1) Background

The University of Queensland secured a Carrick Institute Leadership Development grant in mid 2006 to fund a project which would design and deliver support, including professional development and institutional recognition, for academic staff playing the vital roles of program directors and major conveners—henceforth CONVENERs for short.

A Phase I Working Party, with membership from the seven UQ faculties, met in the second half of 2006 and early in 2007 to identify key elements for the project as a whole. Among these, crucially, was the matter of “recognition”—how, institutionally, and at various levels, is the role of CONVENER recognized, rewarded, and supported? Key aspects of this included, for example,

- formal recognition of the role at School, Faculty, and University levels, as shown, for example, in the development of explicit and detailed position descriptions, of the kind which exists, for example, for Deans and Heads of Schools;
- workload allocation at the School level for performing the duties of CONVENER that is commensurate with the importance of the job and the complexity of its associated duties;
- professional development opportunities of the kind that exist for Heads of Schools and for course conveners (and, indeed, for many other categories of academic staff, including casual academic staff);
- career recognition through the appointments and promotions procedures and their associated policies.

At the first meeting of the Phase I Working Party, members discussed the issue of recognition very thoroughly, as indicated in these notes:

One of the most important points to emerge from our discussion was the significance, for the role of CONVENER, of proper School and University recognition of the complexity and demands of the role. In particular, inadequate workload recognition for the role means that the tasks will be performed effectively only by staff who ignore or downgrade other important imperatives. Some staff will sacrifice their leisure or even their time for productive work-related reflection. Others will spend less time on research or on their own teaching. Or, more typically, staff may slight the responsibilities of the role, seeing, quite accurately, that to take these responsibilities seriously enough to discharge them well may be “career-limiting”. Under current University funding arrangements for teaching-related activities, there may simply be too little financial support for proper engagement with this role. (Some moderate improvement in this position might be obtained by reducing the number of majors/programs.)

More specifically, members of the working party noted that
• It is uncertain whether the CONVENER’s role should be understood, in relation to staff management policies, as teaching or as service and that some clarification of this issue would be desirable.

• More elaborated policy on the assessment, for permanency and promotion, of teaching and service activities would be helpful in ensuring recognition of the importance of the CONVENER’S role.

• There is highly variable and in some cases inadequate administrative support for the CONVENER.

• The absence of CONVENERs from line management schemata is both a symptom and a cause of their relative disempowerment. It makes them invisible to the university senior executive and even to Executive Deans and Directors of Studies. A clearer and more concretely specified set of delegations would assist in securing the role.

At the final meeting of the Phase I Working Party, it was noted that this Carrick-funded project, especially in relation to the issue of “recognition”, was well timed, as several other University-level developments in relation to staffing were coming on stream at the same time.

We summarized Phase I discussions of the dimensions of the role as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The CONVENER’s primary duties are:</th>
<th>Associated capabilities and knowledge include:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• marketing the program;</td>
<td>• comprehensive and up-to-date knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• course and program planning advice;</td>
<td>of program structure and course choices,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• careers advice;</td>
<td>especially in relation to first year;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• practical support and guidance for current students.</td>
<td>• good understanding of students’ career goals and of their career prospects, especially as they may be enhanced by work in the program/major.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• management and administration of the major/program;</td>
<td>• knowledge of School, Faculty, and University approval processes, evaluation cycles, strategic directions, and operational goals;</td>
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<tr>
<td>• alignment of the major/program to faculty-wide policies and practices, especially in relation to quality control;</td>
<td>• knowledge of operational issues</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **• strategic management of the major/program and for proper student administration;** | associated with course scheduling and class timetabling;  
| **• information about the content and pedagogy associated with the individual courses which make up the major/program.** |  
| **• development of curriculum for the major/program** | **• knowledge of curriculum and pedagogy for the discipline and the program**  
| **• oversight of pedagogy for the major/program and its relation to content and outcomes** |

### 2) Phase II

In our application for Carrick funding, we stated:

The crucial outcome for this project is enhanced capacity for academic leadership, and, especially, leadership in curriculum and program development and management, among the strategically crucial but structurally neglected cohort of middle-level academic leaders. To achieve this outcome, the project will deliver:

1. an integrated staff development program targeting, for members of this cohort, their leadership capacities for curriculum development and management;
2. changes to University staff policies and procedures to ensure appropriate recognition, remuneration, and resourcing of middle-level academic leaders;
3. a set of incentives for members of the targeted cohort to participate in this program;
4. a dissemination plan;
5. two evaluation measures; and
6. scholarly contributions to the literature on academic leadership in higher education.

I have underlined the “deliverable” which is especially relevant to the work of this group. One of the “deliverables” for Phase I of the project, now completed, is also relevant, and our Phase II group, will need to undertake further work on this matter. To wit:

Development of position descriptions for targeted leadership roles. Conveners of majors, program directors, and chairs of undergraduate studies committees appear, typically, not to have formal duties statements. Development of such position descriptions is partly a matter of functional analysis (what, according to University policies and larger strategic imperatives, should such staff be deputed to do?) and partly a matter of empirical enquiry (what, typically, do such staff actually do?). In fact, the development of position descriptions is a sine qua non for the project as a whole. Without agreed position descriptions, we do not know the range of duties for which appropriate leadership development programs needs to be designed.

Also relevant to our work is this statement of intent:

Planning for the design project therefore involves

- Identifying and prioritizing tasks that are, according to newly developed position descriptions, key accountabilities for members of the targeted leadership cohort.

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1 In Phase 3, we will need to amend existing University policy relating to staff duties and to ensure the dissemination of these amendments to academic organisational units with budgetary and personnel responsibilities for staff playing these roles.
These might include curriculum review, course approval, liaison with professional and community organizations, etc.

- Identifying, for each of these key tasks, the skills, attitudes, and knowledge that are necessary for the role occupant to discharge them effectively.

**KEY TASKS FOR THIS PHASE II WORKING PARTY THEREFORE INCLUDE:**

- development of a position description or template for such a description for the role of CONVENER

- proposals for change to such University policies and procedural documents as refer to matters impinging on the CONVENER’s duties and the recognition of this role—e.g. workload policy, the Academic Portfolio, promotions policies, and the like.