

**COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INCLUSION  
IN AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION:**

**A THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF  
AUQA'S CYCLE 1 AUDITS**

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**AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY**



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## Executive Summary

This publication provides the results of a thematic analysis of community engagement and inclusion in the Australian higher education sector as reflected in the reports of AUQA's first cycle of university audits from 2002 to 2007. For many universities, especially those with regional responsibilities, the two topics of community engagement and inclusion are closely linked. In this context, 'inclusion' means efforts by universities to increase the participation and success of groups of people who are under-represented in higher education as well as outreach activities to engage and involve these groups within the community.

The analysis was conducted by examining all 39 university audit reports, extracting text relevant to community engagement or inclusion, and considering previous analyses of AUQA audit reports as well as good practices contained in the AUQA Good Practice Database. Of the 39 university audit reports considered, all 39 contained discussion of community engagement and/or inclusion. In 36 reports, universities received commendations, affirmations or recommendations that relate to community engagement and/or inclusion.

Audit report findings and discussions have been presented in this Report using the five themes of:

1. Strategy, policies and leadership
2. University-wide partnerships
3. Engaged teaching and research
4. Traditional outreach
5. Social inclusion.

The ways in which universities have conceptualised community engagement and inclusion together with illustrative examples, are reviewed and described under each of these themes in sections 4 to 8 of the Report. Our emphasis has been on showcasing examples of innovative or good practice, especially those practices that may be transferable.

While care should be taken to interpret major audit findings outside their specific context, some interesting points emerge from an overview of these findings. A total of around 90 commendations that explicitly relate to community engagement and social inclusion has been identified from Cycle 1 audit reports. More than fifty affirmations and recommendations have been identified. The overall distribution suggests that AUQA audit panels have viewed positively universities' efforts to improve the quality of their relations with communities and to encourage access and participation among under-represented groups, within the context of individual missions.

The balance between commendations and affirmations/recommendations varies among the five themes. There are many more commendations than affirmations/recommendations in respect of the large themes of engaged teaching and research and social inclusion, but for strategy, policies and leadership the reverse is the case. In particular, audit panels have emphasised a need for improvement of strategies, policies and leadership for community engagement.

The detailed discussions in audit reports demonstrate that audit panels have tended to commend institutions for the (often specific) engagement activities they have undertaken to build good relationships with their communities, while not imposing requirements for additional activities.

For the other two themes (university-wide partnerships and traditional outreach), there are many more commendations than affirmations or recommendations. Reflecting an emphasis in the literature and within many universities on developing 'two-way' engagement between universities and their communities, rather than the more traditional cultural and sporting 'service', the number of commendations and affirmations/recommendations for 'traditional outreach' activities is quite small.

The 36 commendations which have been written up as Good Practices in the AUQA Good Practice Database (as at August 2008) indicate that AUQA has been keen to encourage universities in their efforts to codify and further develop understandings and practices in respect of engagement as well as pointing to successful strategies for promoting social inclusion.

The range of the contextualised discussions in audit reports reflects the diversity of the Australian university sector and its relationships to numerous communities. For example, community engagement is likely to be viewed and operationalised differently depending on whether a university has state- or territory-wide responsibilities, obligations to particular regional or rural communities or obligations to increase participation in metropolitan areas. In addition, individual universities have identified numerous opportunities for partnerships for development of teaching and research at the local level, all of which contribute to the multiple and overlapping ways in which community engagement is being enacted.

# 1 Approach and Context

From time to time, AUQA carries out or commissions analyses of its audit reports to gain an overview of the information and findings in institutional audits. These analyses give useful information to institutions, their governing bodies, senior management, staff, students, and other stakeholders, on the issues that have emerged from the institutional audits. This document is one such thematic analysis, presenting information on community engagement and inclusion in the Australian higher education sector. It is based on AUQA's Cycle 1 audit reports of all Australian universities.

## 1.1 Approach taken in this Report

In this Report, 'community engagement' is treated broadly as encompassing all forms of interaction between universities and their various external communities, including engagement with regional partners, industry, government, alumni, Indigenous communities, community organisations, and other education sectors. The Report also includes attention to issues that are significant to the social well-being of these communities, such as social integration and participation for persons living in Australia. For this reason, engagement practices that relate to access and participation student life as well as to universities' missions in respect of social justice are included.

Not all these subjects are covered in equal depth. The emphasis in the Report is on engagement and inclusion in an Australian context, although some specific examples are provided of international engagement. In general, however, this Report does not include engagement with international partners or offshore community engagement nor does it address social integration of international students studying in Australia or overseas. Similarly, internal university communities and collegiality, while significant for all higher education institutions, are not the subject of this Report.

Significant issues and AUQA audit findings relating to Indigenous Australians have been provided previously in the analysis by Antony Stella and David Woodhouse 'Serving the Cause of Indigenous Issues: Thematic Analysis of the Institutional Audit Reports of AUQA' (2006). For this reason, the coverage in this Report is brief. In addition, a brief analysis of the treatment of equity issues in audit reports was presented by Jeanette Baird at the 2005 National Higher Education Student Equity Forum meeting in Canberra.

The Report covers the 39 Cycle 1 AUQA audit reports for Australian universities. Cycle 1 audits were conducted for four other institutions that, like universities, have the authority to internally accredit their courses. As each of these institutions works with a very specific constituency or community, to some extent their entire practice could be considered 'community engagement', and they have not been included in this analysis. (The four institutions are: Australian Film, TV and Radio School;

Australian Maritime College, now part of the University of Tasmania; Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education; and the Melbourne College of Divinity.)

The analysis was conducted by examining all 39 university audit reports and extracting text relevant to community engagement or social inclusion, in addition to identifying commendations, affirmations and recommendations. Previous analyses of AUQA audit reports were considered as were entries in the AUQA Good Practice Database and Progress Reports in response to audit findings. The overall balance and nature of commendations, affirmations and recommendations was reviewed. A broad categorisation of major themes was developed, with examples under each.

The Report aims to highlight innovative and transferable practices, as well as providing specific examples to illustrate the range of activities under way. For this reason, and in contrast to some other thematic analyses of Cycle 1 audits, quotes from AUQA audit reports in this publication do identify the particular university.

The commentary in the following sections should be considered in regard to the AUQA audit process and the time span of the audit reports considered for this analysis.

The anchor point for AUQA audit is the auditee's objectives, i.e. what the institution aims to achieve. It is explicitly the responsibility of the auditee to devise a systematic process to evaluate how well it is achieving its objectives using criteria which may include relevance, desirability, feasibility, distinctiveness, and measurability, accompanied by appropriate outcome indicators (see also section 1.3). As each auditee has systems relevant to its own objectives and character, the actual procedures used and how they are implemented vary from auditee to auditee. Consequently, the treatment of a particular topic differs from audit to audit. Institutions that have community engagement or inclusion written specifically into their objectives could expect to be audited more closely on how they achieve those objectives.

Moreover, the audit reports considered for this analysis have been published over a period of around five years, from October 2002 to November 2007. In a rapidly changing higher education sector this time span makes generalisations difficult. This Report highlights how certain aspects of community engagement were being implemented by Australian universities at the time of audit and how the audit panels commented on these. The Report does not describe the present situation of community engagement activities or thinking in the Australian higher education sector. In fact, since the Cycle 1 reports, significant institutional efforts have gone into better and more effective ways of conceptualising, conducting and monitoring community engagement, partly triggered by AUQA audits, and there has been significant cross-institutional sharing of experience. For earlier auditees in particular, the situation in 2008 may be quite different to that seen by the audit panel.

This Report recognises that attention to community engagement is increasing in the higher education sector and that institutions have an obligation to engage with the community in a meaningful manner. However the Report does not seek to explain how institutions should engage with their communities nor does it suggest that some

form of overt community engagement is the only way to establish a mutually beneficial relationship with the community or encourage social inclusion. By commenting on institutions' good practices and successful outcomes, and by bringing to the attention of the institutions the areas that need improvement, AUQA audit reports have communicated certain elements of good practices. The Report attempts to highlight these elements.

This Report is published at a time when the second cycle of AUQA audits is under way. For some universities, community engagement will be one of the two themes that is audited in greater depth. As well, the current audits will follow up some recommendations from the 2002–2007 audits, so progress against recommendations on community engagement may be investigated in this way even if engagement is not a specific theme for the second audit.

An earlier version of the analysis in this report was presented by Antony Stella at the AUCEA conference on 'The Scholarship of Engagement: Australia's Way Forward' held in Alice Springs on 2–4 July 2007 and subsequently published (Stella 2008).

## **1.2 Structure of this Report**

This Report has a specific focus on community engagement and inclusion but some earlier reports carried out or commissioned by AUQA also comment on community engagement as a part of their broader remit. Section 2 discusses relevant findings from those earlier analyses.

The Report examines all observations found throughout the audit reports as well as the major audit conclusions. In section 3, the most significant audit findings, taking the form of commendations, affirmations and recommendations, are examined. In acknowledgment of the degree of interest in the balance across positive findings and areas for improvement, this section comments on how such a focused analysis should be interpreted. In sections 4 to 8 issues commented on by audit panels in the 39 audit reports are presented under five major sub-themes.

