

Submission to the Australian Capital Territory Remuneration Tribunal

Annual Spring Review 2017

Part-time Holders of Public Office

Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS) Chair

From John Stenhouse, Executive Director, Board of Senior Secondary Studies (BSSS)

Background

As Executive Director at the Office of the BSSS for the past four years, I have a clear understanding of the responsibilities of the Board Chair and of the work involved in the execution of these responsibilities. I welcome this opportunity to make a submission to the Tribunal.

The BSSS operates under the BSSS Act 1997 and its main functions relate to the provision and quality assurance of assessment, curriculum and certification to 25 ACT schools in the ACT and seven international schools. The Board provides ACT Senior Secondary Certificates, Tertiary Entrance Statements and Vocational Certificates to 6000 students annually.

The Board Chair is responsible directly to the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Development and has oversight of the Board's functions including the strategic plan. In recent times there have been major changes nationally and locally in the senior secondary sector.

On the national scene, senior secondary Australian Curriculum has been introduced in five jurisdictions including the ACT. Curriculum and assessment authorities, including the BSSS, are embracing digital assessment and all jurisdictions are either implementing or examining the assessment of literacy and numeracy at senior secondary level.

In the ACT, the Board has conducted a major review of certification in 2014 and curriculum in 2015 and languages in 2016. All reviews have delivered significant changes which have impacted on the work of the Board and in turn the Board Chair. In 2016, the Board finalised its Strategic Plan 2017-2021. The new plan differs from previous plans in three respects. The goals in the new plan are more ambitious and strategic than those in previous plans. This explains the five year extent of the plan as compared to previous plans which have been over three years. The plan is readily available to the Canberra community through the BSSS web site whereas previous plans have only been shared with schools. The nature of the plan will place a higher level of responsibility and accountability on the Board Chair.

Workload

The Board Chair presides over six Board meetings and six meetings with principals each year. The papers for the Board meetings are prepared three weeks prior to the meeting and contain papers for decision, discussion and information in addition to reports from Board sub committees and reports on Board responsibilities such as certification, moderation and the ACT Scaling Test. The Board is the body which sets policy and procedures for senior secondary education in the territory. The high stakes nature of senior secondary education requires the Chair to preside over proposed changes ensuring a balance between the need for the system to evolve and the need to minimise risk to student outcomes.

The Chair is briefed by the Executive Director on the Board papers prior to meeting with the principals. The Chair then meets with the principals and to allow them the opportunity to review and comment on the Board papers. The Board meeting follows in the week after the principals meeting. The principals meeting and the Board meeting are typically of three hours duration. The Board itself is a community based group drawn from a diverse range of organisations which have an involvement and interest in senior secondary education.

The Chair meets with the Minister twice a year. Before this meeting the Chair is briefed by the Executive Director on the items for the agenda. The standing item at these meetings is a progress report on the Board's strategic plan. Other Board initiatives and issues form the remainder of the agenda.

The Chair also meets with the Director-General of the Education Directorate twice a year. The format of these meetings is similar to those with the minister.

The Chair in collaboration with the Executive Director is responsible for the strategic planning and monitoring of progress of the strategic plan. The development of a new strategic plan occurs in the final year of the old plan.

The Chair is the last avenue of appeal for students on a range of Board policies and as such has to deal with situations requiring high levels of sensitivity and confidentiality. The decisions made by the Chair can impact significantly on the future prospects of students.

The Chair is a member of the selection panel which selects the Executive Director. The current Chair has undertaken this on two occasions during her tenure. The entire process takes about three days to complete.

The Chair is required to make a speech and present certificates at the Board's Annual Recognition of Excellence Ceremony. The Chair is also required to give speeches at special events organised by the Office of the Board.

The Chair is available for comment to the media as appropriate. In particular, the Chair composes an opinion piece on developments and issues in senior secondary education for the Canberra Times in December each year.

Scope

In 2017, the Director's position (Executive Level 1.2) at the Office of the BSSS was resized to Executive Director (Executive Level 2.4) as a consequence of an independent appraisal of the nature of the position and the level of responsibility. Many of the factors considered in the resizing are applicable to the Chair's position. The role of the Board Chair runs parallel to the role of the Executive Director in terms of responsibility for major decisions made by the Board but without the day to day responsibility for the management of the Office of the Board.

The Board Chair needs to have a sound knowledge of senior secondary education in the ACT and elsewhere in addition to expertise in governance particularly in the public sector. At the Office of the Board there is a significant gap in level between the Executive Director and the closest level which is School Leader B (deputy principal) which sits 4 levels below the Executive Director. Because of this the Executive Director relies on the support and advice of the Board Chair on issues of high importance and/ or great sensitivity.

Members

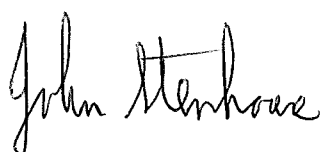
The Board has 15 members including the Chair. The Chair is the only member who is remunerated.

Recommended remuneration

In the light of the nature and extent of the Chair's responsibilities, I suggest that remuneration in the \$30,000 to \$40,000 range would be appropriate. In doing so I take into account the visibility and standing of the Board Chair in ACT public life. The current chair is an ex ACT Chief Minister and the previous chair was the Vice Chancellor at a local university.

Discussion with Tribunal

I am available to discuss my submission with the tribunal.



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