The Review of the Faculty of Information Technology - A Submission to the Schools Structure Team

1. Scope

The Faculty Review Scope document lists the following questions:

- How do we organise ourselves as an integrated Faculty to deliver our Vision and Values?

- If a school structure is not retained, how should administrative responsibilities be organized throughout the Faculty?

- Does a school structure best allow us to enact our values and to achieve our vision and objectives?

- If a school structure best allows us to enact our values and to achieve our vision and objectives, can the existing school structure be made more effective and efficient?

- If a school structure undermines our ability to enact our values and to achieve our vision and objectives, what alternative structure should be used?

2. The Current Structure

The Faculty of Information Technology was created in 1990 after Monash merged with the then Chisholm Institute of Technology which included the Peninsula Campus. The University also merged with the Gippsland Institute of Advanced Education in 1990, established Berwick, Malaysia and South Africa campuses in 1994, 1998 and 2001 respectively.

The Faculty currently has eight Schools. The largest one, SCSSE (Computer Science and Software Engineering) operates on both Clayton and Caulfield campuses. SBS (Business Systems) operates at Clayton, SIMS (Information Management and Systems) is at Caulfield, SNC (Network Computing) is at Peninsula, SMS (Multimedia Systems) at Berwick and GSCIT (Computing and Information Technology) is located on the Gippsland Campus. There are two Schools overseas, both are small, one located in Malaysia and a very small one in South Africa. Three of the Australian Schools (SNC, SMS and GSCIT) are also relatively small. The three larger Schools together account for over 80% of the students and revenue.

The two Schools at Berwick and Peninsula teach multimedia and network computing respectively and it has been the practice during the last few years that all teaching related to multimedia and network computing is done by these two Schools even if the teaching is required at Caulfield or Clayton. At the present time both SNC and SMS teach at Caulfield and about half the SNC’s EFTSU is Caulfield based. Staff from Peninsula as well as Berwick travel regularly to Caulfield to give lectures and provide support to students.

Gippsland has a small number of on-campus students but has more students off-campus. GSCIT also has a number of partner supported programs running in, for example, Singapore and Hong Kong.
2.1 Problems with the Current Structure

The current Faculty structure has not led to an integrated community of scholars. There appears to be a little too much diversity in the Faculty. Some schools are very technical while others are not. Some are large while others are not. Some are based on the major Clayton and Caulfield campuses while others are located at regional Victorian or overseas campuses. Although diversity should be encouraged and welcomed, this large diversity needs to be better managed. The current structure has also resulted in turf wars which appear to consume an enormous amount of time and energy distracting us from our vision and objectives.

The problems with the current structure include the following:

1. There are too many Schools in the Faculty which contributes to disunity and encourages proliferation of degree programs and units.

2. Two schools, SBS and SIMS, are operating in similar discipline areas offering what appear to be somewhat similar programs.

3. SMS and SNC have a monopoly on teaching two important discipline areas. In the present environment of low student demand, it makes little sense to allocate two areas of great student interest, multimedia and network computing, to the outer suburban campuses. It is well known that domestic as well as international students prefer to come to campuses at Caulfield or Clayton. When the Master of Networking Computing program was moved from Peninsula to Caulfield, the number of students enrolled increased dramatically.

4. SNC and SCITSE both have expertise in network computing.

5. The role of GSCIT in off-campus learning and partner-supported programs overseas needs to be better defined.

6. The future of the FLITE Centre needs to be decided.

2.2 Options to Overcome the Problems

There are several options available to the Faculty. Of course two extreme options are either to disband all Schools creating a Faculty without Schools (eg. Law) or to leave the School structure as it currently is. In my view, both these option are unsatisfactory.

The option of disbanding all Schools might help in reducing disunity within the Faculty but a very large organisational unit is unlikely to be very effective. Staff need to work in much smaller groups working on closely related areas with which they can identify. A group of some 300 staff distributed on seven campuses without Schools is unlikely to work even if some informal structure perhaps based on research groups was established.

The other option of retaining the current structure has little to recommend it. Some of the problems with the current structure have been outlined above.

The problems listed above are inter-related. We consider them together and focus only on Caulfield, Clayton, Berwick and Peninsula campuses.
CAULFIELD AND CLAYTON

Currently the Caulfield and Clayton campuses have three schools. We consider three options to reduce the number of schools to two:

(a) Combine SBS and SIMS.

(b) Combine SIMS and SCSSE at Caulfield and combine SBS and SCSSE at Clayton.

