COMMUNICATION POLICY

Approved	Council/Standing Committee of the Academic Board
Approval Date(s) (from most recent)	04/01/2017, 02/01/2017, 01/04/2015, 27/04/2011
Date for Review (no more than five years from last approval)	2020
Responsible Officer	Dean
Author(s) and Role(s) from most recent	D. Speed (Dean)
Related Documents (explicitly cross-referenced)	SCD Handbook
Higher Education Standards (2021)	7
National Code (2018) (if directly relevant)	1, 2, 3

Introduction

This Policy was first developed and adopted in 2011 to address issues identified by the 2009 AUQA Audit, recognizing that ongoing review would be required.

Changes to the academic governance adopted in response to Professor Anne Cusick's Report (141104) on the External Academic Governance Review she conducted for SCD, to have been fully implemented by 13 July 2015, have necessitated associated changes to this Policy that are incorporated below.

General Principles

Communication related to the operation of the Sydney College of Divinity (SCD) occurs both amongst the various participants in the SCD community and between the SCD and the public, including Government agencies and potential students.

In all contexts the SCD pursues the following general principles:

(i) The SCD requires all information disseminated by the SCD and its Member Institutions (MIs) to be adequate for purpose, honest, and as clear as possible, and both SCD and its MIs will strive to present their website communications in a readily accessible form.

(ii) The SCD requires all information disseminated by the SCD and its Member Institutions to accord with relevant Government regulations and directions.

Internal Communication through Governance

Because SCD is a consortium, its governance structure is designed to provide both for the orderly conduct of its core business of education, in accordance with its Vision, Mission, and Values, and for the integration of the MIs' interests with the interests of the SCD collective.

The governance structure comprises a range of bodies that address systemic operational tasks and make relevant decisions and recommendations according to defined reporting lines, while also providing for exchanges amongst the MIs. These committees are all located on clear lines of responsibility, delegation, and communication and constitute the main framework of communications within the SCD.

The nature of communication through the governance structure varies somewhat according to whether or not the membership of a body is expressly representational in respect of MIs. Representational membership means that members are expected to act in the interest of their MI as well as the collective interest. Any conflict of interest should always be acknowledged and factored into the committee's business. Non-representational membership means that members are expected to act only in the collective interest of the SCD.

Representational committees are, by definition, predicated on an assumption that representatives will report back to their MIs, as well as bringing to the meeting any matter their MI wishes to communicate to the meeting. In the case of non-representational committees, key operational business to be implemented within the individual MIs may be reported to them by committee members from the MIs, but information open to dissemination in this way will always exclude matters of a confidential nature, and key decisions taken will be communicated to the MIs in a timely fashion by the Office of the Dean.

Neither the Council nor any of its committees, including the Academic Board, is representational.

Council membership includes a majority of independent, external members and a minority of persons explicitly from some, not all, of the MIs. Academic Board membership includes a majority of internal persons based in the MIs and the SCD Office and a minority of independent, external persons, as of 11 March 2015 at least one and no more than three, but membership does not necessarily include persons based in all MIs.

Academic Board and the other Council committees report to Council and the committees of Academic Board report to it.

While all committees of Council (Academic Board and the Audit, Institutional Membership, and Strategic Planning Committees) are non-representational, the committees of the Academic Board continue to be variously representational and non-representational, with the following arrangements as of 13 July 2015:

(i) basically representational because of their particular relevance to the ongoing individual operations of the SCD MIs: Research and Student Support and Administration;

(ii) non-representational because of their particular relevance to the whole-of-SCD operation: Standing, Discipline Coordinators, and Coursework.

In the new category of Committees of the Dean, certain committees will report to the Dean, who will convey any significant matters arising to Council or Academic Board, as relevant, via the Dean's Report. These committees are to be variously representational and non-representational:

(i) representational because it is a working group concerned with the day-to-day operations of the MIs and SCD Korean School of Theology as constituent parts of the SCD: Library;

(ii) non-representational because their membership consists of experts who are expected to make requested decisions: with the Dean to notify Council, Academic Classification and Promotion Appeals; with the Dean to notify the Academic Board, Academic Classification and Promotion and Research Ethics.

