



To: Office of Planning and Development

From: Adelaide University Postgraduate Students' Association

Subject: Feedback on University of Adelaide's Draft Strategic Plan

Date: 31 October 2003

The Adelaide University Postgraduate Students' Association (AUPGSA) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft of the University of Adelaide's Strategic Plan and commends the University in providing the University community with the prospect of discussing the draft. As the peak representative body of all research and coursework postgraduate and honours students at the University of Adelaide, the AUPGSA is in the position to offer an opinion that can hopefully represent the views of most of its diverse membership.

The AUPGSA offers the following comments:

Mission, Vision and Values. The AUPGSA supports fully the ideas espoused as being the University's mission, vision and values, and in particular the desire for a united Australia.

Contextual Analysis. In an environment of reform and shrinking financial Governmental support, and being located in one of the smaller Australian States, the University of Adelaide faces a unique challenge in the coming decade. The AUPGSA commends the University in correctly identifying the areas that shall inevitably shape the institution's future and seeking solutions to the challenges that have yet to be implemented, such as the Federal Government's proposals for reforming the higher education sector – should they actually be implemented. It is particularly pleasing to note that the University acknowledges the importance that postgraduate coursework fees play as a source of University income, as well as the impact that the costs of higher education have on individuals from lower socio-economic backgrounds and the importance of addressing the secondary education sector's issues.

Growth with Excellence. Whilst it is important for the University to develop and expand its capabilities, it is concerning that the institution wishes to more than double the current level of fee based enrolments to over 6000 EFTSU of a 16000 total EFTSU, up from the Semester 1 2003 number of just over 2700 fee-paying EFTSU of a total 13716 total EFTSU. This includes an undergraduate fee-paying increase from 50 EFTSU to at least 750 EFTSU. The AUPGSA does not support the increase at any course level in fee-paying places beyond what it considers to be the already excessive level of fees that many students already pay. However, the AUPGSA does acknowledge the need for the University to increase its income, but raising the number of fee-paying places is not the method by which it should be achieved.

The proposal to increase the number of postgraduate students, especially those in enrolled in HDR programs, is admirable; however, it is important that any increase is not at the expense of enrolments in Faculties that do not as easily attract external funding such as the Humanities and Social Sciences. In addition, the University must ensure that adequate resources are provided for all postgraduate students.

Student Focus. The AUPGSA supports the targets and strategies that are outlined in this section of the Strategic Plan. However, the need for 24-hour computing access and a Student Services Precinct with 24-hour telephone and email support is particularly important, and needs to be implemented well before the proposed 2008 target date.

It is encouraging to note that the University realises that it needs to develop services that provide support for postgraduate coursework students. Given the large fees that such students pay, this aspect needs to be given particular priority to ensure that noticeable improvements can be made as quickly as is practicable.

Scale and Focus in Research. The University correctly acknowledges the need to further improve its research output and research education. Of particular note in the proposed targets are the further increases to HDR enrolments and at least maintaining HDR completion rates. The AUPGSA is concerned that the level of resources and support that HDR students receive must be at least maintained in some areas, and increased in others.

Concerning the general improvements of the University's research capabilities, it is important that disciplines that do not attract large levels of funding are not neglected, so that high quality academics can be attracted to, and remain at, the University.

Enabling Strategies. The AUPGSA supports the aims of this section of the Strategic Plan.

Human Resources. The AUPGSA supports the aims of this section of the Strategic Plan, providing the University does not seek to implement Australian Workplace Agreements as a means to achieving the stated goals.

Planning and Budget. It is important for the University to establish a firm financial basis on which to build. However, proposals must not be at the expense of disciplines that do not have the high profile of others, if such disciplines are performing well in their own right. In all financial considerations, it must be remembered that a University is a place of learning and research – even when business considerations are important. Under no circumstances should the independence and freedom of research and teaching be compromised by external funding and corporatisation.

Facilities and Infrastructure. The AUPGSA supports the aims of this section of the Strategic Plan, as they acknowledge the importance of the core learning and research roles of the institution. In light of the large increases in student enrolments and research output that is proposed, this section of the Strategic Plan is vital to the achievement of all other plans. The AUPGSA hopes that the University consults widely before it implements its proposals.

Internationalisation. The proposals outlined in this section of the Strategic Plan have merit; however, it is important that international students are not viewed merely as being an important source of income for tertiary institutions in an increasingly difficult financial climate. Collaboration between universities is a desirable strategy to pursue, but internal structures must not suffer as a result of external activity.

Information Technology. In a world that relies increasingly on IT, the University needs to develop a flexible yet efficient IT plan. An integral component that is essential to achieve the stated goal that is not included as a strategy is the use of open standards across all areas of IT systems and services. It is important for an institution that wishes to remain efficient and responsive to not be dependent on closed standards of corporations that provide products and services to the University. The University must consider the adoption of other IT solutions, rather than blindly continuing along the same path without examining alternatives.

Information Management. The AUPGSA supports the strategies and goal outlined in this section.

Marketing, Student Recruitment and Communication. The AUPGSA supports the strategies and goal outlined in this section.

Conclusion. Whilst the AUPGSA does support many of the proposals outlined in the University's Strategic Plan, the association is interested in the specific details of individual projects that shall be undertaken to achieve the stated goals before it gives its unqualified support to said Plan. However, the AUPGSA does have reservations about certain aspects, and hopes that the University does takes them into consideration before finalising its Strategic Plan. At the core of all University endeavours must be recognition and support for its primary areas of research and teaching. The AUPGSA wishes to participate in assisting the University achieve its aims and looks forward to all future collaboration.