Agency details

Agency number: 404
Agency title: Centre for Biomedical Engineering (1976 - 1994) / Graduate School for Biomedical Engineering (1994 - )
Start date: 1976
End date:
Creation: Formally established by the Vice-Chancellor on 26 September 1976
Abolition:

Administrative history note: The Biomedical Engineering Centre is of a multi-disciplinary nature. During 1973 several committees were concerned with the drafting of a proposal to establish a Centre for Biomedical Engineering within UNSW. As a result the university submission made to the AUC refers to this centre as one of the few major development projects proposed for the 1976-1978 Triennium. The university's activities in this area had steadily increased involving staff from the faculties of Medicine, Applied Science, Biological Sciences, Science and Engineering. Academic staff members felt at the time that the existence of such a centre as a formally established entity would help those involved to attract funds from outside sources. The centre was seen as providing a consolidated foundation for work in this area by conducting and sponsoring research; establishing postgraduate programs; sponsoring the development of appropriate undergraduate subjects; and organising conferences, meetings and discussions on biomedical engineering.

On 27 August 1974 the Vice-Chancellor, Professor Myers, agreed to the informal establishment within the university of a centre for biomedical engineering and to the establishment of a management committee under the chairmanship of Prof Svensson. The committee comprised Profs NL Svensson (Mechanical Engineering), Chairman, R Huckstep (Orthopaedics), Drs J Loughman (Anaesthetics), M O'Rourke (Cardiology), P Farrell (Chemical Engineering), and Mr P Bason (Electrical Engineering). One of the committee's briefs was to plan the future structure and functions of the centre. The Vice-Chancellor provided initial funding of $750 for use by the centre in 1975 with the expectation that the various participating faculties would take over full responsibility for the associated costs in subsequent years. The centre had the support of the deans of the faculties of Biological Sciences, Engineering and Medicine. The major activities of the centre fell in the areas of teaching, research and clinical application.

On 24 September 1976, after consideration of the management committee's proposals, the Vice-Chancellor formally approved the establishment of the Centre of Biomedical Engineering in the University of New South Wales as a centre for interdisciplinary studies and developments involving engineering, medicine and the biological sciences. He also approved the management structure of the centre involving an Advisory Board to be responsible for the overall operating policy of the centre and a Management Committee to be responsible generally for the execution of policy objectives, for the control of the staff and financial management of the centre and for the proposals of further research and development projects. In 1977 Professor Peter Farrell was appointed Director of the Centre of Biomedical Engineering.

Growth of the centre was rapid. Within a few years the centre had attracted considerable interest in its research activities and received extensive funding from industry, government and private research foundations. Its international reputation in artificial organs research meant that already in 1979 most of its funding for artificial organs research came from sources outside the university (AMA Gazette, 19 July 1979). In 1980 the centre offered postgraduate programs in biomedical engineering for students with either an engineering/ scientific or medical
background; it also co-ordinated biomedical engineering research in schools of the university and in hospitals in biomechanics, medical instrumentation, cardiology, physiology and rehabilitation engineering.

The centre's growth and success meant that in 1980 it was suggested by senior staff that the Centre for Biomedical Engineering should be located within a faculty to put on it on a more permanent footing. The faulty of Engineering, which had coordinated all the centre's activities since its establishment, was suggested as an appropriate home. In 1981 the centre became a faculty unit within the faculty of Engineering. The position of Director, Centre for Biomedical Engineering in the faculty unit, faculty of Engineering, was established and Professor Peter O'Farrell was seconded to that position effective from 8 May 1981. Administratively within the faculty the unit operated and was treated like any other school.

A review of research centres at UNSW by Professor Alan Gilbert in 1990 defined the role of research centres at the university. The Centre for Biomedical Engineering lay outside the guidelines of research centres in respect to the teaching function it provided. Resulting from this the centre sought to have its name changed to the Graduate School of Biomedical Engineering. At its meeting on 5 July 1994 the Academic Board resolved that it be recommended that Council approve the proposed change of status of the centre. Council at its meeting on 29 August 1994 resolved as follows:

(CL94/72)(b) That Council approve the proposed change of status of the Centre for Biomedical Engineering to the Graduate School of Biomedical Engineering.

The head of school in 2008 was Associate Professor Anne Simmons.