After publication of the audit reports, two mechanisms support post-audit developments in Australian universities. One is the Good Practice Database (GPDB) that AUQA administers as a quality enhancement tool, whereby commendations that are transferable to other organisational settings are published with a more extensive description of the practice by the auditee. The other mechanism is the progress report, which an auditee has to submit to AUQA 18 months after the publication of the Cycle 1 audit report. Section 9 comments on the GPDB entries and draws out some of the changes made by universities since their audit reports. Drawing on the commendations and positive comments on various policies and practices of the auditees, section 10 concludes that the picture that emerges is one of consolidation and further development, with some areas requiring attention.

## **1.3 Community engagement, inclusion and quality audit**

As noted above, AUQA's attention to the community engagement and inclusion activities of Australian universities has been determined by the approach it has

adopted to achieve its objectives. AUQA's central responsibility is to carry out 'audits of quality assurance arrangements relating to the activities of Australian universities' (and certain other organisations). Taking 'fitness for purpose' as the definition of quality, AUQA investigates how an institution goes about achieving its goals, and how well it is in fact achieving them. AUQA does this by adopting an audit approach that evaluates aspects of an institution's quality assurance arrangements on four elements of a continuous quality improvement cycle: Approach, Deployment, Results and Improvement (ADRI). The manner in which this approach guides the audit panels is discussed in the AUQA Audit Manual (AUQA 2008).

The 'Approach' includes the trail from an organisation's overall objectives through to more specific goals and the planned arrangements for how these will be achieved, including policies and rules. In relation to community engagement and inclusion, the audit panel's investigation is along the following lines:

- What are the specific goals and objectives of the institution in relation to community engagement? And in relation to equity and social inclusion?
- What outcomes is it trying to achieve?
- What, if any, reference points are used in establishing the institution's community engagement objectives or goals for inclusion?
- How does the institution plan to achieve those objectives?
- Does it understand its context and capabilities?
- Are those objectives set against appropriate benchmarks?
- Is the approach reflected in relevant policies and other documents that interpret institutional intent?
- Is the approach aligned and communicated throughout the institution and more widely?

In understanding an auditee's approach to community engagement, an AUQA audit panel is likely to discuss with the auditee such topics as how community engagement goals have been decided, the factors that were taken into account in their development and the stakeholders that were consulted.

In respect of inclusion, audit panels are aware that the Federal Department of Employment, Education and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and its predecessors have for many years collected data on the access, participation, retention and success of groups that are under-represented in higher education (Indigenous students; students from areas of low socio-economic status; students from rural and isolated areas; students with a disability). DEEWR has also provided incentives for universities to improve their performance against these indicators and relative to other institutions. A panel will discuss with the auditee how its student profile reflects these groups and the elements of its plans to improve participation and success.

The 'Deployment' dimension considers whether, and how effectively, the approach is being put into effect. Broad audit questions include the following:

- Is the approach (to achieve community engagement goals or targets for representation of equity groups) being deployed consistently and in the best possible manner? According to whom?
- What benchmarks is the institution using to assess this?
- If the approach is not being deployed, why not, and how is this managed?
- Are staff appropriately supported and resources appropriately deployed to achieve the community engagement and social inclusion goals?

The 'Results' dimension considers an institution's results to determine how well the deployment is achieving the planned approach. Broad audit questions include the following:

- Is the institution achieving its intended community engagement and inclusion outcomes? How does the institution's performance on equity indicators compare to sector and other performance?
- Does the institution understand why and how it achieved those particular results, i.e. are the results a consequence of the approach and deployment?
- How are the results reported and used within the institution?

The 'Improvement' dimension focuses on whether the institution is actively and continuously engaged with understanding its performance in each of the A-D-R dimensions, and whether it is using this understanding to bring about improvements. Broad audit questions include the following:

- Does the institution know how it can improve its community engagement and inclusion outcomes?
- How does it know this (e.g. through the use of external benchmarks or successful strategies used by others)?
- How is it acting upon this knowledge?
- Does the institution have a sustained history of improvement?

In addition to 'fitness for purpose', AUQA also considers 'fitness of purpose' by investigating certain external reference points to which the institution must, or has voluntarily decided to, comply. These include: the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes*; the institution's own enabling legislation and regulations; other government requirements, e.g. in respect of equity indicators and funding; and various guidelines of peak bodies, such as Universities Australia. Commitment to community engagement and to equity goals is expected of all Australian universities and to this extent it is part of any institution's objectives.

#### **1.4 Community engagement as an element of higher education policy**

Australian higher education institutions, as a part of civil society, have been expected to serve the public good, contribute to the maintenance of a democratic system and respond to the needs of the community. To meet these expectations, universities interact with their communities in a range of ways and with varying levels of commitment. Globally there is a strong tradition of higher education institutions

interacting with their communities. However, an emerging political and intellectual agenda around communities and the social benefits of higher education has begun to emphasise the accountability of higher education institutions for their responsibilities to the communities they wish to serve. It is in this context that the term 'community engagement' has come to the forefront in many discussions the world over.

Although interaction with community is not new to Australian universities, in recent years discussion on their community engagement strategies has become more visible. References to 'Third Stream funding' drawn from UK approaches, explicit mention of the community engagement goal in the 2007 revision of the *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* (MCEETYA 2007), the advocacy played by networks of universities such as the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA), the number of projects in progress on community engagement, the number of scholarly articles and papers published on the topic all demonstrate the increasing attention given to community engagement.

The Australian Government Ministerial consultation paper entitled 'Education at the Crossroads: An Overview Paper' (DEST 2002) emphasised that 'higher education institutions need to be responsive to the social, economic and cultural needs of the communities in which they are located and foster a more active engagement with these communities. The obligation for community engagement is one that rests with all higher education institutions, but regional institutions and campuses clearly have a special responsibility to their communities' (section 109).

The paper also noted that 'engagement is a two way process. Both parties need to agree on mutual objectives, which may include job generation, business and investment growth and increased participation' (section 112). Advocating a new compact of mutual obligation, involving active partnerships between various stakeholders, the paper raised a number of questions such as 'Should universities be specifically funded for community service activities and, if so, who should pay? How can government policy encourage universities to focus on being of service to the community?' (section 113 and below).

These consultative questions have influenced the discussion on 'Third Stream' funding, which has steered the community engagement agenda in a new direction. The argument for this funding model is that, unlike the commercial application of knowledge emerging from universities, universities are also engaged in significant non-commercial engagement with communities that has substantial impact. The introductory chapter of 'Atlas of Higher Education: A community focus' by Steve Garlick, in Cumpston et al. (2001), argues that 'Individual regions, through their distinctiveness are often better placed than nation states to develop competitive advantage in their local industries. By focusing on their areas of research strength and improving their linkages with industry in the regions, as well as their local communities, universities are in a unique position to transfer knowledge and skills into initiatives for economic growth, environmental improvement and community development'.

The discussion paper on 'The Third Mission of Universities – Business and Community Engagement, Outreach, and Regional Development' developed by the Innovative Research Universities Australia group (IRUA 2005) acknowledges that '...vast amounts of university knowledge are shared freely for the public good, resulting in economic and social benefits' (p3). The paper also contains the argument that 'of the range of knowledge, technology, skills and services that universities make available to external users of all kinds, only a small portion earn income for universities' (p3). The paper recommends the development of a Third Stream Funding model that allows for the most efficient and effective transfer and application of university knowledge.

The revised *National Protocols for Higher Education Approvals Processes* (MCEETYA 2007) added strength to the emphasis on community engagement through a fresh articulation of national expectations. All higher education institutions in Australia are required to meet criteria stated in the Protocols. The goals of higher education in Australia presented in the National Protocols include inter alia: '...equipping the community with social, cultural and international knowledge, skills and attitudes to improve the quality of life for all citizens'. In addition to contributing to this goal, institutions receiving significant public funds are expected to 'engage with the community to enhance material, human, social and/or environmental wellbeing of the community'.

These developments have influenced the Australian policy context and discussions over the past few years. In 2008, the new Federal Government is emphasising social inclusion and has signalled an interest in funding universities for mission-based compacts.

### **1.5 Evolving interpretations and practices**

Complementing these developments in higher education policy, work is in progress in many Australian universities to develop operational definitions, frameworks and benchmarks for community engagement. There is a growing body of literature analysing the impact of enhanced relationships with communities on academic organisations and cultural values. The Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance (AUCEA) has facilitated discussion among people with responsibility for, and experience in, community engagement portfolios. As a result new meanings, interpretations and definitions are emerging.

Acknowledging the full range of engagement activities pursued by Australian universities, AUCEA endorses the view that 'university-community engagement specifically implies collaborative relationships leading to productive partnerships that yield mutually beneficial outcomes'. It recognises a range of communities for the universities such as businesses, industries, professional associations, schools, governments, alumni, indigenous and ethnic communities as well as groups of local citizens.

