I am the postgraduate student member of the University of New England Council and I
would like to offer the following comments on some aspects of item 3.2 - the role and
composition of governing bodies. I realise that my Council has made a submission, but I
was unable to provide comment to the Secretary by the deadline given due to other
commitments.

3.2.2 - Maximum size: I do not think that nine to eleven is the appropriate size for higher
education governing bodies. I think that this would seriously limit the breadth of expertise
that could be included on the Council. In my experience, a university is a complex
organisation, so the governing body benefits from having members with a wide range of
expertise. Many of the "best practice" standards are based on governance of commercial
companies which have very different goals and requirements to not for profit public
institutions. My nearly twenty years of experience of governance in the Uniting Church,
which uses inter-linked councils to make decisions, suggests that the current maximum size
should not impede effective decision making as long as the members of the Council have the
necessary expertise, are provided with appropriate briefing on issues and meetings are
chaired effectively. If these things are not in place, effective decision making is difficult
with a group of any size.

3.2.3 Maximum term: I think that care needs to be taken that individual members do not
become entrenched because of excessively long terms but there is also value in having
continuity and as it takes some time to become familiar with the way a Council works, terms
of less than two years severely limit the ability of members to make effective contributions
to the governance process, regardless of how effective the induction programme might be. I
do not see maximum terms of 12 years as unduly concerning, as long as care is taken that
not all positions are renewed at once and as long as members are not appointed for 12 year
terms, neither of which currently happens. The issues paper did not specify what length of
term are now being considered, nor how the exceptions might be limited, so it is difficult to
comment on whether or not a change is likely to be problematic. If the proposal is to
decrease the maximum term to 10 years, I would see no problem. A reduction to five or six
years would be seriously detrimental, especially if it were coupled with severe limitations on
how exceptions could be made. In addition, one of the problems of non-metropolitan areas
is that the pool of people available locally with appropriate expertise is significantly smaller
than it is in capital cities so at times there is the need to make exceptions on the length of
term that enable people with particular expertise to keep serving because they simply cannot
be replaced.

3.2.5 Representatives of staff and students: Representatives of students and staff perform
two valuable functions on a university Council. First, they see the university's operations
from a perspective that the senior management does not have and can sometimes point out
problems or offer solutions that would not be seen by other members. Second, if provided
with effective means of communication with the groups that elected them, they can help
improve the level of understanding about the reasoning behind decision and thus the loyalty
to the institution amongst their "constituents". Whilst a consultation process will often
result in a broader perspective than that able to be provided by elected members, it is usually
slow and cumbersome. I anticipate that if students and staff were only included in
consultative rather than governing bodies, the level of consultation with students and staff
would be quite low because it is difficult. One of the functions performed by staff and
sometimes also by student members of Council is to provide regular reports on decisions
made by Council that are of direct relevance to the particular body which has elected them.
This encourages students and staff to have more "ownership" of the university and its
processes and makes for more transparency in governance. Student and staff members are
also able to communicate the bigger picture behind decisions as they are usually significantly more accessible to their "electorates" than are other members of Council.

Yours sincerely

Judy Redman

--
"Politics is the work we do to keep the world safe for our spirituality" - Judith Plaskow, Phoenix Rising, 2000

Rev Judy Redman
PhD candidate, Postgraduate member of Council &
Uniting Church Chaplain
University of New England
Armidale 2351
ph: +61 2 6773 3739
fax: +61 2 6773 3749
email: jredman2@une.edu.au