
Future Directions of the Faculty

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This special issue of the Journal to mark the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the Faculty of Law at the Queensland University of Technology includes the reflections of the foundation Dean Mr Tom Cain and those of his successor Professor David Gardiner, now Pro-Vice Chancellor (Planning and Resources) at QUT. As the new and only the third Dean of the Faculty appointed in the twentieth year since the establishment of the Faculty it would seem appropriate for me to offer my own reflections on the likely future directions of the Faculty over the next five years.

The likely directions of the Faculty for the next five years will be greatly assisted by a major five year developmental review which will be conducted in 1998 as part of the quality assurance process in place at QUT. The implementation of many of the recommendations of an earlier review conducted in 1992 also contributed to the development of the Faculty. Before speculating about the future direction of likely developments in the Faculty, it would seem appropriate to reflect briefly on the considerable achievements of the Faculty over the last five years in meeting student needs and expectations, in the development of a research profile and in the contributions made to the profession as well as in community service activities.

The Faculty can point to considerable achievements in meeting student needs and expectations. A major achievement of the last five years has been the introduction of a new undergraduate curriculum following a major review of the undergraduate curriculum which took some two years to complete. As result of the review, new and broader objectives were established for the curriculum and on the basis of those objectives a new undergraduate course was introduced, characterized by a core of compulsory units encompassing theoretical and contextual perspectives as well as the main areas of the law and the areas of knowledge required to satisfy the academic

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requirements for admission as a legal practitioner. Students were also provided with greater choice of elective subjects including the opportunity to study in other faculties and schools. In conjunction with these developments the range of double degrees has expanded. The external course has undergone a major review and significant improvements have been made to that course on the basis of the recommendations which arose out of the review. Much has been done to incorporate skills training into the undergraduate program and a range of innovative teaching practices have been introduced and much greater reliance is now placed on the use of information technology as a result of projects funded from teaching and learning grants. Overall the Faculty has been able to maintain high demand for undergraduate programs in terms of first preferences as well as maintaining high cut off places for undergraduate places in law. In addition the Faculty has developed a successful Masters by Coursework program in terms of student demand, range of units, external involvement and cooperation with other Faculties. The program is undergoing a major program of improvement with the introduction of new units, specialist streams as well as new modes of flexible delivery including intensive and external modes of delivery. Other achievements include the introduction of the full range of postgraduate programs including the PhD and the professional doctorate as well as graduate certificates offering specializations in particular areas of the law. Throughout the Faculty has been able to maintain high employment rates for its graduates.

Over the last five years the Faculty has made the transition from being primarily a teaching Faculty to being a Faculty with a very well developed research profile. The Centre for Commercial and Property Law has been at the forefront of these developments and has done so by coordinating research activity, providing research assistance, attracting outside funds and contributing to a very substantial increase in research quantum, particularly in the form of books and refereed articles in law journals. Additional research concentrations have been established in the areas of Environmental Law, Civil Litigation and Public Law. The development of the research base has been assisted by the establishment of three sponsored professorships partly funded by three leading Brisbane law firms in the areas of Property Law, Commercial Law and Corporate Law. The Faculty has been able to host a number of successful international conferences and has attracted a number of distinguished academics as adjunct professors. The number of staff publishing significant works has steadily increased as has the completion rate of higher degrees by staff. The number of women engaged in research has increased and many staff have been trained in the supervision of higher degrees and in how to go about applying for research grants.

The Faculty was established under the auspices of the legal profession and as a result established itself as a Faculty with strong professional links and as a Faculty which provided a very sound practical legal education. In recent years the Faculty has expanded its horizons and has developed into a very mature Faculty which offers the full range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Law as well in Justice Studies for those seeking careers in the police force, the security industry and in other law-related fields such as justice administration. In addition the Faculty also has courses which enable students to satisfy the practical legal training requirements

for admission as a barrister or a solicitor. The Faculty has continued to develop professional links in a variety of ways including the provision of professional advice through consultancies, through participation in professional and continuing legal education programs, through the employment of expert and specialized practitioners in undergraduate and postgraduate teaching programs and through involvement in external boards and committees such as the Queensland Law Reform Commission as well as a range of professional bodies. The community service activities of staff members are extensive and include the provision of training for High School Legal Studies teachers, the provision of expert advice on human rights issues and involvement in the activities of a range of community groups.

Over the next five years the Faculty will have to respond to a climate of restricted resources due to cuts in operating grants to universities and consequent reductions in operating grant flowing through to the Faculty. This climate of restricted resources will be further exacerbated by the refusal of the Commonwealth to provide any across-the-board supplementation for salary increases. This climate of restricted resources has the potential to give rise to a number of difficulties which will require careful management if the Faculty is to build further on its already considerable achievements in relation to teaching, research and community service. Staff/student ratios could be adversely affected as could the capacity of the Faculty to maintain an innovative and forward-looking approach in relation to teaching and learning. Additional demands imposed on staff time could reduce research output and involvement in professional and community service activities and reductions in support staff could also reduce the support services available to students and staff. Problems could occur if the Faculty is unable to regenerate itself through the appointment of new staff. There may be limitations imposed on the capacity to develop library resources to meet the research interests of academic staff and postgraduate students. The Faculty will also have to confront additional demands from students who undertake the course as full fee paying students, whether as domestic or international students. These are but a few of the potential problems which the Faculty may need to confront as a result of reductions in government funding.