The study 'Beyond Rhetoric: University-Community Engagement in Victoria' (Winter et al. 2005) discusses the difference in terminologies and how universities have interpreted the idea of engagement variously. The study finds that all Victorian

universities integrate community engagement with teaching and research in different ways. 'In Search of Evidence: Measuring Community Engagement: A Pilot Study' (Goedegebuure and van der Lee 2006), building on the 'Beyond Rhetoric' study, also notes the variation in the use of the term. Some universities use the term 'community engagement' to denote their activities that have some 'public good' element. Many use it with a 'regional nature' and discuss how they relate to the region where they are located. Others use the term more internally to denote collegiality and shared values and talk about 'communities of academics' and 'communities of practice'. Considering the various usages, the report defines community engagement as 'the mechanism through which universities achieve the goals they have articulated in relation to specific communities in terms of their trinity of basic functions, i.e. teaching, research and service, whether at the strategic university level, or in project specific contexts' (p3).

As meanings and definitions evolve, the need to develop indicators, frameworks and benchmarks to monitor and track community engagement is starting to receive attention. The 'In Search of Evidence' study examined the possibility of drawing up a viable set of indicators for community engagement based upon an investigation of the relevant international literature. One of the key findings is that 'there seems to be a dominance of indicators to measure commercialisation, technology transfer and spin-offs. If community engagement is reported upon, it is done in an inconsistent and qualitative way' (Goedegebuure and van der Lee 2006 p3).

After an international literature search and evaluation of the available indicators to measure community engagement the researchers used the Russell Group Indicators, developed for elite universities in the UK. Their research suggests that 'at present there is insufficient information reported to even superficially understand the level of community engagement being undertaken by a university' (p29). The researchers believe that 'this is not the result of the indicator set selected, but is the consequence of what universities report – or not report for that matter – in the area of community engagement' (p2). To address this gap, the study recommends that the reporting of existing data could take better account of university-community engagement activities.

McKenna et al. (2007) studied the frameworks for community engagement set out by many Australian universities and the international literature on the topic, and developed a quality management framework for university engagement. The framework, with four quality management clusters, facilitates evaluation at various levels of engagement such as 'conceptualisation and planning', 'resourcing', 'implementation' and 'impact'. The authors suggest that the framework simply provides a number of quality check points for reflection and that there is no one best way to address each of them. They argue that a shared framework and tracking system would enable the sector to better identify and share good practice.

AUCEA has developed a national benchmarking framework to assist universities improve engagement with their communities. AUCEA states that the framework 'aims to provide universities with a basic capacity to make ongoing comparisons with other universities throughout Australia and, through this, the adoption of 'good practice' where relevant to their circumstances, while at the same time retaining

institutional confidentiality and individuality.' It also '...aims to provide the core elements for each university to tailor a more comprehensive local benchmarking process that will best fit their particular mission and community context' (AUCEA 2008). The benchmarking framework comprises goals, strategies and measures that are commonly associated with high quality and effective engagement. Swinburne University of Technology is hosting the pilot project. As the project progresses challenges also emerge, and Langworthy (2007) acknowledges that the definitions need to be sharpened and methodologies refined.

Amidst these developments, Australian universities have been experimenting and piloting a range of strategies and practices to engage with their communities. The audit panels that visited these institutions over a period of five years have noted both good practices and areas that need improvement, and recorded them in the audit reports.

## 2 Earlier Analyses

Community engagement is one of the larger themes investigated in AUQA's cycle 1 audits. The following analyses have commented on the extent to which AUQA audit panels have made findings relating to community engagement.

### 2.1 Dr Anne Martin's analysis

AUQA began its first institutional audits in 2002 and the Board of AUQA commissioned Dr Anne Martin early in 2003 to prepare a thematic summary of the eight audit reports published at that time. Dr Martin's report presented an analytic overview of themes and issues emerging from the audit reports. Among the 71 issues presented in the report (39 key issues and 32 other issues) under twelve themes, 'Community Engagement and Partnerships' emerged as a significant topic (Martin 2003).

Dr Martin's report revealed that community engagement was considerably less thoroughly covered in the first eight audit reports than teaching and research. This may be attributed to the absence within the Australian sector of a public discourse around engagement at the time or to the fact that this is an area in which quality assurance systems are difficult to construct and therefore difficult for AUQA to assess. The audits found that the institutions' engagement with the community often revolved around particular initiatives, such as the establishment of research parks, or traditional outreach through campus-based learning or cultural activities. These initiatives were often entrepreneurial in nature. Collaboration with industry or with other educational providers — generally through strategic alliances with local technical and further education institutes — was commended at several institutions.

Reports that commented on the 'town/gown' interface found that the universities had good relations with their communities, and often strong support from these communities. Several institutions were praised for their commitment to serving local or regional constituencies. There was some evidence that the value of community support and the institution's public reputation was not always recognised by the institutions. In one case, an institution was criticised by AUQA for not taking sufficient account in its planning of external perceptions of the institution's strengths and weaknesses. Another was felt to be missing opportunities by not capitalising on its location.

Dr Martin noted the positive comments in audit reports on strategies to meet the needs of Indigenous students. She founds that audit reports tended to 'comment in passing on the institutions' student profile, noting, for example, its diversity, the presence of designated equity groups or of significant numbers of off campus students', with two institutions being commended for 'their outreach to specific student populations'.

While audits found evidence of numerous examples of institutional-level community relations activities, few institutions had clear organisational structures to provide leadership for their community interface. Most commonly, individual staff took the lead in external engagement, for example through the provision of expert opinions in the media.

## **2.2 Professor Ray W. Cooksey's analysis**

By September 2003, when AUQA had conducted three trial audits (one agency and two universities) and published 10 formal audit reports, Professor Ray W. Cooksey carried out an analysis of the commendations and recommendations that AUQA audit panels had produced across the different universities. Among other things, the analysis recognised the potential for learning from the commendations and recommendations, as certain consistent themes can be identified as emerging across universities, which may point to more general problem areas in the sector as well as to areas where the sector appears to be doing well. This analysis was undertaken as private research by Professor Cooksey and kindly made available to AUQA for its own purposes.

All commendations and recommendations from the ten AUQA audit reports published as at 30 September 2003 and recommendations from the trial audit of the University of New South Wales were considered for the analysis. To carry out the analysis, ten major macro themes and 83 micro themes were identified, under which all the commendations and recommendations were coded.

To highlight emergent patterns, Professor Cooksey identified 'more prevalent micro sub-themes' and 'highly prevalent micro-themes'. Although AUQA discourages anyone from seeing the number of commendations or recommendations in an audit report as some sort of 'quality index', it is possible to derive some cautious conclusions based on the numbers that emerge in relation to sub-themes (see section 3). Professor Cooksey's report categorises more prevalent micro sub-themes in each macro category as those with five or more coded instances and highly prevalent micro-themes as those with ten or more coded instances.

The analysis revealed that in commending universities, AUQA found 'External & Partner Relations' to be a main area of achievement, others being 'Management, Staff & Student Support Systems', 'Management & Structure' and 'Quality Assurance'. Within the macro category of 'External & Partner Relations', the analysis found that 'community, industry & external relationships' was the most highly prevalent micro-theme.

## **2.3 Professor Susan Holland's analysis**

In September 2004, Professor Susan Holland was commissioned by the AUQA Board to undertake a meta-analysis of the 19 institutional reports published to date (the half-way mark in the first audit cycle). The main purpose of the meta-analysis was to analyse the reports for coverage of academic activities and the general consistency or lack thereof across the reports. The report was written in confidence for the AUQA Board rather than for public release.

Professor Holland reported that community-related forms of activity appeared to be less well-defined at an institutional level in comparison to other core university activities. While many actions and characteristics concerning community engagement and partnerships had been commended, the nature of the future action outlined in the audit recommendations suggested that AUQA regarded this activity as less mature in a policy, planning and strategic sense. The report also pointed out that there were hardly any citations directly concerned with outcomes in community engagement and partnerships.

#### **2.4 Stella and Woodhouse report on Indigenous issues**

Serving the cause of the Indigenous people is a major element of community engagement in the Australian context and the Australian universities have a pivotal role in this. In a report commissioned by the Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council in September 2006, AUQA analysed the 31 audit reports published at that time. The analysis, carried out by Dr Antony Stella, identified areas needing attention and other areas that were strong in the Australian higher education sector (Stella and Woodhouse 2006).

Areas particularly requiring attention were: university-wide coordination of activities; more system-wide approaches and explicit sharing of good practices; better use of the equity indicators to guide planning and actions; development of Indigenous staff; and enhancement of the cultural context. Other gaps noted in audit reports include: locating accountability and responsibility with a senior staff member; Indigenous membership of governing boards; awareness of Indigenous aspects among other staff and units; research models for Indigenous issues; and Indigenous staff recruitment.

Major areas of strength were the existence of Indigenous objectives, advisory committees and support centres. Most Australian universities had demonstrated tangible results by establishing support units, schools or research centres specifically dedicated to promoting Indigenous participation and Indigenous studies. In addition, flexible approaches to suit the learning styles of Indigenous students, Indigenous subjects, special drives and personalised support emerged as strengths.

