Strategic Review of the University College Pilot Program (UCCP)

For the University of Tasmania

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Strategic Review of UCPP

Report of the Strategic Review of the University College Pilot Program (UCCP)

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Background

The University of Tasmania sought an independent review of the UCPP with the following terms of reference:

1. To provide an assessment as to how well the UCPP met and meets current and future strategic objectives of UTAS
2. To determine the success of UCPP through the identification and utilization of relevant external benchmarking measures
3. To provide an assessment of the outcomes and impacts of the program over its first 2 ½ years utilizing stakeholder and external feedback
4. To provide an assessment of the academic credibility of the UCPP in the context of wider UTAS QA processes
5. To comment on the risks of continuing or not with the UCPP or similar program
6. To identify the opportunity cost of resources flowing to the UCPP in regard to optimal achievement of related UTAS strategic objectives
7. To provide advice on the development and review of policy and practice relevant to the strategic direction of UTAS and the related aims of the UCPP
8. To provide recommendations as to the future of the UCPP including expanding and/or improving the system.

The terms of reference are attached as Appendix 1.

The independent reviewer was provided with a number of documents and a self-evaluation of the outcomes from 2008 to the present. She undertook a number of interviews with internal and external stakeholders over the period 8-10 August 2010 in Launceston and Hobart.

The University College Pilot Program: Context

The UCPP is a UTAS program run in collaboration with the Tasmanian Academy and Senior Secondary Schools/Colleges, including independent and non-government schools, which allows capable and motivated students to undertake units of university study either in conjunction with or alongside their studies towards the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) or the International Baccalaureate (IB). The program has operated on a pilot basis for three years which ends in December 2010.

The UCPP was established in 2008 as part of the University of Tasmania’s EDGE2 (Excellence, Distinctiveness, Growth and Engagement) to help achieve a number of strategic priorities for UTAS; first, and most important, to develop the UTAS College model in partnership with the State
Government to provide an integrated year 11 to PhD educational framework for Tasmania; second, to embed a high performance culture by strengthening high achiever and pathways programs to attract the top echelon of students and, third, to strengthen relationships with UTAS communities, particularly the Department of Education and Secondary Schools and Colleges.

The UCPP is operating within a rapidly shifting context, both internally and externally. Within the University there is significant change in the Senior Executive and a revision of the Strategic Planning document has been published covering the period 2008-2011 (EDGE 2.1). The Federal Government’s response to the Bradley Review of Higher Education has helped define more ambitious growth targets to 2011 and a more defined commitment to social inclusion. UTAS’ institutional goals include growth “to approximately 16,500 EFTSL” by 2011 (although interim indications are for approx 16,200 EFTSL in 2010) with a performance indicator to “increase higher education participation rates of Tasmanians to at least the national average” (UTAS EDGE 2.1).

In February 2010, the Vice Chancellor in a report to Council stated that “Members also agreed that social inclusion should be a priority not only because of the Commonwealth targets but also because providing the opportunity for capable students is at the core of our mission and vision”. In discussion of the social inclusion targets he suggested that UTAS should “Create a participation strategy encompassing schools, government, local government, business, industry and service groups” and that UTAS should “push into every home in Tasmania” and increase Tasmanian-based EFTSL by 5% pa for 15 years until 2025.

Externally the Tasmanian secondary school sector, and in particular the senior secondary sector has experienced a series of major changes over recent years – a pattern which shows no signs of abating. The senior secondary school sector in Tasmania is characterised by a high attrition rate after Year 10 and by low transition rates to higher education. A new Australian curriculum for K-10 is likely to be implemented by 2013, with a timeline for implementation of an Australian Baccalaureate yet to be determined. It is therefore likely that there will be at least five years for the UCPP to continue to work with the Tasmanian Certificate of Education.

The State of Tasmania has strategic needs to increase its number of tertiary-educated people with a range of skills to enhance employability and productivity. While the biggest employers are health and education, the State also has strategic needs in business, innovation and science and engineering.

Participation in the UCPP has grown strongly from 288 students in 2008 to 588 students in 2009 with further growth in 2010, although the numbers for the full year are not yet available (UCP Evaluation Report, p36). The pattern of enrolment is not comprehensive, but is focussed mainly in the pilot areas of Languages and Visual and Performing Arts (VPA).
**Recommendations**

1. That UTAS encourage the development of Diploma programs in selected disciplines to be run concurrently with other degree programs to enhance Distinctiveness and Growth.

2. That UTAS clarify both the branding of the UCCP as an integrated educational pathway, and the branding of UTAS College more generally, so as to coordinate all its preparatory programs under the UTAS College brand.

3. That UTAS develop a clear participation and social inclusion strategy with defined goals and mechanisms, utilising an innovative and sensitive combination of regional, online and supported delivery to enhance University participation by regional and low SES groups.

