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# MEMORANDUM

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**To: Dale Ward, Director, Saskatchewan Structural Sciences Centre**

**From: Jim Basinger, Associate Vice-President Research**

**Date: March 11, 2012**

**Re: Review of the SSSC**

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Dale,

Attached for distribution at your discretion are documents concerning the Review of the Saskatchewan Structural Sciences Centre, which included a site visit by the external review team on June 21 - 22, 2011. These include:

SSSC Self-Study for External Review, May 23, 2011

SSSC Self-Study for External Review – Appendices

Committee Report of the External Review of the SSSC, September 2, 2011

Director's Response to the External Reviewers' Report, January 1, 2012

The external review team included two members external to the University (Josef Zwanziger, Dalhousie University; Michael Freund (University of Manitoba), and one member internal to the University (Tom Ellis, Canadian Light Source). The reviewers' report includes a number of observations and recommendations, which you have responded to in your director's response, and which I will reflect upon here.

The reviewers recognize clearly the importance of the SSSC to the UofS research community, emphasizing the strength that comes with consolidation of complementary equipment in a shared facility with oversight by experienced and expert support staff. The potential for access to multiple techniques, and therefore for innovation, is enhanced in such a facility. The reviewers also identify enhanced opportunities for training, as well as efficiencies and cost-containment, as direct outcomes of the SSSC. The OVPR greatly appreciates this external endorsement of the central role that the SSSC plays in research at the UoS.

The reviewers recognize also risk that comes from lack of financial sustainability, and provide a number of recommendations for enhancement of research, financial, and overall centre performance. Among the most important are:

Secure and sustainable funding by embedding staff salaries within the base-budgets of one or more colleges. While the SSSC is able to sustain non-salary operation and maintenance costs from cost-recovery, the user base does not have the capacity to cover salary costs. The OVPR recognizes this need for centrally funded staff salaries, and fully supports the pursuit of sustainable base-budget funding of these positions.

Increase the user base of the SSSC through coordinated efforts at outreach to the research community both within and external to the University. With the high level of expertise within the staff complement of the SSSC, there are unrealized opportunities for direct involvement of staff in training, outreach, and support of the research community. A strategy for communication with users and potential users is recommended. The recommendation for regular staff meetings (staff-manager-director) is interpreted in part to be a means of facilitating these efforts.

Expansion of the user base must be documented in order to serve most effectively the needs of the SSSC. The reviewers identify acknowledgement and promotion of SSSC support within publications and presentations as necessary to leveraging resources. The also recognize that measuring productivity is challenging, but essential to the competitiveness of the SSSC in pursuit of resources.

Aggressive pursuit of new instrumentation. It is noted that the CFI 2012 LEF/NIF competition includes three applications for enhancement of the SSSC infrastructure.

Simplification of the fee structure. As Director, Dale Ward has restructured the fee structure, and has significantly simplified and clarified the cost-recovery mechanism. The reviewers have identified some remaining areas for improvement, and also recommend greater transparency in fees and budgeting. This may be helped by the establishment of a committee of major users (called by reviewers a “Management Board”).

Also in support of transparency, the reviewers recommend that staff time be accurately accounted for, “such that it is used only to support multiuser SSSC assets or is billed”. This is interpreted as meaning that there is some perception among researchers that staff may not confine their activities to maintenance and training (that is, indirect costs of research), but that some users may be benefiting from excessive assistance, which would therefore subsidize direct costs of their research. The reviewers recommend in such cases, where researchers receive substantial and direct benefit to their research, that staff time be billed.

The reviewers have expressed concerns for the governance of the SSSC. At the present time, the SSSC is governed by a “Management Board” consisting of: the VPR or designate; associate deans research of Science, Medicine, and Engineering; one rep from a government lab; one user; and the Director of the SSSC. The reviewers

recommend that this body be replaced by a higher-level “Advisory Board” established with representation at the decanal level. Director Dale Ward generally concurs with this recommend, although he considers that appropriate representation can be at the Associate Dean Research level. The OVPR concurs in that it would be acceptable for a dean to designate the ADR. In practical terms, this recommendation calls for a renaming of the current Management Board to an Advisory Board, with accompanying changes to its terms of reference to better reflect this function.

A more important change recommended by the reviewers is the establishment of a Management Board that serves a different purpose than at present, and is constituted by different membership. The reviewers recommend that this body meet regularly and be charged with significant responsibility for issues concerning management of the SSSC. Director Dale Ward, in his response, reflected upon the original intent that there be a “User Group” to serve this function, but that this body was never struck (current meetings of “users” do not serve this purpose). Both the reviewers and the Director appear to be in agreement with the need for such a body, which would include key users and be responsible for “representative, transparent and active management” of the SSSC. The OVPR concurs that representation need not be at the senior administrative level. Dale Ward recommends that this group should meet quarterly, which would seem reasonable.

On behalf of the Vice-President Research, I wish to express my gratitude to the review team for their insight and guidance in management of the SSSC, and to Director Dale Ward for his capable leadership, for his thoroughness in development of the self study documents, and for his thoughtful response to the recommendations of the reviewers.



Jim Basinger  
Associate Vice-President Research

cc: Peta Bonham Smith, Vice-Dean Science  
Nick Ovsenek, Associate Dean Medicine  
Ajay Dalai, Associate Dean Engineering  
Sue Abrams, Principal Research Officer, NRC-PBI  
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