### **3 Most Significant Findings from Cycle 1 audits**

#### **3.1 Commendations, affirmations and recommendations**

Each audit report contains a summary of findings together with a list of commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A commendation refers to the achievement of a stated goal, or to some plan or activity that has led to, or appears likely to lead to, the achievement of a stated goal, and which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. A recommendation refers to an area in need of attention, whether in respect of approach, deployment or results, which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. Where such matters have already been identified by the auditee, with evidence, they are termed 'affirmations'. In addition, throughout the text of the audit reports there are variously positive comments and suggestions for improvement.

Although many audit reports contain quite detailed discussions and observations relating to community engagement and inclusion, there is always a tendency to focus on the major audit conclusions as expressed in commendations, affirmations and recommendations. While this approach may serve certain purposes, it also provides some misleading signals if not considered in the light of the overall discussions.

As noted in section 1, audit panels investigate a university's activities taking the institution's goals and objectives as the starting point. Not all panel observations become audit conclusions; but the ones that do have a very significant bearing on progress towards those goals and objectives. However, one or more recommendations on community engagement in an audit report do not necessarily mean that the university is weaker than others in that aspect. A recommendation should more usefully be interpreted as signifying that, for the goals and objectives of that auditee, community engagement requires further attention. For example, universities that have a regional focus and aim to serve the local community may receive many recommendations on more meaningful and effective ways of engaging with the local community. This is not necessarily because 'community engagement' is a weakness or neglected in those institutions (the reverse may well be the case) but because those institutions aspire to be strongly focused on their local communities and so the audit panels have paid particular attention to aspects that need to be strengthened to progress towards meeting those goals.

At the same time and amid this diversity, all Australian universities have made a commitment to promote the Indigenous cause, engage with the community, ensure certain levels of student support, and so on. These commitments provide an anchor point for audit panels to observe common patterns. If audit panels find that significant improvements are required in these areas, recommendations could be expected to result, irrespective of the specific mission of the university. Seen from this point of view, an analysis of the commendations in audit reports can point to particularly effective or helpful practices and outcomes, while an analysis of

affirmations and recommendations potentially can throw light on some broad areas of community engagement and inclusion needing attention.

Of the 39 university audit reports considered, **36 received commendations, affirmations or recommendations that relate to community engagement and/or inclusion**. In the other three institutions, the audit panels have made observations on community engagement or inclusion in the text of the report without providing a major audit finding. These observations are likely to be embedded in a more general discussion (typically a chapter in the audit report) that includes engagement and inclusion, consistent with the approach taken by the particular auditee.

Of the 36 auditees for which major findings were recorded, eight institutions received only commendations and positive observations about their community engagement initiatives. The remaining 28 universities received either affirmations or recommendations or a combination of commendations and affirmations and/or recommendations. The largest number of significant audit findings in any one audit report was 6, which should be taken as an indication of the importance of matters of engagement and inclusion to the institution's overall mission.

A total of around 90 commendations that explicitly relate to community engagement and social inclusion has been identified from Cycle 1 audit reports. More than fifty affirmations and recommendations have been identified. The overall balance suggests that AUQA audit panels have viewed positively universities' efforts to improve the quality of their relations with communities and to encourage access and participation among under-represented groups, within the context of individual missions.

These numbers should not be read as absolute: other readers may omit some examples and include others. Within the broad scope defined for 'community engagement and inclusion', some judgements have had to be made about which audit findings to include in the analysis. Universities conceptualise the most important elements of their engagement in different ways and audit findings may reflect this. Audit panels may also direct their findings towards or away from the implications for universities' wider engagement.

In general, commendations, affirmations and recommendations refer directly to external communities, to inclusive practices or to particular segments of the community have been included. Audit findings that are couched in terms of institutional practices without such reference have mostly not been included.

For example, one audit report mentioned in the text that the auditee had done well in establishing partnerships and linkages with industry and other community partners. The audit panel found that these linkages helped in promoting benefit to the community as well as commercialisation opportunities for research. However, the relevant commendation was worded only mentions research commercialisation goals, without an explicit mention of linkage with community partners. Hence, this recommendation has not been counted in the analysis.

Another auditee was commended for its environment policy, the performance indicators it used to monitor its performance, and the range of environmental programs and initiatives it had developed for the campus community as well as for the external community. However, what the institution does in the external community gets only passing reference in the text. What the auditee does on campus to improve environmental sustainability was elaborated and the report had a general commendation that mentions how environmental programs were supported by effective organisational structures. Once again, that commendation has not been included in this section.

Some audit reports have very favourable comments as well as recommendations on community engagement, but these did not become major audit conclusions for reasons such as newness of the activity, lack of evidence to demonstrate the sustainability and benefits of those efforts, and the activity not being judged to be of enough significance to the strategic priorities of the institution.

### **3.2 Main themes emerging from audit report findings**

The around 90 commendations and over 50 affirmations/recommendations identified in audit reports can be categorised under five main themes:

1. Strategy, policies and leadership
2. University-wide partnerships
3. Engaged teaching and research
4. Traditional outreach
5. Social inclusion.

It should be emphasised that this is a derived schema, not a reflection of the ways in which audit panels have conceptualised the issues relating to community engagement and inclusion. These themes overlap and there is not always a clear line between, for example, traditional outreach activities and engaged teaching and research. Some commendations, affirmations and recommendations cover more than one of these themes, as in the following example which addresses inclusion, engaged teaching and traditional outreach:

*AUQA commends the University of New England for a wide range of examples of positive community linkages, including Access Centres, relationships with Indigenous communities and sharing facilities. (AUQA 2004b p43)*

Assigning each major finding to one of these five themes, the themes receiving most commendations, affirmations and recommendations in order are: engaged teaching and research; strategy, policies and leadership; and social inclusion.

The balance between commendations and affirmations/recommendations varies quite markedly among these three themes. There are many more commendations than affirmations/recommendations in respect of engaged teaching and research and social inclusion, but for strategy, policies and leadership the reverse is the case.

For the other two themes (university-wide partnerships and traditional outreach), there are many more commendations than affirmations or recommendations.

While these findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive, they show the extent to which audit panels have emphasised a need for improvement of strategies, policies and leadership for community engagement, in particular. The findings also demonstrate that audit panels have tended to commend institutions for the (often specific) engagement activities they have undertaken to build good relationships with their communities, while not imposing requirements for additional activities.

Reflecting an emphasis in the literature and within many universities on developing 'two-way' engagement between universities and their communities rather than more traditional cultural and sporting 'service', the number of commendations and affirmations/recommendations for 'traditional outreach' activities is quite small.

When the nature of the major findings is considered in more detail, the differing emphases between commendations and affirmations/recommendations in audit reports become evident, as shown in the table on the next page.

Audit report findings in respect of each of the five themes are explored further in sections 4 to 8. The range of the contextualised discussions in audit reports reflects the diversity of the Australian university sector and its relationships to multiple communities. For example, community engagement is likely to be viewed and operationalised differently depending on whether a university has state- or territory-wide responsibilities, obligations to particular regional or rural communities or obligations to increase participation in metropolitan areas.

In addition, individual universities have identified numerous opportunities for partnerships for development of teaching and research at the local level, all of which contribute to the multiple and overlapping ways in which community engagement is being enacted.

Theme	Nature of Commendations (good practices)	Nature of Affirmations/Recommendations (areas for improvement)
Strategy, Policies and Leadership	Commitment to community engagement Commitment to serving a region Commitment to equity objectives	Review and restructure of strategies and plans on community engagement Leadership, coordination and university-wide understanding Measuring and tracking community engagement Recognition for community engagement activities by staff Resourcing for community engagement (infrastructure, time, money and staff)
University-wide partnerships	Embracing a commitment to regional communities Functioning of advisory committees	Communication and consultation with external communities Strengthening linkages with alumni
Engaged Teaching and Research	Effective liaison with schools and TAFE Articulation arrangements and pathways for students Benefits to community through research Course offerings and customisation to meet community needs Linkage with industry and commercial organisations Functioning of advisory committees Student engagement in community service	Informing industry and the community about university research capabilities Quality assurance for practicum placements Research on community engagement
Traditional Outreach	Specific centres for community use Harmonious relations with local communities	Communicating the university's services
Social Inclusion	Attention to equity issues Support for participation and success of Indigenous issues Fostering access to students from disadvantaged groups	Planning for equity and access Implementation of strategies Resourcing and leadership

## 4 Strategy, Policies and Leadership

### 4.1 Varying interpretations

The interface of institutions with their external community, variously described in terms of 'service', 'engagement', or 'partnership', is traditionally a core concern of universities. However, the patterns of engagement vary from institution to institution and from region to region. Each institution is different, and therefore AUQA audit panels have contextualised community engagement issues when commenting on them.

As most Australian universities are established by state or territory legislation, many statutes have specific reference to contributing to the welfare of the state/territory and its people. Explicitly or implicitly, community engagement goals are recognised in some form in university enabling Acts, frequently in a regional context. Regional missions are often thought of as applying to country or rural areas, but they also apply to metropolitan localities. For example, the *Victoria University of Technology Act 1990 (Vic)* emphasises the contribution of the University to the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne, while the *University of Western Sydney Act 1997 (NSW)* states that the University should have particular regard to the needs and aspirations of the residents of Greater Western Sydney.