As the new Dean of the Faculty I do not believe that the Faculty should respond to the difficulties posed by a climate of restricted financial resources in a negative and pessimistic way. Acquiescence as a response to such difficulties would only serve to downgrade the achievements of the Faculty. Instead the Faculty should continue to endeavour to build on its already very considerable achievements and in doing so it will endeavour to explore a range of positive responses to meet the challenges posed by a climate of restricted resources. Such responses may take the form of the development of alternative funding sources directed at expanding the non-grant base to replace the decline in operating grant. A number of potential strategies may need to be adopted by the Faculty including a significantly higher total student cohort as fee paying domestic and international students. It will also be necessary to develop strategies for maximizing those opportunities which exist for obtaining internal and external grants to support teaching and learning projects and the research activities of the Faculty. The Faculty will need to continue to

maximize potential opportunities with outside organizations through further sponsorships for academic positions. Efforts will also need to be made to establish collaborative teaching and research ventures, to develop opportunities for sponsored student projects as well as credit arrangements for work-related activity. In addition the Faculty will need to explore opportunities for adjunct positions, the supervision of research projects, the accreditation of professional programs and the development of a strong alumni and a major gift development program to support such projects as the provision of scholarships and the development of library resources. It is likely that the Faculty will adopt a more coordinated approach to the provision of continuing legal education programs with particular emphasis on contemporary topics of general relevance to the profession and within the expertise of academic staff.

Apart from endeavouring to expand the resource base it is likely that over the next five years the Faculty will need to seek greater efficiencies in the employment of existing staff and resources. This will require a review of the existing managerial and organizational structure as well as a review of the administrative arrangements and the support provided across all areas by support staff. A centralized student support group has already been established and is responsible for the administration of all academic programs. There will also need to be a greater degree of integration in the administration of budgetary systems and it is likely that the Faculty Administration Manager will be called upon to provide strategic advice to the Dean. There are already signs that the next five years will herald more emphasis on accountability of staff performance through the introduction of a performance management system to provide feedback, to reward achievement and to deal with unsatisfactory performance. In this context there are a range of issues which might have to be reconsidered including the nexus between teaching and research, the adequacy of the existing promotion criteria and the overall structure of the academic year. There is also likely to be much greater emphasis on the use of technology in the delivery of the teaching programs leading to more flexibility and efficiency in the conduct of teaching and learning.

There are a number of other more general issues apart from those generated by the climate of restricted resources which the Faculty will need to confront in the coming five years. The large undergraduate intake over the last few years has given rise to concerns about its impact on the quality of teaching and learning in the undergraduate programs. The increase in the number of international students has highlighted the necessity for the Faculty to address their special needs. There are likely to be significant national developments to which the Faculty may need to respond including further developments in relation to national admission requirements and the establishment of a national accreditation body to accredit law programs for the purpose of admission to the profession and for the recognition of specializations. The future direction and development of postgraduate programs, particularly the Masters by Coursework, will need to be examined in the light of matters such as the introduction of full fees, flexible delivery and the need to cater for the interests and demands of international students. The Faculty will need to

respond to national and local developments in relation to practical legal training as well as respond to matters such as full fees, shorter courses and demand for such training. The Faculty will also need to assess whether it wishes to develop more flexible modes of delivery and to pursue such modes of delivery as are appropriate in order to meet student needs and expectations. It is likely that the Faculty will also need to deal with the additional needs and expectations of full fee paying students.

Notwithstanding some of the constraints outlined above which stem from the climate of restricted resources, as the new Dean of the Faculty I am optimistic that the Faculty will still be able to build on its achievements of the last twenty years in continuing to meet student needs and expectations, in the further development of its research profile and in the development of its relationship with the profession and the wider community. Overall the Faculty will be endeavouring to extend and advance its achievements within the teaching, research and community service goals of the University. The Faculty will be seeking to gain greater national and international recognition for its achievements. It will be seeking to maintain a high level of demand for undergraduate and postgraduate courses with particular emphasis on the development of flexible modes of delivery including greater reliance on technology. The Faculty will seek to further enhance its reputation for excellence in research nationally and internationally as well as developing collaborative research projects with the profession, industry, government and community groups. Existing research concentrations are likely to be enhanced and further developed and the involvement of the staff of the Faculty in a range of professional and community activities is expected to continue to develop and expand.

In 1997 the Faculty is celebrating the twentieth anniversary of its foundation and its very considerable achievements in a variety of ways. First and foremost it has sought to renew its association with the graduates of the Faculty. This has involved a major exercise in updating the records of the Faculty so that contact can be made with the graduates. The Faculty now has an alumni data base on which are recorded the current names and addresses of its graduates. As result it has been possible to contact many of the graduates and to involve them in a variety of activities to mark the twentieth anniversary of the foundation of the Faculty. Through the hard work and efforts of some of the early graduates it has been possible to launch a major fundraising campaign to establish an endowment fund to provide assistance for financially disadvantaged students. In addition the graduates have also presented to the Faculty a trophy named in honour of the foundation Dean, Mr Tom Cain. This trophy, to be known as "The Tom Cain Trophy for Outstanding Achievement", will commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Faculty and will be awarded annually to a student for outstanding achievement in both law and in another field of endeavour. The celebrations will culminate in a gala dinner to which graduates, current students and staff as well as many others who have been associated with the Faculty in a variety of ways over the last twenty years will be invited. The foundations have been laid for the establishment of a successful alumni association of graduates through which it will be possible to involve graduates in the further development of

the Faculty.

It is my hope that the Faculty will continue to adopt a forward looking approach and in doing so it should seek to develop all facets of its teaching, research and community service profile. Every effort should be made to maintain and further develop a common and shared vision for the Faculty through cooperative and supportive working relationships. In seeking to adopt such an approach the Faculty should seek to take advantage of the opportunity provided next year by a further five yearly developmental review to evaluate the Faculty's achievements, to examine the important issues which need to be addressed and to set down the future direction of the Faculty for the next five years.