4. That policy decisions be taken for the next academic year in a number of areas:
   (i) limiting the number of UCPP units that a Year 11/12 student can take to two per year
   (ii) formalising the current practice of allowing withdrawal without academic penalty for UCCP units for students in Years 11/12
   (iii) standardising an evaluation instrument which has some consistency with SETL.

5. That the UCCP increase the range of disciplines on offer to include business and science in an appropriate number of units to ensure effective delivery and academic credibility.

6. That UTAS grasp the opportunity for innovative work linking learning outcomes and standards in Year 12 and First Year University.

7. That UTAS build its UTAS College initiatives (as part of its broader social inclusion and regional and community engagement objectives) into its compacts with the Federal Government and allocates some of the increasing HEPPP funding as recurrent funding for the running of UTAS College.

8. That UTAS allocate responsibility for the approval of the UCPP Program to the University Preparations and Pathways (Sub-)Committee with appropriate modifications to its TOR, membership and reporting lines.

9. That UTAS examine a number of its major academic policies, notably Academic Assessment and Program Approval to ensure that they cater for UCCP units and also consider the need for policy development for Unit Approvals and Under-18 Students.
TOR 1. To provide an assessment as to how well the UCPP met and meets current and future strategic objectives of UTAS

The current and future strategic objectives may be considered as the four elements of EDGE, i.e. Excellence, Distinctiveness, Growth and Engagement. The recent focus on social inclusion relates both to Growth and Engagement.

**Excellence:** The UCPP is clearly aimed at enhancing excellence as it is targeted at students who are capable and motivated. The UCPP runs alongside but is separate from the ‘High Achiever Program’ where students of high academic ability sit in on UTAS units which are unadapted for pre-tertiary students. Fewer than 100 students have been part of this program, half of them from four secondary Colleges. The increasing enrolment of Year 11/12 students into the UCPP has broadened the base of participation from High Achievers to a much wider cross-section of capable students.

**Distinctiveness:** Although most Australian universities allow school students to enrol in University studies, the UCPP is quite distinctive in its conception and scope, its widespread use of the co-delivery model for Year 11/12 students, and its use of the Associate Degree as an Award vehicle to maintain eligibility for CGS funding. It is particularly useful in the island context of Tasmania which has a relatively closed catchment. It is an important step in working towards the strategy of developing an Integrated Year 11 – PhD educational framework.

**Growth:** The UCPP has helped increase domestic load. However, arguably the increased load is to some extent a shifting forward of load but without the payment of HECS. The increase in load has been particularly successful in the areas of Languages and Visual and Performing Arts. It is quite possible this load could be sustained if students maintain these interests while pursuing degree studies in more clearly vocational programs. The suggestion of the development of a Diploma course in Languages and VPA to be studied alongside enrolment in other degree programs could be an innovative and effective way of supporting load whilst supporting Tasmania’s cultural vibrancy. This model has proven effective in other universities such as UTS where the concurrent study of Languages enhances internationalisation of a number of other programs.

**Engagement:** The UCPP has clearly helped strengthen engagement with the Senior Secondary sector which values the concept and the increased interaction with the University. Similarly very close relationships at a number of levels have been developed with the TQA. Many of the students interviewed had increased awareness of University options, although the co-delivery model did not always lead to an identification of the University’s involvement. In some cases, when the delivery model fell down or was not perceived as engaging, (as was reported to be the case with some language teaching and some students at the HITLab), then students were in fact put off engaging with the University. Although this only occurred in a relatively small number of subjects, the University needs to be mindful that unsatisfactory engagement is worse than no engagement, and that negative experiences can easily lose hard-won goodwill.

**Social Inclusion:** The UCPP was never intended as a mechanism for social inclusion, but many of those interviewed believed it has raised awareness and aspiration within the senior secondary cohort. Evidence from the TQA showed that the profile of the UCPP students who gained an ATAR was in fact drawn from a segment of the secondary school community which had a higher socio-
economic status, and was located closer to the campuses in Hobart and Launceston but was similar in its gender to the overall profile of Tasmanian students gaining an ATAR. However, a small pilot program in Accountancy based at the Cradle Coast Campus had clearly attracted students who would not otherwise have considered University, all of whom had been successful and had gone on to degree programs.

The UCPP is not currently designed to widen social inclusion and in particular to increase the flow of enrolments of students to University from low socio-economic backgrounds and from remoter parts of the State. Its impact in this area is more of an incidental ripple effect than a conscious policy.

