

COMMUNICATION POLICY

Introduction

This Policy is focussed on communication as referred to in the AUQA Audit Report on SCD (2009), which refers to communications particularly within the SCD but also with the wider community, as follows:

(i) Affirmation 7

AUQA affirms SCD's identification of the need to improve **communication** within and beyond the consortium, and enhance relationship-building.

This Affirmation is related to a note that '**communications** between Head Office and the MIs, and between and within MIs, had been identified by SCD as a priority for improvement'.

(ii) Recommendation 4

AUQA recommends that as a matter of routine, the President of the SCD Council, the Dean and the Director of Finance meet each Member Institute individually on an annual basis to review the nature of the 'Principal and Agent' relationship, including the terms of the Memoranda of Understanding between SCD Head Office and each individual Member Institution, in order to inform the alignment of the SCD and Member Institution strategic plans.

This Recommendation is related to a note of 'the importance being given to **communication** and relationship-building in the consortium, by both SCD Head Office and the MIs'.

(iii) 'Looking to the future'

The SCD is engaged in addressing a range of **communications** issues amongst its various constituents (students, staff, the Dean's Office, MIs, stakeholders, and the general public).

All such matters related to communication are being addressed by SCD in an ongoing way. While considerable progress has been made since the AUQA Audit, this area is recognized as an especially dynamic one that will inevitably be subject to constant review and improvement.

General Principles

Communication related to the operation of the Sydney College of Divinity (SCD) occurs both amongst the various participants in the SCD community and between the SCD and the public, including Government agencies and potential students.

In all contexts the SCD pursues the following general principles:

- (i) The SCD requires all information disseminated by the SCD and its Member Institutions (MIs) to be adequate for purpose, honest, accurate and as clear as possible, and both SCD and its MIs will strive to present their website communications in a readily accessible form.

Approved by Academic Board 110411, adopted by Council 270411

- (ii) The SCD requires all information disseminated by the SCD and its Member Institutions to accord with relevant Government regulations and directions.

Internal Communication through Governance

Because SCD is formally a principal with agents, its governance structure is designed to provide both for the orderly conduct of its core business of education, in accordance with its Mission, Values and Goals, and for the integration of the MIs' interests with the interests of the SCD collective.

The governance structure comprises a range of bodies that address systemic operational tasks and make relevant decisions and recommendations according to defined reporting lines, while also providing for exchanges amongst the MIs. These committees, some generating sub-committees or occasional working parties, are all located on clear lines of responsibility and communication and constitute the main framework of communications within the SCD.

The nature of communication through the governance structure varies somewhat according to whether or not the membership of a body is expressly representational in respect of MIs. Representational membership means that members are expected to act in the interest of their MI as well as the collective interest. Non-representational membership means that members are expected to act only in the collective interest of the SCD.

Representational committees are, by definition, predicated on an assumption that representatives will report back to their MIs, as well as bringing to the meeting any matter their MI wishes to communicate to the meeting. In the case of non-representational committees, key operational business to be implemented within the individual MIs may and often should be reported to them by committee members from the MIs, but information open to dissemination in this way will always exclude matters of a confidential nature.

Neither the Council nor any of its committees, including the Academic Board, is representational in this sense. Council membership includes a majority of independent, external members and a minority of persons explicitly from some, usually not all, of the MIs, together with the SCD Dean. Academic Board membership includes a majority of persons from the MIs and the SCD Office and a minority of independent, external persons, but membership does not necessarily include persons from all MIs. Academic Board and the other Council committees report to Council and the numerous committees of Academic Board report to it.

While all committees of Council, as indicated, are non-representational (Academic Board and the Audit, Institutional Membership and Strategic Planning Committees), the committees of the Academic Board are variously (i) representational and related to constant operational needs affecting all MIs (Academic Standards, Distance Education, Libraries, Research, Student Administration) and (ii) non-representational and related to other operational needs (Academic Classification and Promotion, Academic Classification and Promotion Appeals, Doctor of Ministry, Human Research Ethics, Languages Other than English, Learning and Teaching, Professional Development). Most committees of either kind also have independent, external members.

The composition and duties of each body are set out in the Terms of Reference for that body.

The Council and Academic Board and all their committees generate Agendas and Minutes or Reports. The Agendas, Papers and Minutes of Academic Board and its Academic Standards and Research Committees are automatically sent to the Principals, and any Principal may, with the consent of the

Chair, send an observer to Academic Board or any Academic Board Committee. The Principals may also, at the invitation of the Chair, send an observer to Council meetings. An observer at any of these meetings will be subject to the same confidentiality rules as the Board, Committee, or Council itself.

In addition, the Dean regularly provides a report on all scheduled Council and Academic Board meetings to the Principals, drawing their attention to significant matters. These reports normally constitute one body of material for discussion by the Principals' Fellowship. Recent developments in policy and procedure are also gazetted on the SCD website.

The Principals' Fellowship is a body outside the governance structure, which provides for the sharing of news and concerns amongst the Principals. The Principals' Fellowship functions as an advisory body to the Council, and a report from the Fellowship is a standing item on the Council agenda. The Dean is normally invited to attend Fellowship meetings to provide information and to be informed of particular concerns of the Principals. For particular reasons, other Directors from the Office of the Dean may also be invited to attend on occasion.

In the AUQA Good Practice Database, one of the two Practices contributed by SCD, at the invitation of AUQA, concerns the work of the Principals' Fellowship, together with that of the Registrars' network, as 'Good Management for an NSAI Consortium'. In such contexts, management is inseparable from communication.

Particular Protocols for Communication

1. Regular Strategic Planning Days will be arranged to permit policy discussions and institutional planning through shared discussions amongst the Council, the Principals, the Academic Board, and the Office of the Dean.
2. The SCD Handbook and other key documents, including essential information concerning appeals, grievances, and other student welfare matters, will be readily available to staff and students and information about how and where to access them will be made clear at the time of induction of new staff and enrolment of students, both domestic and overseas.
3. Documents provided to staff and/or students by Member Institutions will promote SCD policy and procedure and/or not contradict SCD policy and procedure.
4. The Dean and other staff from the Office of the Dean will be available to provide information and guidance to the Principals and other staff based in MIs, as well as any student who wishes to contact the office directly. Requests will be addressed in a timely way.
5. The Principals, the Academic Deans, and other key staff in the MIs will ensure that they and those for whom they are responsible take notice of communications from the Office, as well as reports they receive through the governance structure, and address matters raised or make further enquiries in a timely way.
6. The spokesperson for the Council and the College at all appropriate times is the Dean.

Associated Policies and Procedures

Communication lies at the heart of virtually the entire SCD Policy and Procedures Manual.

Some Policy areas of particular relevance are:

Advertising Policy

Confidentiality and Disclosure in Relation to Council Membership

Induction Policy

Overseas Student Policies

Professional Development Policy

Student Support and Welfare Policy

Terms of Reference for each governance body