



PRESS RELEASE

DEANS OF SCIENCE TACKLE THE ISSUES

At the Annual General Meeting of the Australian Council of Deans of Science (ACDS) in Sydney on October 14-15, ACDS endorsed a bold initiative to transform the teaching of laboratory based classes. Science Faculties around Australia will collaborate to establish ASELL (Advancing Science by Enhancing Learning in the Laboratory), a systematic process for engaging academics in the educational design, testing and publication of quality controlled laboratory experiments for undergraduates.

The system builds on the already well developed ACELL, which is confined to Chemistry. The Deans will put their faculties behind the restructuring of ACELL into ASELL through a roll-out to other disciplines. A start has been made by the Physics community which trialled the approach in a day-long workshop at UTS last November, and a workshop for biologists has been held at Flinders University.

‘This will create national communities of practice that will let staff share and draw upon each others experience across all of Australia’s universities’, said newly elected President Professor Rob Norris, Dean of Science at Monash University. ‘It will provide a systematic arena in which the educational thinking behind various experiments can be discussed and improved. It will also provide a curated database of experiments with full details of how teachers can implement them, including environmental health and safety issues. In time, and with sufficient resources, the secondary school system might be able to access them.’

The Council took another new step in appointing an Executive Director. Immediate past President of ACDS, Professor John Rice, honorary professor in mathematics at the University of Sydney and retiring Dean of Science at UTS, was appointed as the first holder of this position. John was foundation President of ACDS.

Professor Rice praised the founders of ACELL for their vision and organisational insight in developing the system and encouraging its expansion to more disciplines. He also noted that without the existence and support of organizations like the Australian Learning and Teaching Council and its predecessors the initiative could not have happened. ‘A roll out like this will probably need further support during its establishment phase’, he said, ‘and certainly DEEWR should consider its implications for the secondary sector, especially for sustaining and revitalising the national curriculum.’

Earlier, in June, Professor Rice organised the inaugural national meeting of Science Faculties’ Associate Deans Teaching and Learning, and at the AGM Council approved its continuation as an annual event. ‘A large part of my role will be to support this new network, and the ASELL initiative will be one significant part of its work’, he said.

In his address to Council Professor Richard Johnstone, CEO of the Australian Learning and Teaching Council strongly encouraged the development of the Associate Deans network and the

ASELL initiative. He observed that these were the kinds of outcomes that the ALTC was intended to foster.

The ACDS Council noted the National Science Forum organised by the National Curriculum Board. While encouraging bold initiatives toward a K-12 curriculum, it believes that these could not be positive without a sea-change in teacher professional development that would let them meet the challenge of its implementation (see separate Press Release).

Other matters discussed at the AGM included FASTS (presentation by ED, Mr Bradley Smith), the ARC (presentation by Professor Margaret Sheil, CEO of the ARC), Science and Mathematics Postgraduate demand, a collaborative approach to enabling Science courses at regional universities, the ways in which ACDS could assist the integrations of and appreciation of the value of PhD graduates in Australian industry, full-cost funding for research, and addressing of the deferred maintenance issue in science faculties across Australia.

CONTACTS: Professor Rob Norris
 President, ACDS
 03 9905 4123
 +61 419 324 510
 rob.norris@sci.monash.edu.au

Professor John Rice
Executive Director, ACDS
+61 438 438 097
[John Rice <johnwr@maths.usyd.edu.au>](mailto:John.Rice@maths.usyd.edu.au)