Similarly, Charles Sturt University's Strategic Plan includes the following statement with respect to regional engagement:

*...the University has an obligation to the communities in western and southwestern New South Wales and northern Victoria, regions that correspond well with the footprint of the Wiradjuri people. The University considers service to these regions and its communities to be a priority and commits itself to undertaking dynamic and sustainable regional engagement'... (AUQA 2004f p15)*

While universities have been accustomed to integrate community engagement with their other core functions to varying degrees, specific emphasis on community engagement as the third core function of higher education institutions is still new to some institutions and plans to deploy activities are still evolving.

Different institutions handle differently the matter of external relations with the communities or constituencies they serve. For some institutions, their location within one or more defined communities is a key focus and a defining part of their mission and founding legislation or one of a number of strong aspects of their identity. For others, the community is simply contextual. Whatever the level of community orientation, it is evident from the audit reports that most universities have a genuine desire to work in close collaboration with their communities.

*Example:*

The *Millennium Document* of James Cook University includes the following Priority Objectives with respect to Service to the Region and Community:

1. *Participation: 'To secure a level of funded places for JCU which responds to and reflects the needs of the region and to promote and facilitate the participation of those relatively under-represented in higher education, especially indigenous people.'*
2. *Engagement: 'To continue the process of engagement with our region so that the University is increasingly an integral and inseparable element of the economic, cultural and intellectual life of northern Queensland.'*
3. *Consolidation: 'To develop the full potential of the Cairns and Townsville campuses within a unified James Cook University identity, and to foster in our outreach sites an increasing sense of being integral parts of the JCU community.'*

(AUQA 2004e p38)

As well as differences among universities in their emphasis on community engagement, the concept of 'engaging with the community' means different things to different institutions and even to different parts of same institution. Indeed, the concept of 'community' itself has been defined variously by institutions and accordingly colours the interpretation of the terms such as 'community service' and 'community engagement'.

Some institutions use the term 'community' it to denote 'the larger public' and anything that has some 'public good' value. Many use it in a regional context to denote people and groups in the region – or regions – in which the university is based, i.e. to speak of specific communities. In general, the usage encompasses activities such as: consultancy; links with secondary schools; staff involvement in public talks; membership of staff in external committees, boards and advisory groups; supporting students with special needs; supporting special interest communities with access to knowledge to deal with their problems; and providing special assistance to equity groups (such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; women, particularly in non-traditional courses and postgraduate study; people with disabilities; people from non-English speaking backgrounds; and people from rural and isolated areas).

The need to develop a clearer definition of community service activities has been recommended in a number of audits. Panels also noticed the use of different terms (service, outreach, engagement) by varying groups within the same institution without a clear sense of whether a different meaning was intended or whether the terms were being used interchangeably.

Audit reports contain comments about the need to develop a shared understanding among staff of what is intended by community engagement and ensuring that this understanding is embedded in appropriate policies and position descriptions, as a corollary to the development of new 'community engagement plans'. Panels may

recognise institutional self-reflection on the language of 'community' and 'engagement' as a valuable process in its own right. In quality assurance terms, panels are likely to emphasise the need to minimise misunderstandings around an enormously rich and often 'taken for granted' set of meanings.

#### **4.2 From 'community service' to 'community engagement'**

A redefinition of the relationship with communities from the concept of 'community service' to 'community engagement' is occurring within Australian universities. In general, community engagement is seen as being less uni-directional, and representing a more interactive and collaborative relationship between the institution and each of its communities. The claims made by the institutions in their portfolio documents, as cited by audit panels in the audit reports, indicate a shift towards a mutually beneficial collaborative effort which many of the institutions are still discovering.

At the same time as universities are developing their policy approach, they are also starting to articulate the benefits of two-way community engagement. These vary from 'enhancing community understanding of the university' and essentially economic rationales through to generalised and widespread benefits of various types. For example; the 2005 Community Engagement Policy of the University of Tasmania states:

*Engagement activities should benefit both the Tasmanian community and the University. Through its engagement with the University, the Tasmanian community should benefit in cultural, economic and/or social terms. Community engagement should also build the University's reputation and standing in the community, and increase the community's knowledge, understanding and awareness of the University and its activities. (UTAS 2008)*

Audit panels found that the conceptual shift from 'service' to 'engagement' is supported by members of professional bodies and the communities who consider that the relationship between the universities and communities should be of a collaborative nature with benefits flowing both ways.

#### **4.3 Individual initiatives**

Many community engagement initiatives are ad hoc, especially in institutions where the community link is less centrally recognised in institutional goals. Many audit reports give the impression that existing partnerships are very much a product of individual initiatives by staff members. Audit panels found many distinctive pockets of excellence. However, in speaking with staff, students and community representatives, panels frequently formed the view that much good regional and community engagement work was a product of the sometimes unrecognised labour of enthusiastic and capable individuals working in different locations and situations, rather than being the product of a systematic approach.

As an example, in one university, a highly regarded internship program which places undergraduates in state parliamentary offices is run by a single energetic individual

as a part-time arrangement. The audit panel commented that this program has the potential for expanding politicians' understanding of the university and the issues it confronts.

While the extent of community engagement is considerable in many institutions, less evident is an integrated system for incorporating community engagement into the regular work of academic staff, as the following extract from the audit report for the University of New South Wales indicates:

*...the new Academic Promotion Policy and Procedures allows applicants to nominate service as one element of their portfolio. However, service is defined largely in terms of service to a profession or honorary professional services to the community. The Audit Panel suggests that once the University has clarified the role of community engagement in its overall vision, the Academic Promotion Policy and Procedures be revised to include appropriate recognition of staff contributions. (AUQA 2006a p44)*

Even in institutions where community engagement is recognised as an academic endeavour for the purposes of workload management, there can often be a lack of leadership for the praxis of community engagement. Audit reports highlight a number of instances where staff do not feel they are adequately supported or that their achievements are sufficiently recognised in terms of career progression. Audit panels have suggested that the introduction of excellence awards for community service or community engagement could further assist the universities to acknowledge and celebrate good practice in community relations.

From observations in the audit reports, there is scope for universities to increase their mechanisms for the nurture and support of staff in community-related activities through tangible support for and recognition of the value of these activities.

#### **4.4 University-wide approach and leadership**

Some institutions have very general policies and statements of principles for community engagement, rather than strategies and plans, but this is an area where institutions have realised the need to make improvements. Audit panels endorse the universities' intentions to develop university-wide strategies and operational plans to translate those policies and principles into action.

Even in institutions with a good deal of activity occurring with communities, there often is a fragmentation of activities across the institution. A lack of coordination might mean that people who are active in communities may not be aware of each others' activities, so the same community may be assisted independently by several different activities. Audit panels advise that it is worth reflecting on arrangements for the coordination of the community engagement activities, as the practical details involved in visiting, supporting, and encouraging people in communities need to be fully embraced.

Some institutions recognised the need for a more coordinated approach to community service activities when they undertook their self-assessment for AUQA

audit and developed plans to address the need. For example, one auditee indicated in its Portfolio that it was trying to develop a coordinated approach to community engagement through greater management, direction, support and reward of good practice. To address this, it had plans to undertake an audit of its community-related activities and to develop a university-wide policy and framework for community service and the audit panel supported this approach.

Another auditee doubted the benefits of systematising its approach to community engagement, if in the process it meant slowing down and bureaucratising the instinct of staff to develop partnerships. The auditee stated that until then its approach was to nurture this instinct, to provide support and checks against risk, but not to seek to standardise and control.

Audit panels have emphasised a need to encourage the involvement of more people at a higher level, particularly heads of units/divisions, in institutions' overall community outreach strategies, particularly in seeking input about how community outreach may be most beneficially pursued. Universities have been asked to consider how community outreach leadership is assigned and exercised within the campus. Whereas the other core functions of universities (teaching and research) both benefit from an explicitly dedicated executive responsibility such as pro vice-chancellors (PVCs) in teaching or research, in many institutions community engagement does not. However, in one auditee, the vice-chancellor sits on the regional development committee, demonstrating top-level commitment to the region.

Some institutions are at an early stage in giving practical effect to their community engagement policies. As the policies are implemented, it will be important to ensure that activities are appropriately coordinated and championed at a senior level. Audit panels have commented on the need to give universities' community engagement activities a higher profile, for example through a dedicated senior executive and a comprehensive community engagement plan.

Many universities have involved community members in developing their strategies. As a part of the main Audit Visit, audit panels meet with members of the external community. In most cases, these community members were overwhelmingly supportive of the universities and the manner in which the universities have actively reached out to their communities. In general, universities are regarded positively as being proactive leaders of development, while at the same time being willing to listen and respond to initiatives that community representatives propose.

Alliances with industry and the professions through external membership of advisory committees and statutory boards, staff membership of external commissions, co-hosting of events, joint and contract research, professional accreditation, and so on have been pursued by some universities HE in a strategic manner (see also section 6).