The University will need to examine, support and further develop its strategies for widening participation in order to achieve the Vice Chancellor’s vision outlined in February 2010. Key amongst these are firstly, strategies to enhance awareness and achievement at pre-tertiary levels, but which do not necessitate enrolment in UTAS units. A number of other universities, such as Griffith, Newcastle and UniSA are also developing outreach programs below Year 10 to enhance awareness and aspiration. Secondly, UTAS will need to consider and devise mechanisms to deliver such enhancement to the remoter parts of the State, either supporting the senior secondary curriculum or the current UCPP model of UTAS units, possibly leading to the delivery of an entire Associate Degree or Foundation Year outside the main campuses. UTAS already has a number of preparatory programs including the University Preparation Program (also offered by UTAS College), and a variety of units badged as ‘Foundation’ or ‘Bridging’, offered by the relevant schools. At present, these do not appear to form a coherent offering and the terminology and administration is confusing for potential students.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1. That UTAS encourage the development of Diploma programs in selected disciplines to be run concurrently with other degree programs to enhance Distinctiveness and Growth.

Recommendation 2. That UTAS clarify both the branding of the UCCP as an integrated educational pathway, and the branding of UTAS College more generally, so as to coordinate all its preparatory programs under the UTAS College brand.

Recommendation 3. That UTAS develop a clear participation and social inclusion strategy with defined goals and mechanisms, utilising an innovative and sensitive combination of regional, online and supported delivery to enhance University participation by regional and low SES groups.
TOR 2. To determine the success of UCPP through the identification and utilization of relevant external benchmarking measures

The success of the UCPP can be assessed using some standard measures used in external benchmarking, including participation, retention, success and satisfaction.

**Participation:** There has been considerable growth in participation 2008-2010 in the number of students, unit enrolments, and participating secondary Colleges. There has been a reduction in the number of units offered in 2010, partly because of changes to Language units, but also because of the non-offering of units with very small enrolments. The growth in participation is in itself evidence of success, and in 2010 the increased participation in fewer units is evidence of more efficient delivery.

**Retention:** The apparent low retention rate in the first year of offering was a cause of considerable concern and remedial action. However, in 2009 a number of operational and QA problems were ironed out, and there were fewer withdrawals. Withdrawal rates are still higher than desirable but nonetheless the UCPP offers an opportunity to sample a University offering in a non-threatening environment. School teachers and student participants felt that it was important for participants to have the capacity to withdraw without academic penalty in this sampling environment. Despite the potential inequities with other students, this seems a sensible non-punitive measure appropriate for secondary students. The high withdrawal rate is an indicator of possible problems with the delivery and also with the total load taken by students, as a number found this stressful. For this reason, most teachers and University staff felt it would be wise to limit the number of units taken to two units per student per year.

**Success:** Despite the high level of withdrawals, the UCCP has afforded many students their first taste of tertiary success, with the bonus of credit into their degree. The median grade awarded is a credit. The distribution of grades provided by TQA is slightly lower than for all UTAS students. Analysis from the TQA of those students gaining an ATAR from the UCPP and the High Achiever programs show clear, systematic and statistically significant differences in results between various discipline areas. Music has the highest proportion of Pass and Credit grades while Mathematics and Business have the highest proportion of High Distinction grades. To some extent these differences reflect cohort size, the distinctive High Achiever cohort in Mathematics (not available as a UCPP unit) and that musical ability is not necessarily correlated with overall academic ability. The issue of academic achievement is fundamental to the academic credibility of the program and is considered further under TOR 4.
Satisfaction: The UCPP units are not evaluated by students using the standard SETL format because of the co-delivery method; discussion about an appropriate method of student evaluation is ongoing and requires finalisation; a student survey for languages is reported in the Evaluation Report and provides a useful pilot. The outcomes of the online survey were varied with College Principals and teachers expressing most dissatisfaction with assessment, evaluation, information processes and opportunities for collaboration with UTAS staff, while UTAS staff were dissatisfied with enrolment, resourcing, support for staff and students and opportunities for collaboration with secondary teachers. This stakeholder and external feedback is considered further under TOR 3.

Recommendations

Recommendation 4. That policy decisions be taken for the next academic year in a number of areas:

- limiting the number of UCPP units that a Year 11/12 student can take to two per year
- formalising the current practice of allowing withdrawal without academic penalty for UCCP units for students in Years 11/12
- standardising an evaluation instrument which has some consistency with SETL.

Note: TOR 3 is considered with TOR 8.
TOR 4  To provide an assessment of the academic credibility of the UCPP in the context of wider UTAS QA processes

Academic Credibility

At a superficial level, the program has proven its academic credibility with an increasing retention rate, a high success rate (albeit at lower grades according to TQA data) and a high flow-on rate into Bachelor level study. The lower level of academic achievement in Music is not a particular area of concern in that the expansion of student numbers in Visual and Performing Arts (VPA) attracts a cohort which does not necessarily have high all-round academic ability, but which contributes to load and to the cultural vibrancy of the university and the State. In other discipline areas the level of academic achievement is satisfactory. The main role of the UCPP is in building an innovative integrated educational pathway from Year 11 through to degree level studies.