Two-way communication may occur between any committees in regard to exchange of information or the pursuit of requests without obligation from a governance point of view. For example, the Research and Research Ethics Committees may keep each other informed about research applications requiring ethics clearance, and the Library Committee may be in communication with the Coursework or Research Committees regarding relevant quality assurance or practical assistance of students and staff.

The composition and duties of each body are set out in the Terms of Reference for that body. Reporting lines are set out in the Governance Chart.

Regarding the two external advisory panels, the Principals' Fellowship communicates with the Council through its Chair and members of the External Academic Advisory Panel communicate with Academic Board through the Dean, an academic director, or one of its Committees, as relevant.

The Principals' Fellowship is a body outside the governance structure, which provides for the sharing of news and concerns amongst the Principals. The Principals' Fellowship functions as an advisory body to Council, and a report from the Fellowship is a standing potential item on the Council agenda. The Principals' Fellowship has no decision-making powers or delegated authority. The Dean is normally invited to attend Fellowship meetings to provide information and to be informed of particular concerns of the Principals. For particular reasons, other Directors from the Office of the Dean may also be invited to attend on occasion.

In addition, the Dean regularly provides a report on significant matters addressed in scheduled Council and Academic Board meetings to the Principals. These reports normally constitute one body of material for discussion by the Principals' Fellowship. Recent developments in policy and procedure are also gazetted on the SCD website.

In the AUQA Good Practice Database, one of the two Practices contributed by SCD, at the invitation of AUQA, concerns the work of the Principals' Fellowship, together with that of the Registrars' network, as 'Good Management for an NSAI Consortium'. In such contexts, management is inseparable from communication.

Any Principal may send an observer to the Council, Academic Board, or an Academic Board Committee, with the consent of the Chair. An observer at any of these meetings will be subject to the same confidentiality rules as members of the body concerned.

Communication in Regard to the SCD Korean School of Theology

The SCD Korean School of Theology (KST) delivers SCD coursework awards in Korean as a community language. Staff of the KST must participate in SCD committees and events on the same basis as other SCD faculty, where they are obliged to communicate satisfactorily in English. The KST operation is subjected to the same regular quality assurance exercises as other SCD teaching bodies, involving detailed English communication between KST staff and others in the SCD community.

It is essential that communications between KST and the Office of the Dean and between the KST and other parts of the SCD community should be clear and effective. To that end, any staff SCD considers for appointment to KST must have a reasonable capacity for spoken and written communication in English. In addition, protocols have been established and are periodically reviewed for regular communication in regard to the management of KST by the Office of the Dean.

Key Protocols for Communication

1. Regular Strategic Planning Days will be arranged to permit policy discussions and institutional planning through shared discussions amongst the Council, the Principals, the Academic Board, and the Office of the Dean.

2. All substantive decisions reached by Council, Academic Board, or their committees after due discussion will be communicated to the leaders of the MIs, as relevant, in a timely way (for example, adoption of policies or procedures). Decisions reached by SCD officers or other committees carrying the delegated authority to do so will communicate decisions to relevant other parties directly, in a timely way (for example, accreditation of teachers, faculty classification or promotion).

3. The SCD Handbook and other key documents, including essential information concerning appeals, grievances, and other student welfare matters, will be readily available to staff and students and information about how and where to access them will be made clear at the time of induction of new staff and enrolment of students, both domestic and overseas.

4. Documents provided to staff and/or students by MIs will promote SCD policy and procedure and/or not contradict SCD policy and procedure.

5. The Dean and other staff from the Office of the Dean will be available to provide information and guidance to the Principals and other staff based in MIs, as well as any student who wishes to contact the Office directly. Requests will be addressed in a timely way.

6. The Principals, the Academic Deans, and other key staff in the MIs will ensure that they and those for whom they are responsible take notice of communications from the Office, as well as reports they receive through the governance structure, and address matters raised or make further enquiries in a timely way.

7. The official spokesperson for the Council and the College at all times is the Dean.

Associated Policies and Procedures

Communication lies at the heart of virtually the entire SCD Policy and Procedures Manual.

Some Policy areas of particular relevance are:

Advertising Policy
Confidentiality and Disclosure in Relation to Council Membership
Induction Policy
Overseas Student Policies
Professional Development Policy
Student Support and Welfare Policy
Terms of Reference for each governance body