In several institutions, the establishment of the senior portfolio in community engagement has been a strategic move regarded positively within the university and by many of their external stakeholders as signalling the importance that these universities attach to engaging with their communities. To this end, a substantial

proportion of Australian universities now have a senior level position responsible for engagement. One example, from the audit report of Deakin University in Victoria, states:

*...the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Rural and Regional) has particular responsibility for enhancing the relevance and responsiveness of the University's teaching, research partnerships and international areas in the areas surrounding the University's Geelong and Warrnambool campuses. This appointment has been very positively received, particularly by members of the Warrnambool community, where the person is based and from where appropriate outreach activities extend. (AUQA 2005a pp33–34)*

To support these positions, institutions have established office structures with specific accountabilities. For example, the Office of Community Partnerships of one auditee has a specific objective to strategically and systematically strengthen the university's existing links with its communities. It is tasked with promoting the university externally, scanning issues of current concern to the community, and identifying those to which the university can make a contribution.

Many such initiatives to provide a more effective strategic approach and senior leadership are too new for audit panels to comment on. What is apparent is the significant potential for these initiatives to further enhance a coherent approach by universities to their community engagement activities.

#### **4.5 Keeping track and measuring outcomes**

Within institutions, departments and units have established links with various communities but not much has been done to track these links. Many universities have themselves identified that they could benefit from developing a method of recording the level of engagement of departments and individual staff with their region and its communities. Audit panels generally have suggested that such an approach might require a university-wide register or database of activities and community interactions.

While showcasing the skills and expertise available for commercial and entrepreneurial purposes has worked well in many institutions, the general local community has generally not been informed adequately. In some instances, community members wanting to approach universities with specific projects had difficulty identifying the appropriate point of contact. Audit reports advise that universities could do more to publicise the expertise and skills available.

One auditee has developed a Register of Professional Activities to record the participation of staff in professional boards and local community boards and councils.

The auditee noted that:

*...while these [community engagement] goals are considered to be important by the University, the responsibility for achieving them tends to be dissipated and diffused within the University, with the outcome being that it is often difficult to catalogue, document and analyse the University's contribution to regional engagement. (AUQA 2004f p37).*

The University recognised that further work was required to develop the compilation and analysis of staff contributions that support its regional engagement objectives.

Similarly, many universities acknowledge that more work is needed to develop indicators relevant to monitoring the achievement of their community engagement goals. Some audit panel comments indicated that community engagement does not infuse all aspects of activity and that it is important to develop a set of performance indicators on community engagement to monitor community engagement across various institutional activities.

*Example (Charles Sturt University):*

*The University's Strategic Plan includes the following statement with respect to regional engagement: 'the University has an obligation to the communities in western and southwestern New South Wales and northern Victoria, regions that correspond well with the footprint of the Wiradjuri people. The University considers service to these regions and its communities to be a priority and commits itself to undertaking dynamic and sustainable regional engagement'... (AUQA 2004f p15)*

*...The University notes in its Performance Portfolio that it 'considers that its regional, national and international roles are integrally linked and that they are mutually reinforcing. Thus, for instance, the University's success in attracting national and international students strengthens the programs it is able to offer its regional communities'. Accordingly, the University lists the following as key indicators of its performance with respect to regional engagement:*

- *presence of international students on campus*
- *participation in international exchange*
- *Indigenous student participation and success*
- *demand from regional students*
- *graduate employment in regional locations*
- *register of regional research activities*
- *value of University sponsored regional consultancies, and*
- *contributions to regional communities (artistic, cultural and sporting).*

*(AUQA 2004f p37)*

The audit report comments that the University has acknowledged that more work is required to develop indicators 'that better reflect and measure the influence the University has on its regions' (AUQA2004f p37).

Most universities had made some efforts to identify performance indicators relevant to their engagement goals and/or regional context, but the level of development was highly variable. Some indicators were very broad while others were very simple and specific (even if process rather than outcome measures), such as:

- number of courses that demonstrate industry/professional input
- number of promotions involving engagement performance, and
- number of staff involved in community engagement.

Apart from the difficulties and ambiguities involved in using these indicators, adequacy of the indicators was also a challenge, quite apart from any comparability across universities.

The growing awareness of the need to tackle this issue has prompted some research into common indicators for community engagement, such as AUCEA's benchmarking project and the 'In Search of Evidence' study mentioned in section 1.5 of this Report.

In addition to research activities that are relevant to the community, research on community engagement itself is also essential for maximising the benefits of resources spent on community engagement. The audit reports provide very few comments on this aspect, except on some policy developments and pilots within individual institutions. Comments are more about the challenges in tracking and monitoring community engagement. Some benchmarking initiatives have been mentioned in the audit reports but they are in the very early stages of development and the panels could not see tangible evidence to make a professional judgement on the utility of those efforts.

Attempts to develop models and frameworks for community outreach activities have been noted by audit panels. One audit report highlights a three-phase model. The first phase is 'early development of community outreach', characterised by, inter alia, ad hoc initiatives but limited strategy, coordination or integration. Phase two, 'significant community outreach', is characterised by, inter alia, raised community demand, raised staff awareness, considerable expenditure, reviews of quality and effectiveness, and the emergence of community outreach themes. The third phase, 'structured and co-ordinated community outreach', involves, inter alia, high levels of strategising, systematisation and coordination of outreach activities, dedicated structures, and systematic and comprehensive quality assurance.

Given the number of community outreach activities in which the university was engaged and the generally high level of awareness among the staff and the importance given to community engagement by the university, the audit panel agreed that the university was in phase two. This comment can be generalised to many other Australian universities. Audit panels have commented that many community engagement initiatives seem to be reactive rather than proactive,

implying that effective engagement involves both strategic attention and a developmental process.

#### **4.6 Local engagement and global education**

An interesting tension arises for some universities between their regional mission and local community engagement and their desire to internationalise the student experience or, at least to provide opportunities for international students to obtain a qualification from the university. In addition to their offshore teaching programs, a number of rural and regional Australian universities now offer studies through centres based in Australian capital cities, where international students have wider opportunities for interaction with others from the same country and may find it easier to work part-time. In a small number of instances, audit panels have commented on the need for universities to attend to the balance between (regional) community engagement and support for teaching that is effectively independent of any traditional sense of community.

That is not to say that engaged teaching is not found in university study centres in capital cities, but rather to observe that university-wide engagement strategies need to consider how the concept of 'community' and its associated idea of local engagement interacts with their internationalisation strategies. The audit report for Victoria University in Melbourne describes the way this metropolitan university with a regional focus is thinking about the issues:

*The underlying premise is that VU's engagement agenda could include all people and groups whose identities are shaped by living or studying in the west of Melbourne. It resonates with the University's desire to be both locally and globally relevant but also with its support for immigrant communities in the west... (AUQA 2006f p14)*

## 5 University-wide Partnerships

A number of universities play a very significant role in their state or territory, or within a substantial region of the state or territory. The university will be a large employer and purchaser as well as a main supplier of graduates and research. Given these circumstances, audit panels have commented positively on university-wide partnerships that subsume a wide range of community engagement activities, including teaching, research and outreach.

### 5.1 Major partnerships with government

The University of Tasmania is the only university in that state, just as Charles Darwin University is the only university located in the Northern Territory. Both these universities have entered into a formal partnership agreement with their respective state or territory government.

For the Tasmanian partnership, the key outcomes and objectives of the agreement are

- increased collaboration and co-investment in research
- growth in the State's intellectual capital as the basis for achieving long term economic and social development
- joint promotion nationally and internationally of expertise, innovation and, where appropriate service delivery
- closer collaboration on strategic planning and public policy development, workforce planning and training
- increased innovation and commercialisation
- active exploration of opportunities for cooperation and co-investment in physical and information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure development, and
- building cultural capital as a key ingredient of Tasmania's social and economic future.

(AUQA 2005d p37).

The audit report for the University commented that one distinctive outcome of this particular agreement is the adoption of a 'taskforce approach to the development of joint programs' for community engagement objectives.

For the Northern Territory, Charles Darwin University (a dual-sector institution that provides both vocational education and training and higher education) is a major force for capacity-building. The university-government partnership priorities are: growing resident capacity in the Territory; meeting government needs; reorganising the University to better meet Territory needs; and particular projects to enable Indigenous social and economic development. 'Operation of the Partnership is

overseen by a Peak Group, jointly led by the Vice Chancellor and the Chief Executive of the Office of the Chief Minister. Other Peak Group members [are] the Chief Executives of the Department of Employment Education and Training, and the Department of Business Industry and Resource Development, the Pro Vice Chancellor, Teaching and Learning and the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Community and Access' (AUQA 2005c p10).

The audit panel commented: 'This Partnership, which is rare in Australia, has great potential, and many achievements are already being realised. A very positive aspect of the arrangement is that it emphasises partnership rather than seeing the government as buying services, and it incorporates forward planning. Staff secondment is taking place in both directions. Some public relations work is already carried out, but there is scope for more' (AUQA 2005c p11).