At a deeper level, the UCPP lacks clear goals, coherence and identity. As already noted its offering through UTAS College is not well branded (Recommendation 2). Furthermore, its academic credibility is hindered by the limited nature of the disciplines on offer. This is understandable as a pilot program but is not desirable in the long term. The UCPP provides an opportunity on which to build an excellent and distinctive pathway connecting upper secondary to tertiary education not only by building concurrent or pathway awards at Diploma and Associate Degree levels but by deep consideration of the relationship between learning outcomes at upper secondary and first year tertiary levels.

High Achiever Program: The UCPP although initially aimed at ‘developing a high performance culture’ and attracting the ‘top echelon of students’ has increased participation so much that not all the 600+ participants can be considered or expected to be ‘top echelon’ students. However, they have been basically capable and motivated but their level of academic achievement is not on a par with the very small numbers enrolled in the High Achiever Program (93 students across 51 units since 2003). The UCPP needs better branding and differentiation as an integrated educational pathway so it is not confused with the HAP.

Disciplinary Scope: The Pilot Program is essentially supply-led with most offerings from the Faculty of Arts and a skewed distribution of enrolments, with the majority in VPA and Languages. The secondary sector Principals and teachers expressed concern at the limited range of disciplines on offer and the lack of units in disciplines seen to be of strategic importance to the State’s skills and employability agenda, particularly relating to innovation and entrepreneurship, business, primary industry and science. The academic credibility of the program as an effective transition to University as part of an integrated Year 11 to PhD educational framework is severely limited by its disciplinary constraints. If the University wishes to develop this framework then it would need to extend beyond
the Arts disciplines to encompass other fundamental subject areas. A suite of subject offerings would not need to be complete but sufficiently extensive to allow credit into a range of programs. Some areas of the University have been reluctant to take part in the UCPP but this is changing, e.g. in Business. However, the science areas have shown a cultural reluctance to participate, preferring to offer Bridging or Foundation units and the High Achiever Program, although the Faculty of SET did offer HITLab Unit, Introduction to Mixed Reality, in 2010. This is despite a conviction from TQA and the teachers that there could be as much as a 70% overlap in the curriculum in mainstream subjects such as Chemistry as with other subject areas. In some of the language areas the extent of overlap not just in curriculum but in learning outcomes has been tested by detailed analysis of examination performance. Such detailed scrutiny could provide an informed basis on which to extend the UCPP into other discipline areas.

**Standards and Learning Outcomes**

The development of this distinctive program has led to significant consideration of standards and learning outcomes and the comparison between Year 12 and First Year University units. This analysis has been undertaken in various discipline areas and has consisted not only of curriculum mapping but of student learning outcomes through thorough comparison of student examination papers. In a number of cases this has resulted in an understanding of the extent of overlap and of difference in outcomes, with a norm of 70% of overlap up to an extreme of 80% in some language areas. Academic staff from a number of discipline areas expressed a conception of first year study as a consolidation and extension of Year 12 outcomes, which is to be expected given that first-year units generally have to cater for students both with and without the Year 12 experience of that discipline area. However, while some disciplines were prepared to develop Year 12 units into UCPP units, others, particularly in the sciences, were more concerned about the institutional context in which the subject was delivered, and the overall student experience, including that of self-directed learning. There is a tension here between making the secondary-tertiary transition as smooth and seamless as possible (the approach adopted by the Faculty of Arts), and the desire to position the University experience as distinctive (the approach adopted by the Faculty of Science Engineering and Technology). Use of an evidence base in a small number of appropriate subjects may assist in bridging this divide.

Useful and ground-breaking work could be undertaken in mapping and developing the relationship between senior secondary outcomes and first-year university outcomes which would be particularly helpful in curriculum areas where the ALTC is developing threshold outcome standards. The University is encouraged to consider building on the UCPP experience and its own experience with three ALTC Discipline scholars to define appropriate learning outcome standards at these levels. This could usefully be a pilot project funded by an internal teaching development grant and developed for further external funding, e.g. from the ALTC. The focus on learning outcomes fits well with the standards approach being developed for the sector, and these would need to be better reflected in unit outlines.
**Associate Degrees:** The UCPP students are enrolled in an Associate Degree, as they are required to be enrolled in a University award for the University to be eligible to receive CGS funding. While most University staff understood the need for this, there is an administrative concern that such enrolment will result in unintended consequences such as apparently high rates of attrition, due to withdrawals and transfer of enrolment to full Degree programs. The University staff aired some disquiet about Associate Degrees in general, but these concerns were unable to be verified and are beyond the TOR of the current report.

