Comments on the Draft Faculty General Staff Structure

The Faculty revenue has declined considerably over the years 2003-2005 and is expected to decline further over the next 2-3 years due to the pipeline effect even if the commencing student numbers stabilise. It therefore follows that expenditure must be reduced. Given that a large percentage of Faculty expenditure is on staff salaries, staff numbers will have to be reduced.

At the time of writing this, it is estimated that there are a total of about 120 general staff in the Faculty. Since the beginning of 2004, some 35 general staff have resigned. Given that general staff morale appears low, resignations could well continue at the annual rate of around 10% or more.

First of all it should be recognized that restructuring the Faculty’s general staff is a challenging task because it is very difficult to accurately determine what (and how much) each group and each general staff member in it does. Considerable detail of how every task is done has been provided in the documents on the Implementation Web site. This information is very useful in determining whether each task is being done correctly but is of little help in determining how many staff are needed to do the tasks. It is therefore almost impossible for most staff (including one who was in the Dean’s office for more than one year) to make sensible comments on issues like the following that the document seeks ideas on:

a. Better ways to organise the work and roles
b. Any significant functions that have not been detailed
c. What would we have to start doing, stop doing or change the way we do it currently to facilitate the new structure.

The general staff structure proposed in the draft document can only be considered as an interim structure. The document does not clearly outline the role of each group and does not provide any basis for the number of staff recommended for each. Also, the document does not outline the role of general staff in supporting the academic activities of the Faculty. It is not clear if academics and Schools’ general staff were in any way involved in developing this structure and if any senior academic was part of the team that developed it.

In my view, it is useful to start by formulating some overall objectives for a task like this.

Objectives

The objectives of general staff restructure could be

1. Gradually continue to reduce the number of general staff in line with decline in student numbers

2. Improve the performance of the remaining general staff by providing suitable professional training to encourage multi-skilling and thus continue to provide effective administrative support to the Faculty and making it easier to redeploy staff when necessary

3. Given the high level of general staff turnover, achieve the above aims without any redundancies and thus help improve general staff morale.
Detailed Comments

1. Faculty Manager – Although the structure proposed includes some 115 general staff, the structure does not recommend appointment of a Faculty Manager who can provide leadership to them. The Faculty will therefore continue to have a situation where general staff leadership has to be provided by a number of managers, which in my view is not satisfactory. A good Faculty Manager can make a significant contribution to the Faculty and would have been a great asset in the current general staff restructuring. Without a Faculty Manager’s leadership, the Dean has to deal with issues that he does not have time for. One could argue that in the climate of a very difficult financial situation it is irresponsible to be appointing another senior staff member. In my view however this sort of false economy should be avoided.

2. Staff Morale – Given that the general staff turnover is high, the current number of general staff is around 120, and the proposed structure recommends about 115 staff, one might have expected the draft document to include a recommendation that no general staff of the Faculty be made redundant. It would have greatly assisted in improving general staff morale and in removing the anxiety and stress that the proposed structure has caused (and is continuing to cause) to at least some of them.

3. Marketing and Relationship – The recommendations do not clearly outline how the marketing and relationship roles of the Faculty will be carried out. Is it appropriate to disband ARM when one of the Faculty’s major needs is first-rate domestic and international marketing? No rationale has been provided for the arrangement proposed.

4. Technical Services – No comments are being made regarding Technical Services since a further review is proposed at the end of 2005. Hopefully a senior academic will be part of the review team.

5. Business Manager – Given that marketing and some technical services are to be transferred to the Business Manager, what qualifications and skills would a Business Manager be required to have?

6. Role of the General and Academic Staff – One may take issue with a number of remarks in the draft document. For example, the document notes that academics “provide operational support to the Faculty’s administrative activities”. Instead I would have expected it to note that the primary role of the general staff is to provide support for the academic activities of the Faculty. Also, the document does not appear to recognise that the Faculty Board (with the help of its committees e.g. the FEC and the FRC) is the governing body of the Faculty and no academic unit can take autonomous decisions as the document implies. In my opinion, bottom-up decision-making should always be encouraged wherever appropriate so that the academic staff (and students) have some ownership of the academic decisions made. Furthermore, the document gives an impression that no support is required for day-to-day academic activities in the Schools. There are

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1 **Caveat:** I have been on an OSP overseas since the beginning of 2005 and therefore some comments may reflect a lack of understanding of recent developments in the Faculty.

2 The people reporting to the Dean include: three Associate Deans, five HOS, the Registrar, the Manager of Research Services, the Business Manager, three Research Professors, an advisor, and an executive officer. These are just too many for the Dean to provide them effective guidance. In addition, the Dean currently also acts as Head of the Berwick School and the Head of the Peninsula School. It should also be noted that the Faculty does not have a Deputy Dean to share some of the Dean’s responsibilities.

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many day-to-day tasks that general staff in the Schools do currently and I assume they will need to continue to be carried out.

Recommendations

1. That the Faculty advertise widely and appoint a well qualified Faculty Manager that has relevant experience as soon as possible.

2. That the role, responsibilities, qualifications and skills required by the Business Manager be clearly described.

3. That the Faculty announce that no general staff member will be made redundant as long as each staff member impacted by the restructure is willing to be redeployed after undergoing appropriate training.

4. That no new general staff be normally appointed in the next two years. Existing staff should be redeployed to fill vacancies created by resignations allowing the total general staff numbers to decline during the next two years below the proposed 115.

5. The review of Technical Services at the end of 2005 should include a senior academic in the review team.

6. That the role and responsibilities of each group of general staff be documented in more detail over the next year after the new structure is put in place. For example, information like how many undergraduate and postgraduate applications are handled, how many research applications are processed and what work is done by the human resources staff in the Faculty Office given that almost no new staff are being recruited should be part of the description. The description should also include outcomes expected from each group perhaps in the form of KPIs. The staff resources required to meet the KPIs can then be better estimated.

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