While audit reports have commented positively on the establishment of these partnerships, the resources required to sustain them and to deliver joint projects and initiatives should not be underestimated. Charles Darwin University found that: '... A major challenge ... was aligning the different expectations of the two parties and ensuring that officers from each party had a realistic understanding of the operating environments, constraints and priorities of the partner'(AUQA 2005c p11). Similarly, the University of Tasmania identified a need to improve the working of its partnership agreement taskforces in order to realise tangible benefits.

The example of Monash University's South African campus (MSA) may have wider implications for community engagement in a global context. The audit report comments as follows:

*MSA is an important part of Monash's ambition to be an international university and is considered to have a positive impact on its reputation and thus its ability to attract international students to all its campuses. Monash's intent in operating in South Africa is to be a 'public good' university and to contribute actively and effectively not only in South Africa's but Africa's development...The University emphasised that the intention is not to make money, but to break even. (AUQA 2006e p57)*

This partnership raises the interesting question of how Australian universities with offshore campuses interpret and exhibit a commitment to community engagement in international locations.

## **5.2 Regional partnerships and commitments**

Commitment to the region has a number of different forms of expression. Where a university is the only one for a particular region, such as James Cook University in far north Queensland and some other Queensland and New South Wales universities in particular, planning for the future of the university inevitably takes into account regional needs and circumstances. Even where a university is not the sole higher education institution for a region, some universities will emphasise their historical links and responsibilities to a particular locality, as in the following example from the audit report for the University of Canberra.

*Example:*

*...the University's community relations mission is linked inextricably to its professional education mission. The other distinctive feature comes from the unique relationship with the 'Capital Region' that [the University] inherited as a result of being originally established as the local CAE in a city with a 'National' university, and later, as a university with a formal link to the ACT Government. To address these various strands, the University developed the Capital Region Strategy... (AUQA 2003b p31)*

Multi-campus universities are involved in a number of arrangements designed to encourage each campus to develop mutually beneficial relationships with local communities. Campuses situated in diverse communities have provided audit panels with examples of different forms of engagement by staff at each site that respond to specific local needs. Through having persons with specific regional responsibilities or foci on the university's governing body and on high-level advisory committees, some auditees ensure that, at leadership level, regional issues are factored into the university's deliberations (see section 5.3 below).

Universities have promoted themselves to the various communities they serve on a number of fronts. They have conducted surveys to assess the perceptions of the community of the ways in which the institution is relating to the community. Formal needs analysis surveys of community leaders have also been conducted, in addition to an increasing number of studies of the economic impact of universities on their regions.

Most institutions open facilities such as the library and art gallery to the community, exemplifying traditional outreach activities that are common for nearly all universities (see also section 7). However, in regional communities, 'town-gown' interactions are likely to be reinforced by social interactions and consultations between university staff, students and community residents. Adjunct staff often live within a regional community and they provide both community input to the university and act as ambassadors for the university. Events that bring the community onto campus are hosted as part of community engagement. One auditee indicated that it would soon 'formalise an annual program of public events on its campuses to strengthen the partnerships between the university and its local communities' and the panel endorsed this.

Several universities have concentrated on building partnerships at or for specific communities and regions. Two extended examples from audit reports, one from Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Western Australia and one from the University of South Australia, are given below.

*Example:*

*ECU is involved in a number of 'precinct' arrangements. These are designed to encourage each campus to develop mutually beneficial relationships within their local communities. There are currently precinct arrangements at the Joondalup, Mt Lawley and South West Campuses. Most notable amongst these is the Joondalup Learning Precinct. It is a partnership between the University, Western Australian Policy Academy and West Coast College of TAFE, formed by Memorandum of Understanding in 1999. The City of Joondalup participates as a significant observer. At its most fundamental level, the relationship involved a shared campus. However, it has progressed to include a range of joint marketing activities, events and innovative pathways for students. The management committee meets regularly and continues to explore ways of strengthening the relationship. A number of working parties (the Professional Development Working Party, the Marketing Working Party and the Resources Sharing Working Party) have been established to pursue specific issues of joint interest. (AUQA 2004d p39)*

*Example:*

*The UNAP program is a recent University-wide initiative...Its emphasis is on community capacity-building in the region that includes UniSA's Mawson Lakes campus.*

*The State government observed that residents of the northern suburbs experience high social, economic and educational disadvantage, yet the region is enjoying rapid economic development with employment growth being drawn from other parts of the city. School retention and tertiary participation rates are very low. The Office of the North, spanning five government departments, was established to address this situation and identify short-term and long-term actions. The UniSA taskforce that led to UNAP focused strongly on long-term actions. Recognising that many government initiatives have failed, the task-force considered what the University might offer to make a difference, and identified: expertise, students, staff, and commitment to a great deal of input. These commitments are wise ones, but despite the long-term nature of the goals, there must be intermediate PIs so progress can be made visible and people remain committed. UNAP has therefore set down a staged set of useful and meaningful indicators. These include leading input indicators (such as number of projects, committees, staff, etc), intermediate ones (such as the results of satisfaction surveys), and long-term lagging ones (such as improvements in the unemployment rate). A small run of the surveys had been done by the time of the Audit Visit and a larger survey was due in April 2004. It is then intended to compile the PIs annually and monitor the trends.*

*UniSA has contributed \$250,000 per year over three years to UNAP, and much more in terms of staff and student time...Many UniSA projects in the region predated the inception of UNAP, and UNAP's aim is to co-ordinate these as necessary and to ensure that projects address matters of importance to the community, rather than to seek extra resources. In the longer term, it will be to UniSA's benefit to have potential students from this region oriented towards UniSA. It is of course too early to comment on the overall success of this Project, but the Audit Panel nonetheless believes it very soundly based and that UniSA's commitment and practical engagement are worthy of commendation.*

(AUQA 2004c pp37–38)

Other institutions have developed university-wide partnerships or alliances for teaching and research with other major regional employers. One example comes from the audit report on Victoria University:

*[The University's] largest formal partnership agreement is with the Western Bulldogs Football Club. The agreement, which has twelve schedules of agreed activity, covers areas including: exercise and sport science services; sponsorship; education and training for players; and shared commitment to collaborative community building. (AUQA 2006f p15)*

Overall, relationships with the region appear to be a strength of the Australian higher education sector.

### **5.3 Regional and campus advisory bodies**

Many Australian universities are multi-campus institutions and many have campus advisory committees, especially universities that have campuses in regional or rural cities. Most of these have senior representation and they may report directly to the university governing body. Institutions have established advisory bodies which involve community members to obtain input on matters relating their community engagement activities.

*Example:*

*[La Trobe] University operates four Regional Advisory Boards (RABs); one each at its Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura and Shepparton campuses. Membership of the RABs include prominent community representatives. For example, the Bendigo RAB includes, among others, the CEO of the City of Greater Bendigo, the Principal of Bendigo Senior Secondary College, the CEO of the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, and the CEOs of two major local businesses. RABs report directly to Council. The Audit Panel considered the terms of reference for the RABs and a number of their reports and met a number of members. It concluded that RABs are an effective mechanism for ensuring that the University is linked with community leaders.*

(AUQA 2005b p38)

Similarly, at Deakin University, the audit report notes:

*For a number of years a Warrnambool Community Reference Group has operated as an advisory group to the Vice-Chancellor on matters relating to the University's activities in South West Victoria. In 2004, a similar group was established for the Geelong area. The Audit Panel met members of both groups. It is clear that they value the opportunities the reference group meetings provide to learn more about current University activities, to provide comment on these and to develop relationships with fellow reference group members which have led to individual business or other collaborative ventures. Clearly the reference groups have been a worthwhile and positive development but the Panel considers that there is additional scope for the University to use these groups as active participants in the identification of ways the University can contribute to these communities. (AUQA 2005a p34)*

It is evident that the community representatives in these bodies value this opportunity to learn more about university activities, to provide comment and to develop relationships with other community members. Several audit panels have commented that there is additional scope to use these bodies as active participants to identify ways in which universities can contribute more effectively to their communities.

#### **5.4 Community members' views**

Community members interviewed by the panels were generally positive about their experience of the universities, albeit with a few complaints. Many audit reports confirmed that the 'town-gown' relationship was very good. Some community members praised the institutions for their responsiveness, good communication, good graduates (especially teachers) and could identify very little they wished to improve.

Commitment to communities can bring with it a tension between community needs and a university's capacity to respond to those needs. While there is clearly evidence of good relationships with the community on many levels, audit panels' discussions with members of external communities suggested that these communities would like to see greater opportunities for interaction and involvement with the universities. Notwithstanding the success stories, many community members believed more could be done. In particular, on the part of the community members there is a desire not only to become more involved in terms of funding and revenue support, but also to provide feedback on course quality and relevance. There are comments in a couple of audit reports that universities have not developed the number and strength of links that their locations allow.

#### **5.5 Alumni**

Several audit reports have commented on the good relations institutions have with their alumni. Maintaining regular contact by newsletters and email, and social functions, are activities common to most universities. The emergence of strong alumni associations overseas is a feature noted by a few audit panels. Some

institutions are engaging with alumni in a networking sense, asking them to be mentors or initial contacts for graduates.

