

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the evidence collected during the review, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. All stakeholders agree that that the ANUSC is achieving its first outcome of providing a high quality educational experience for talented ACT senior college students. They were adamant that the experience added value to their final two years of school. While there was also unanimous agreement that there had been an associated growth in the relationship between the university and the college sectors, there was less agreement with the proposition that the ANUSC had resulted in a substantial increase of professional development opportunities for teachers in the college/school sector.
2. The performance of students in the ANUSC courses is high with the majority gaining merit grades in their courses. A substantial number accepted the offer of enrolment at ANU in Science based courses indicating that the third objective of an easier transition of students from ANUSC to the ANU was also being achieved. Whether there was an increase in enrolments in Science based programs as a result of the ANUSC cannot, at this stage, be determined.
3. The enrolment data and student evaluations indicate that there is strong demand for the courses that are currently on offer, and that ACT colleges support the original concept of providing courses in the Science/Mathematics area. There is, however, the danger that this level of support from the school/college sector may not be maintained if ANUSC expands in too many directions without extensive consultation – there is the fear that the ANU is “poaching the brightest students”.
4. As the program has grown there appear to be some communication and structural issues that may degrade the relationship between the university and the school/college sectors. To a number of the stakeholders the communication lines have become blurred and there has been insufficient consultation before decisions have been taken.
5. The number of applications for teaching positions has not been large and some respondents from the school/college sector argued that there is not a large pool of college teachers with the requisite knowledge to be able to teach the ANUSC courses without the need to learn further concepts. This is especially true in Mathematics where the ANUSC course content is unfamiliar to many Mathematics teachers. Data from the school/college sector indicate that other factors may also discourage teachers from applying for ANUSC positions: a perceived lack of recognition, in terms of pay and teaching relief, a perceived heavy workload associated with teaching positions at ANUSC, and the perceived lack of relevance of the teaching experience at ANUSC when

applying for future promotion. Given that the program is only in its third year, the last perception may turn out not to be accurate.

6. While funding and resources appear adequate at present, agreements between the university, DET and the non-government sector, and between ANU departments and the university Executive will have to be re-negotiated in the near future to ensure continuity of the program.

Despite the three areas of concern, all stakeholders agree that the program is very beneficial to ACT college students and should be continued; as one respondent said, “with the goodwill that has been generated, there is no reason why it should not continue”. All stakeholders recognise the unique features of the program whereby the courses undertaken by ACT college students within the ANUSC are embedded in their home college programs. The areas of concern are related to a possible expansion of ANUSC courses that may have a deleterious impact on ACT colleges, and to ANUSC structures and procedures.

Expansion of the program was an obvious area of concern. The need for extension courses in Mathematics and Science to attract more students into these areas was recognised, and limiting the program to these disciplines gave the ANUSC a sense of cohesion. Expanding the program to include Biology and Japanese without extensive consultation raised questions about the future direction and role for the ANUSC. Concerns were also raised that there was insufficient time for accreditation of these courses.

To provide advice on what subjects should/could be offered by the ANUSC in the future one would firstly require an analysis of the ACT college curriculum to determine areas of the curriculum where the ANUSC program could add value to the educational experience of high achieving students. Such an analysis is outside the scope of this review and would require extensive consultation with the college/school sector and within the university.

Recommendation 1.

That before any further expansion of the ANUSC program

- (i) an analysis be conducted of the curriculum offered by ACT colleges to determine areas where the ANUSC program could add value to the educational experience of high achieving students and where the university has expertise,*
- (ii) there be extensive consultation with the college/school sector to determine their views on an expanded program,*
- (iii) there be adequate consultation within the university to determine the views of academic staff,*
and

(iv) sufficient time be allowed for full accreditation of courses by the BSSS.

In this recommendation I am assuming that the overall objectives of the ANUSC program are broadly the same as those enunciated in the 2007 MOU. If this were not the case, the first recommendation would be to consult widely within and without the university to determine the purpose of the ANUSC.

The one objective which the ACT college principals perceive is not being achieved is that of professional development of teachers in the ACT secondary colleges. Among the three original courses, Mathematics is the exception, with two days of professional development being provided by the university annually. Of the two new courses, Japanese had been given a grant for the Japanese Centre to provide courses for teachers.

Recommendation 2:

That consideration be given to expanding the provision of professional development courses in the disciplines offered by the ANUSC to teachers in ACT colleges.

Expansion of professional development courses has at least two benefits. Such courses, if well presented and attended, can have a positive effect on student outcomes and hence the preparation of prospective ANU students. Also they can assist in providing a larger pool of prospective ANUSC teachers by increasing the knowledge and skill base of ACT teachers.

If there is not an adequate pool of prospective ANUSC teachers the sustainability of the program may be under threat. Evidence collected during this review showed that relatively small numbers of applications were received for advertised teaching positions. The timing of the advertisements was seen to be one issue and lack of recognition was another. The perception that ANUSC teachers did not receive sufficient financial reward and teaching relief was not universal, but was held by a strong majority of teachers. Not all college principals agreed with the perception that pay and allowances were inadequate but all agreed that lack of recognition of service at ANUSC in relation to a career path in the ACT college sector discouraged some teachers from applying.

There are no easy answers to staff recruitment. There are some administrative issues that can be addressed, being paid on time etc, but these are minor impediments to recruitment. Perhaps the medium/long-term answer lies in the increasing the content knowledge and skills of ACT teachers through professional development activities and/or the provision of postgraduate certificate courses in the relevant disciplines.

Related to problems in recruiting teaching staff for the ANUSC courses is that of succession planning in the university sector. An issue that arises in many initiatives of this nature is that of replacing the initiator – other academic staff may not have the same vision and enthusiasm for the project. Sustainability of the ANUSC requires that there be suitable people involved in the program from both the university and school/college sectors.

To achieve the stated objectives the College must have adequate resourcing, both financial and human. Evidence collected from interviewees indicated that financial resourcing was also seen as a concern. While current funding was seen as adequate in most areas, concerns were raised from principals of the ACT colleges that money given to ANU for the ANUSC by DET was coming from other parts of their budgets. Additionally, several of the ANU academic staff stated that there may be problems with sustaining the program if the current level of funding their departments received was reduced.

Distributing the costs associated with the ANUSC in an equitable fashion will not be an easy exercise as some of the costs are visible but others hidden. The underlying question is whether the costs are distributed on the basis of function (who does what) or on perceived benefit. These are difficult philosophical questions, but need to be addressed.

Evidence collected during the review also showed that consultation and communication were not always perceived as adequate, and these are regarded as essential ingredients in any collaborative venture. These perceptions may have arisen because of the increased size of the program so that the informal structures which were adequate for a smaller program are not longer sufficient. This is an area that the university needs to address.

Recommendation 3

That the university, in collaboration with the school/college sector, modify the structure of the ANUSC to ensure that adequate consultation occurs and that there is clear and timely communication between all stakeholders associated with the Secondary College.

To conclude; in broad terms the ANUSC can be seen to have achieved its stated objectives and all stakeholders want the venture to continue. My overall recommendation is that, because of the benefits to ACT senior students, the university and the ACT educational system, the ANUSC continue to operate. Sustainability, however, depends on adequate resourcing of the program in human and financial terms, and having a more formal structure in place that provides allows greater consultation and improved communications between all groups associated with the College.