**Concurrent Diplomas:** The languages and VPA form relatively discrete areas of study which are clearly suited to students with particular interests and aptitudes. Early discussions are occurring about the possibility about developing a Diploma which such students could study concurrently with another professional degree. This could be beneficial in increasing load in those disciplines and appears to be an option worth further investigation.

**Recommendations**

**Recommendation 5:** That the UCCP increase the range of disciplines on offer to include business and science in a limited number of units to ensure effective delivery and academic credibility.

**Recommendation 6:** That UTAS grasp the opportunity for innovative work linking learning outcomes and standards in Year 12 and First Year University.

Recommendation 1 is also relevant to this section: That UTAS encourage the development of Diploma programs in selected disciplines to be run alongside other degree programs to enhance Distinctiveness and Growth.
TOR 5 To comment on the risks of continuing or not with the UCPP or similar program

All community engagement projects entail risks, particularly over the quality and nature of the engagement and of raising community expectations of the University’s capacity to deliver the desired interaction and outcomes. The survey of stakeholders (UCP Evaluation Report, p65) showed a very high level of support for the program continuing, with most wishing to see the program continue and expand and all others, bar one, wishing to see the program continue either in its current form or with modifications.

The secondary school sector is a key community partner for any University as the provider of the bulk of domestic undergraduate students and with a shared commitment to education as a fundamental contributor to social inclusion and economic participation. The University is committed to Engagement as one of its EDGE Strategic Priorities. UTAS is also the only University provider within the close-knit community of Tasmania (although a significant number of students – 1465 in 2008 - choose to enrol online with other Universities). Hence serious engagement with the secondary school sector is, and will remain, a clear priority for the University for the foreseeable future.

Any decision to withdraw from the UCCP would have to contend with the problem of raised expectations. This is already evident in the disappointment shown in response to decisions made not to offer the full range of languages and some other low-enrolment units. Decisions such as these, including the withdrawal of units and the elements of the co-delivery model, need to be made within the framework of a partnership rather than unilateral decisions by the University. Obviously if withdrawal from the UCPP became necessary, e.g. as the result of changing Federal Government policy, such as withdrawal of CGS funding from Associate Degrees or the introduction of the Australian Baccalaureate, then this needs to be done with care, and adequate warning and consultation.

If the University continues with the UCPP, there are a number of risks which will need to be managed. These include the perceived risk of ‘dumbing down’ University programs, the perceived risks of an unequal partnership and the mismatch between expectations placed on UTAS College and its resourcing.

Some University staff considered there was a risk of perceived ‘dumbing down’ of the University’s programs, if they could be successfully achieved by secondary students. This risk can be mitigated by careful branding, and by the work outlined under TOR 4 on standards and learning outcomes.

Some secondary sector Principals felt there was a risk of the University acting unilaterally rather than in a partnership model. They welcomed their engagement as partners in the learning journey of their students and welcomed a forum where they could share ideas and experiences. They also felt that in some cases the University has been patronising about the standard of secondary school teaching but has not necessarily demonstrated uniformly high standards itself.
There is a risk in the mismatch between the expectations placed on UTAS College and the funding allocated to it, examined below in relation to TOR 6.
TOR 6  To identify the opportunity cost of resources flowing to the UCPP in regard to optimal achievement of related UTAS strategic objectives

The business model under which the UCPP operates is not well known and understood by many people within UTAS. The funding for UCPP essentially involves all teaching being funded at normal CGS rates and UTAS forgoing the HECS contributions by providing HECS scholarships. This level of funding is sufficient to cover full costs of delivery and overheads – in fact normal UTAS overheads are reduced because of the co-delivery model. UTAS schools are funded for UCPP teaching load at the same level as for all other teaching. UTAS made an initial strategic investment of $500,000 to support the implementation of UCPP and other costs have been met through growth in funded load. The total enrolment in UCPP in 2009 was 120 EFTSL generating $1.2m in income to UTAS.

The funding received flows to the University’s Faculties and Schools on the basis of their student load, as with any other UTAS student. The Schools therefore use this funding to engage staff, many of whom are casual, often teachers, postgraduates or practicing professionals. In VPA the funding has been used to fund a coordinator position which all stakeholders seemed very happy with and which teachers commented was ‘best practice’. However, the UTAS Schools themselves seemed unsure of the funding arrangements.

The reviewer is not in a position to comment on how else this funding could have been used and the potential benefits of alternative use, e.g. investment in research. It seems, however, that the investment has produced immediate results in terms of enrolment load at CGS rates and subsequent flow-on, with improving QA processes and retention rates over time. Some direction of investment towards students and areas who either would not have thought about university as a viable destination for themselves or who need to raise their level of attainment to achieve University entry is likely to be a longer-term investment.

