hear and discuss any concerns or suggestions. SoAP students were invited to attend such a forum on 6 August, being a date (and a time) selected by the School. Approximately twenty students attended this meeting.

Student input is also invited through the ongoing Staff-Student Consultative processes, which operates, in a coordinated way, at University, Faculty and School levels. The Faculty Manager will, in October, review the Faculty-level Staff-Student Consultative (SSC) process to ensure that this is an effective mechanism for communication and discussion generally.

The Dean and the Head of School will establish a series of special SSC meetings in October and November to work with architecture students to address current concerns, and to address some of the specific issues raised by the NVP.

Professor Pretty is happy to meet with individuals or groups of students at any time to discuss ideas, issues or concerns. Appointments can be made through the Faculty Executive Officer, Abby Cummins, ext. 82747.

3.

The students would like to see greater trust and goodwill between the Faculty and SoAP staff and students, and greater collaboration to ensure that the University/ Faculty know what is good for the students. How could this be achieved?

The University's moves to establish NICAI in 2004 and SoAP in 2006 were both huge undertakings and it is recognised by the NVP, the Faculty and the University that there is still a significant amount of work to be done. There has been significant capital investment in SoAP. For example, in 2007 to-date, there has been a major upgrade of metal workshop machinery; approval of the purchase of a \$50,000 laser cutter; and discussion amongst the Deans of NICAI, Science and Engineering to review workshops and explore the possibility of a University digital fabrication hub. A new vacuum pre-former has been purchased and installed in the wood workshop and there have been significant investments made in software and studio upgrades.

In the immediate term there will be increased dialogue between the Faculty and SoAP staff to start to resolve any issues and build a shared understanding of the vision.

An issue frequently raised by students is that of after hours access to studios- greater access is desired. Studio Access hours will be re-reviewed and re-discussed with Property Services. The Faculty and School would like to see maximum student access to the resources within the constraints established by safety and cost. A benchmarking exercise will be undertaken immediately to compare the SoAP studio hours with other institutions.

4.

Stated goals in the NICAI annual plan 2007 include:

- ***'Recruit and retain high quality staff and student body, striving to create equal opportunities for all those of ability to succeed in a University of high international standing'***
- ***'Create a culture that encourages academic and general staff to meet their full potential'***
- ***'Create and maintain an outstanding learning environment'***
- ***'Create and promote a student environment that is welcoming, enjoyable, stimulating, encouraging students to reach their full potential within a climate of academic excellence'***
- ***'Engage Alumni and friends in mutually supportive and productive relationships'***.

Staff turnover appears to be high and staff morale appears to be low. Is this not contradictory to the goals? Staff morale is impacting on student morale and this in turn impacts on the quality of the learning environment and learning outputs.

The SoAP is a large school, with approximately 50 full-time-equivalent staff teaching and/or researching in any given semester. The staff turnover is not unusually high for a school of this size (five resignations and six new appointments in 2007) - the University operates in an international, highly competitive and mobile market. Inter-institutional competition for staff is generally the most intense at higher levels and in professional disciplines.

One of Professor Dixon's first key tasks in the role of Head of SoAP will be to develop staffing plans for the immediate and long term. Further recruitment processes are likely to flow from this. A new Professor of Planning has been appointed and will commence in February 2008. A search will commence shortly for a Professor of Architecture to replace Professor Deamer.

The Faculty and School work actively to maintain a staff-student ratio of 1:16 across permanent and fixed term staff in the School. This staff student ratio is low by Australasian benchmarks.

As mentioned above, there will be increased dialogue between the Faculty and SoAP staff in the forthcoming months to resolve any issues and build a greater shared understanding.

Students in the School of Architecture and Planning can be assured that the University, Faculty and School aspire to the highest research, teaching and learning, and professional practice standards. It is highly encouraging to see that the current students in Architecture and Planning are equally committed to a high quality learning experience and a reputable and esteemed School, Faculty and University. This is a great base on which to build relationships and partnerships and move forward.

One of Professor Deamer's important achievements, during her five months as Head, was the development of the seminar series which engaged staff, students, alumni and the profession. The Faculty will continue to support this initiative.

5. The NVP outlines some issues concerning the relationship between the Faculty and School
“The panel identified significant challenges currently facing the Faculty and the School that largely hinge on the matter of human resource management...there is a significant schism between the vision for the School held at the level of the office of the Dean and a confidence in and ownership of that vision at School level. the panel observed that there were significant opportunities for the School in the University's NICAI vision but that management of that change between Faculty and School has resulted in a disenfranchising of staff and students in the School”.

Are the School and Faculty ultimately sustainable?

The School of Architecture and Planning and NICAI are robust academically and financially, and are fully supported by the University. The NVP also correctly identified that there are significant opportunities for the School within the NICAI vision.

It is recognised and understood that change processes are difficult and “ownership” of the vision needs to be developed over time. The Faculty will continue to put significant effort in to attracting, appointing and retaining high quality staff, and ensuring constructive dialogue with staff and students in the School. Staff are encouraged to bring forward any issues and suggestions to the Head of School and Dean.

The performance of students in the School is high and locally and internationally recognised as such. There is collective commitment to progress, create an outstanding learning environment, and explore and realise the interdisciplinary potential of the School. Nevertheless, in all universities, including this one, there are always challenges and better ways of doing things, and we are not complacent in this regard.