(c) Combine SBS and SIMS and locate the combined School at Caulfield (or Clayton) and all of SCSSE to Clayton (or Caulfield).

The first option has the advantage of combining two schools that are operating in the information systems field. The following implications should be noted about this merger:

- Multi-campus schools can work. When the previous Dean tried to break SCSSE into two separate Schools, it was somewhat surprising that both parts of the School opposed the proposal strongly.

- Multi-campus Schools assist unity in the large and diverse multi-campus Faculty.

- Multi-campus Schools can be made to work better. For example one arrangement could be to appoint a Head of School that is primarily based in Clayton and a senior academic as Deputy Head that is based at Caulfield and requiring that each one of them spend one day a week on the other campus. After two or three years, the arrangement should be reversed so that the Head is located at Caulfield and a Deputy Head at Clayton.

- Multi-campus Schools can be made to work better if incentive is provided to staff to spend say one semester every two years at the other campus. This can improve unity and encourage collaboration between staff at different campuses.

- Combining SIMS and SBS is natural. It should lead to much better cooperation between them.

The second option creates two single campus schools. Although single campus schools should be easier to manage than multi-campus schools the option has many disadvantages:

- It creates two Schools with too much diversity within them. As the Faculty needs to manage the diversity very carefully, this option does not assist that process as it creates schools that will have difficulty working as coherent units.

- The two Schools will both have expertise in computer science and information systems field. They will therefore naturally strongly compete with each other.

- Two single campus Schools will encourage the tendency to return to Caulfield vs Clayton rivalry. Although the environment has improved somewhat, creating two such schools could easily make it worse.
The third option has a number of advantages and disadvantages:

- Single campus schools are somewhat easier to manage than multi-campus schools.
- SIMS and SCSSSE both have considerable history of offering programs at Caulfield. It is therefore not desirable for these programs to be abandoned or moved to Clayton. Likewise with SBS and SCSSSE at Clayton.
- There is a risk that two single campus Schools will encourage Caulfield vs Clayton rivalry.

**REMAINING CAMPUSES**

These five Schools are small and some are barely viable. Possible options are:

(a) The Schools at the regional Victorian campuses could be combined in to one School, the Malaysian and South African Schools could be combined with the Business Schools there. The benefits of this approach are that the number of Schools is reduced to three or four. There is likely to be better cooperation between the three regional Schools and more viable joint Schools in Malaysia and South Africa. The disadvantage of course is that one Head of School in regional Victoria will find it difficult to manage a School that is located at three Victorian campuses that are some distance apart.

(b) Let the Schools at Gippsland, Malaysia and South Africa be managed by the local campus directors. SNC should be merged with SCSSSE as this fits with the technical nature of SCSSSE and SMS with SIMS since there appears to be some affinity between the two. SNC staff is then moved to Caulfield and Clayton although some staff will travel to Peninsula to provide IT teaching at that campus. In effect, this results in closing SNC at Peninsula and scaling down Faculty activities there. The benefit of this approach is that a barely viable campus at Peninsula is closed.

**GSCIT**

As noted earlier, GSCIT has only a small number of on-campus students. It has many off-campus students and it has a number of partner-supported programs. My submission for the Academic Programs Team has recommended that all partner-supported programs be discontinued. The off-campus programs of GSCIT should however continue and be improved. At the present time much of the off-campus learning is paper-based although web is used to some extent. There is significant potential to improve the off-campus programs by using video streaming and perhaps using DVD lectures. I am not an expert in OCL but it appears that the aim of the Faculty ought to be to make GSCIT one of the best OCL providers in the world.

**FLITE CENTRE**

It is not quite clear why this Centre was established. Although the Centre provides some useful services to the Faculty, for example tutor training, the benefits to the Faculty by continuing with the Centre are not commensurate with the expenditure on it. The University has other units that can provide the services that the FLITE Centre provides at much lower cost.
3. Recommendations

(a) We recommend that SMS, SBS and SIMS be combined into one School and SNC and SCsSE be combined into another with all SNC staff given the choice of moving either to Clayton or Caulfield. The remaining three Schools should be managed by the local Pro-Vice-Chancellor or the Campus Academic Director.

(b) It is recommended that network computing and multimedia subjects be allowed to be offered on any campus that has the expertise to offer them.

(c) GSCIT should be encouraged to make use of advanced technologies in improving the quality of the Faculty's OCL programs.

(d) The FLITE Centre should be closed.

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