The funding to UTAS College allows coordination of the UCCP with Principals and internally and is building a collaborative partnership with the secondary sector. However, this work is essentially being undertaken by one senior staff member with support. The investment in UTAS College does not appear commensurate with the expectations that it will also coordinate and run University Preparation Programs, strengthen pathways from the VET sector and build broad community engagement. At the conclusion of the pilot, the University will need to consider funding a slightly larger coordination unit to develop these other important roles, while working always through the mainstream administrative systems.

Some secondary teachers questioned whether the University was giving real value for the funding received, given the limited University input to the delivery and assessment of some units. As the number of participants increases, there may be scope for the University to take some ‘off the top’ of the CGS funding received in order to fund UTAS College. However, it may be more strategic to source this funding from the increased HEPPP funding which is beginning to flow and which is designed to encourage partnerships and participation. Greater clarity and transparency of the
budget model and the strategic plan for UTAS College will be essential as it moves to recurrent funding.

A deep engagement with remoter secondary schools, and with school students up to Year 10, as noted above, is likely to be a longer-term investment to bring about greater social inclusion. It would be expected that this is not the sole responsibility of the University but requires partnership with and co-investment from the senior secondary sector and the Tasmanian Department of Education. However, given the University’s monopoly provider status, its rural and remote hinterland and its commitment to Engagement, it would be sensible to build this imperative into the University’s compact with the Federal Government. Given the increasing funding for equity students over the next few years, it would also be highly appropriate to direct some of the HEPPP funding into outreach and partnership activities with the secondary school sector, in accordance with the guidelines. This would provide a recurrent source of funding for the operation of UTAS College in its preparation, social inclusion and pathway activities.

Recommendations

Recommendation 7: That UTAS build its UTAS College initiatives (as part of its broader social inclusion and regional and community engagement objectives) into its compacts with the Federal Government and allocates some of the increasing HEPPP funding as recurrent funding for the running of UTAS College.
TOR 7 To provide advice on the development and review of policy and practice relevant to the strategic direction of UTAS and the related aims of the UCPP

The UCP has grown ‘organically’ and significant work on Quality Assurance was undertaken and accepted by Academic Senate in May 2009. The reviewer heard that Academic Senate has been actively engaged in debate on aspects of the UCPP, yet it appears that a number of mechanisms and processes are as yet uncodified. In some cases, UTAS’ existing policy environment is not flexible and contemporary enough to accommodate the demands of an innovative cross-disciplinary pathway program conducted in partnership with external bodies.

While Recommendation 4 contains some recommendations about policy in relation to the UCPP units themselves, i.e.: the number of units per student per year, the use of the WW grade and standardised evaluation instruments, this section is more concerned with the overarching academic policy framework which is for all students and includes unit approval, assessment and under-age students.

Unit and Program Approval

The reviewer heard that the formal processes for offering existing units in the UCPP were clarified after 2008, and are approved by Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees. The designation of a unit for UCPP is deemed a minor change which may involve some or all of a change of location, mode of delivery and assessment.

Forms and guidelines for unit approval are available in the Teaching and Learning Quality Manual but do not appear to be covered by a policy framework which S&AA advises is currently under development. The TORs of Faculty TLCs vary, and not all specify reporting of decisions to ULTC. The Unit Approval form could be amended slightly so that if a Unit is designated as a UCPP unit, then some provisions, such as those included in Recommendation 4, would automatically apply.

At present there is no overarching approval process for the program. It would seem appropriate that a sub-committee of Academic Senate should have overview of such a program as an educational pathway. The University Preparations and Pathways Sub-Committee is a sub-committee of the University Teaching and Learning Committee which is itself a sub-committee of Academic Senate. Although Learning and Teaching is important in the program, there are also broader strategic considerations relating to community engagement and social inclusion. At the University of Newcastle, the Board of Enabling Programs reports directly to Academic Senate. It is suggested that with minor modifications to the TOR, membership and reporting lines, that the University Preparations and Pathways (Sub-)Committee could take responsibility for approving the program for each year.
Withdrawal without Academic Penalty

The reviewer was given diametrically opposed information about whether current UCPP students were allowed to withdraw without academic penalty, and that the provenance of this initial 2008 decision was unclear. The Evaluation Report indicated there is confusion on this matter (p58). On balance, I believe it is best to retain this exemption for UCPP students and feel this matter should be clarified once and for all.

Assessment and Examination

The methods of assessment vary as would be expected, including the use of the TCE grade as established by TQA as the basis for the University assessment. However, it is not clear that the methods of assessment are adequately covered under the policy on Academic Assessment which took effect in December 2007. If assessment by partner organisations comes under ‘any other method of assessment’ then that requires approval by the relevant TLC and Academic Senate (Rule 2, 4.2). Similarly unit examinations held routinely at the time of deferred examinations are not adequately covered in the policy.

Furthermore the policy does not allude to penalties for plagiarism, criterion-referenced assessment, nor the relationship of assessment to learning outcomes or graduate attributes, nor specify numbers and timing of assessment tasks and the timeliness required for the return of assessed items. It is possible such matters are dealt with in other policies but if so, they should be at least cross-referenced.

Students aged under 18

The MOUs with the Senior Secondary Colleges maintain the College as the primary source of enrolment and care. However the University has specific responsibilities for students under the age of majority. Although no specific problems were identified in relation to the UCCP students, the reviewer believes the University is at risk in not having a specific policy on under-age students given the issues of child protection and mandatory reporting. The reviewer was provided with a discussion paper on ‘Admitting Gifted Students’ prepared by S&AA in March 2010, which noted at that time that UTAS had 220 students aged under-18 of whom 34 were UTAS College students.

UCPP Administration

The UCPP is operated from UTAS College which has an Academic Director and two other staff (excluding University Preparation Program (UPP) Teaching staff) and has responsibility for UPP and wider VET collaboration through the TASACT Tasmanian Articulation and Credit Transfer Committee. The program requires development, codification and strategic coordination and the Principals welcome the certainty of a primary point of contact. At present, the responsibility for academic oversight of individual units lies with UTAS Schools and the academic administration (as in enrolment admission and processes of results) with S&AA and other related functions with the relevant UTAS Divisions (e.g. marketing who distribute brochures for UTAS College). This mainstreaming, while not yet seamless, is the most efficient and cost-effective model for what are UTAS students.
Recommendations

Recommendation 8: That UTAS allocate responsibility for the approval of the UCPP Program to the University Preparations and Pathways (Sub-)Committee with appropriate modifications to its TOR, membership and reporting lines.

Recommendation 9: That UTAS examine a number of its major academic policies, notably Academic Assessment and Program Approval to ensure that they cater for UCPP units and also consider the need for policy development for Unit Approvals and Under-18 Students.
TOR 3. To provide an assessment of the outcomes and impacts of the program over its first 2 ½ years utilizing stakeholder and external feedback

TOR 8 To provide recommendations as to the future of the UCPP including expanding and/ or improving the system

The primary outcome of the UCPP over its first two and a half years has been the early exposure of many senior secondary students to tertiary education, which facilitated their transition to University by demystifying the process and the institution. Most students valued their learning experience, particularly if it was on-campus, which deepened their connection to UTAS. They also valued obtaining credit in a unit and the HECS scholarship. The major outcome of the program has been the development of an innovative educational pathway bridging the gap between secondary and tertiary sectors. Only about a third of UCPP students enrol in the same discipline area in their subsequent UTAS studies. This partly reflects the predominance of Languages and VPA in the UCCP, but of itself this is not a problem if those units provide a bridge to tertiary study as electives.

The impact of the program has been far-reaching into the secondary sector with improved engagement and relationships. However the secondary sector was concerned about stress on students and adequate resourcing; some Principals emphasised the need for the secondary schools to co-invest by allocating workload and sharing timetables. They also emphasised they felt this was a ‘good quality product’ which has potential for both expansion and improvement and for greater engagement between the University and the senior secondary sector.

UTAS staff within particular Schools have embraced the program vigorously and see it as a way of increasing and maintaining enrolments, and as part of their community engagement strategy and have set structures in place for its organisation such as a coordinator and a committee. UTAS staff who have been involved in the program have embraced it positively and feel that it has been rewarding and that there are adequate rewards in the system for their participation. There have been concerns about the adequacy and transparency of resourcing for the program, and about organisational and communication issues; staff in some areas were philosophically opposed to the program in general.

Operational improvements have been identified which particularly include early and accurate communication of the program to (and preferably designed in collaboration with) the secondary sector. The secondary Principals wanted a clear brochure in hard copy which can be given to
intending students and their parents, and which is ready mid-year through the year for the following year. Administrative improvements include clarity of unit guidelines and assessment procedures and a more streamlined process for enrolments and examinations. It is clear that there are UTAS policy issues in relation to unit approval processes but also broader issues of program approval and of University academic policy.

Summary of Recommendations

The UCPP cannot be all things to all people. It is an innovative educational pathway allowing access to tertiary study by secondary students. It does not of itself contribute greatly to social inclusion except via awareness-raising and it is only a small element in community and regional engagement. It is also one of a number of preparatory programs which are not well articulated. The UCPP on the one hand needs to sit comfortably in the suite of UTAS preparatory offerings and on the other within the UTAS participation and social inclusion agenda (Recommendations 2 and 3).

The UCPP has a broad base of support and has made a positive impact on hundreds of students. This review supports maintaining the UCPP but teaching a wider range of disciplines, with fewer units taught cost-effectively (Recommendation 5). The program requires some operational improvements and enhancements to the policy settings (Recommendations 4, 8 and 9). Its coordination and engagement role through UTAS College should be funded recurrently from HEPPP sources (Recommendation 7). Future arrangements could include the whole first year available online, the development of concurrent Diplomas (Recommendation 1) and sector-leading developments in learning outcomes and standards at the secondary-tertiary interface (Recommendation 6).
Appendix 1. DRAFT TERMS OF REFERENCE

Strategic Review of the University College Pilot Program (UCPP)

Introduction
The UCPP is a UTAS program run in collaboration with the Tasmanian Academy and Senior Secondary Schools/Colleges, including independent and non-government schools, which allows capable and motivated students to undertake university study either in conjunction with or alongside their studies towards the Tasmanian Certificate of Education (TCE) or the International Baccalaureate (IB). The program has operated on a pilot basis for three years which ends in December 2010.

The UCPP was implemented as part of the EDGE2 (Excellence, Distinctiveness, Growth and Engagement) to help achieve a number of strategic priorities for UTAS; first, and most important, to develop the UTAS College model in partnership with the State Government to provide an integrated year 11 to PhD educational framework for Tasmania; second, to embed a high performance culture by strengthening high achiever and pathways programs to attract the top echelon of students and, third, to strengthen relationships with UTAS communities, particularly the Department of Education and Secondary Schools and Colleges.

The major aims and objectives of the UCPP include but are not limited to:

- encouraging students to obtain qualification in senior secondary study and higher education, particularly in priority areas such as the core sciences, mathematics, visual and performing arts and languages;
- developing and improving links/pathways to university study that recognise and respond to the individual capacity of students to undertake higher education;
- supporting the professional development and recognition of high quality teachers;
- developing strong links between college teachers and UTAS academic staff; and,
- achieving better alignment between the Year 11/12 curriculum and first year units at UTAS.

The UCPP (or similar) is potentially an important part of UTAS’ efforts to achieve the Commonwealth’s ambitious participation targets and to implement its social inclusion agenda. In this context, there is a need to undertake a strategic and academic review of the program to determine whether or not it should be continued beyond the pilot phase and, if so, in what form.

The proposed strategic review and summative evaluation will take place in June and July reporting to Senior Management Team, Academic Senate and the Quality Committee with a view to providing recommendations on the suitability of the UCPP or equivalent.
Proposed Terms of Reference

Stage 1 (by week 2 of July 2010)

The Academic Director will provide a self review of the UCPP to the SC, including the results of a systematic evaluation which has been conducted over the establishment phase. Regular reports on the UCPP, which have been provided for the University Teaching and Learning Committee (UTLC), will be attached

Projections for the future of the College, with risks and potential strategic benefits to UTAS, will be included as a conclusion to the self review

Stage 2 (by end of July 2010)

An external reviewer will be engaged to provide an independent view on the evaluations to date. The review may involve but not be limited to a review of the quantitative and qualitative evaluation outcomes using data relating to the program from 2008 to the present (including stakeholders’ perceptions of the program, identified pathways, proportion of students articulating to UTAS, the success of students articulating to degree programs and any correlations between performance in the college program and performance in subsequent degree studies) and interviews with various internal and external stakeholders.

Steering Committee Membership

Professor Gary O’Donovan, Acting PVC, S&E (Chair)

Professor John Williamson, Chair of Academic Senate

Mr Paul Barnett, Executive Director, Planning & Development

Dr Peter Colbourne, Manager, Quality Processes and Improvement

Associate Professor Anne Langworthy, Academic Director UTAS College
### List of Acronyms used in this report

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALTC</td>
<td>Australian Learning and Teaching Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATAR</td>
<td>Australian Tertiary Attainment Rank</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGS</td>
<td>Commonwealth Government Supported</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDGE</td>
<td>Excellence, Distinctiveness, Growth and Engagement</td>
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<tr>
<td>EFTSL</td>
<td>Equivalent Full Time Student Load</td>
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<tr>
<td>HAP</td>
<td>High Achiever Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>HECS</td>
<td>Higher Education Contribution Scheme</td>
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<tr>
<td>HEPPPP</td>
<td>Higher Education Partnership and Participation Program</td>
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<td>Pro Vice Chancellor: Students and Education</td>
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<td>SES</td>
<td>Socio-Economic Status</td>
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<td>SETL</td>
<td>Student Evaluation of Teaching and Learning</td>
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<td>Tasmanian Certificate of Education</td>
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<td>University of Tasmania</td>
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<td>WW</td>
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