Efforts to develop links with alumni in a systematic manner to ensure long-term sustainability were emerging. In developing an alumni engagement plan, audit panels suggested that it is important to work closely with alumni in identifying ways in which these connections can be mutually beneficial.

Overall, audit panels have commented that although the relationship with alumni has been good, services to alumni are still reasonably limited and very traditional. A number of universities are still in the early stages of taking steps to address this issue.

## 6 Engaged Teaching and Research

To demonstrate how the community engagement goals are achieved, institutions have listed a variety of evidence in their Performance Portfolios (self-evaluation documents). Many institutions approach community engagement activities within the framework of teaching and research. Rather than seeing community engagement as ancillary to teaching and research, they facilitate its integration.

Evidence provided by the institutions in regard to teaching and learning, includes courses that specifically focus on the social welfare needs of the community, including nursing and health, teacher education, social sciences, environment and heritage, and youth studies. There are examples of courses that include elective or compulsory units in which students engage in learning activities in a community setting, including internships and practicums. In some institutions, students are required to work in community service organisations for a certain number of hours as part of their coursework.

Research activities that focus on contribution to the community have been remarked on by audit panels. Many institutions have successfully disseminated the results of research that has been conducted in partnership with a specific community, or designed to help a community or region in dealing with a range of issues. The audit reports have acknowledged that many benefits flow to the community through teaching and research activities themselves.

However, as with the concept of 'community engagement', there are varying understandings within universities of what is meant by 'engaged teaching and research'. The following audit report extract illustrates a common situation:

*The University's 2004 VoiceIT Survey found that staff were committed to VU's mission of service to the west of Melbourne. However, the University community's view of the meaning of 'engaged teaching and research' varies widely and it is clear that the concept is in need of additional consideration by VU. For some staff, 'engagement' is viewed passively as the offering of courses at locations in the western region. For others, such as the School of Education, engagement with regional communities permeates many aspects of its learning and operations...The University's research strategy is more obviously aligned with an engagement agenda and the Audit Panel applauds the University for recognising that its capacity to achieve its mission in respect of community engagement depends directly on its ability to deliver effective applied research. In furtherance of engaged research, in 2006 VU commissioned a study of the value of its research from a client perspective.*

(AUQA 2006f p15)

Although it is probably not helpful to draw a hard and fast distinction between universities' long-established outreach activities, such as working with local schools, and recent efforts to identify projects of mutual benefit, 'engaged' teaching and

research' is likely to be found where an awareness of community interests and needs suffuses academic thinking and projects.

## 6.1 Engaged teaching

For many universities, engaged teaching starts with program offerings that reflect the needs of the local community or regional communities, particularly in fields such as health, education and welfare: 'The two [*regional*] cities particularly appreciate the University's local provision of professional courses such as teaching and nursing which increases the likelihood that graduates will stay to work in their own communities' (AUQA 2005a p34).

In addition, there is some evidence that graduates from regional universities may be more likely to meet regional employment needs, an issue of particular concern for many rural Australian towns. Some audit panels have made specific reference to this feature of rural universities, as follows:

*Research conducted by a research institute affiliated with Charles Sturt University has shown that 70% of students from a regional background and 20% of students from a metropolitan background who study on-campus at CSU will take up initial employment in a regional area. This is important given the regional drift to metropolitan areas and difficulties in sustaining skills locally. (AUQA 2004f p38)*

More generally, an increasing number of universities are able to articulate and explain how their programs provide the essential services that support community well-being and development. In some institutions, placements and practicums provide a vehicle for student interaction, although not all these activities necessarily embody a philosophy of active engagement with communities. One example that shows a spectrum of approaches is provided in the audit report for the Australian Catholic University:

*Many of the courses offered by ACU, including nursing, teacher education, psychology, social sciences and youth studies, specifically focus on the needs of the community. Many courses include elective or compulsory units in which students engage in learning activities in a community setting. These include internships and practicums, and students work in community service organisations, either for credit (for example the unit 'Christian Community Experience') or not (for example the unit 'Volunteer Experience').*

(AUQA 2002 p42)

More explicit efforts to embed engagement across learning and teaching are also evident, as in this example from the audit report of the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS).

*...UTS is now seeking to move from 'a focus on community service to a more strategically defined concept of engagement with professions, industry and social justice and equity groups' (PF p54), including the use of engagement activities to broaden students' educational experiences... This view of engagement is reflected in a range of activities including a community radio station and the impressive Shopfront program, which links community groups to university resources by allowing projects that would not otherwise proceed to be undertaken by students under academic supervision. Over 350 projects have been completed so far and the program won a 2005 Australian Award for University Teaching for the Provision of Education Services to the Community. (AUQA 2006c pp10–11)*

## **6.2 Engagement with other sectors of education**

Many institutions have effective secondary-school liaison activities which were positively by the panels. For example, one auditee was actively reaching out to high schools, with the aim of having a memorandum of cooperation with 20 local urban secondary schools and another 20 remote Indigenous community schools in its catchment. Secondary-school liaison positions had been created to develop active links with those schools. This strategy was found to be effective in increasing the participation rate of particular equity groups in higher education.

Communication mechanisms and information transfer of the Australian universities with the schools of their catchment area are generally well regarded. A number of multidisciplinary community partnership projects with schools were observed. One example is the provision of environmental education and training programs to the community and to primary and secondary school staff and students. The interest and effort that many institutions make, including participation in a range of targeted activities related to student recruitment, transition to university and careers selection, have been positively commented on by audit panels.

Some universities were criticised for taking elite students from private schools and for not caring for regional students. These universities were advised to expend further effort in changing this perception. In some cases the institutions themselves realised that they needed to work on this issue by highlighting their interactions with a range of less affluent schools.

Strong relationships with the vocational education and training sector, e.g. institutes of technical and vocational education, were also commented on positively by audit panels. There are Recommendations in audit reports that suggest an examination of the opportunities with other sectors for joint course offerings, resource sharing, and applied research projects could be beneficial for all parties concerned.

The following extracts, from the audit reports of James Cook University and Victoria University respectively, demonstrate how an agenda for engaged teaching engagement, combined with external partnerships, can foster social inclusion.

*Example:*

*Two noteworthy examples of effective rural, remote and Indigenous community engagement reviewed by the Audit Panel are the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), which is based on active collaboration with the local TAFE provider and the targeted initiatives of the School of Medicine.*

*RATEP was established as a joint initiative between Education Queensland, JCU and Tropical North Qld Institute of TAFE in 1992. RATEP is an innovative course that provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in rural and remote communities access to the Bachelor of Education over five years and via distance education. TAFE delivers the front end of the program and JCU the final three years. TAFE and JCU collaborate on curriculum development to facilitate the articulation involved. Approximately 60% of Queensland's Indigenous classroom teachers are graduates of RATEP or its predecessor, the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (ITEP).*

*The Portfolio states: 'The School of Medicine is committed to graduating medical practitioners who are more likely to stay and serve northern Queensland regional community, especially its rural, remote, and Indigenous communities' (PFp77). To help achieve this objective, approximately 300 local GPs and specialist medical practitioners have been appointed to Adjunct academic positions to recognise their contribution to teaching and research.*

*To fulfil this commitment the Medical School targets students from rural and remote areas, with 50% of each cohort to have rural and remote backgrounds. There is also an annual intake target of at least five Indigenous students. This target has been met for the first five years of its operation. It was also noted that some Indigenous and remote students have entered the Medical program by articulating from the TAFE health worker training program. (AUQA 2004e p39)*

*Example:*

*The 'Access and Success in the West' project has been announced by VU as a major five-year project to improve the access and successful participation of young people in post-compulsory education through collaborative research and other partnership activities with schools. It is the centrepiece of the University's action to meet its commitment to enhance educational opportunity in the west and builds on several established engagement activities. These include the Partnerships Project between VU's School of Education and primary and secondary schools, one component of which is applied research into successful practices through the Researching Innovative Partnerships in Education initiative.*

*(AUQA 2006f p16)*

### 6.3 Engaged research

Audit panels observed some excellent examples of research activity based upon linkages with external communities nationally and internationally. Whereas some of these are facilitated through specific linkage grants and other government funding support, others are more a result of the universities' own efforts and networks. Attention to establish linkages with business and industry for transfer of knowledge derived from research is developing with greater awareness of the potential 'community benefit' component in those efforts. Collaborations with a range of community and social organisations to benefit society from the transfer of knowledge derived from research across the universities received favourable comment by the audit panels.

As an example, the audit report for the University of Western Sydney comments: 'An important component of the engagement agenda at UWS involves the concept of 'engaged research'... this is defined as research with 'an interdisciplinary focus and relevance to industry, government and the community'. In this area also, UWS has an appropriate set of KPIs and notable successes' (AUQA 2007 p33).

Many regional universities seek to develop and provide research expertise that reflects their unique situations and environments. Some familiar examples include Antarctic studies at the University of Tasmania, tropical marine biology at James Cook University and Charles Darwin University's core partnerships in Cooperative Research Centres for Aboriginal health and for Desert Knowledge. As global concern grows over sustainability, climate change and (particularly for Australia) water resources, many universities have established regionally-focused centres to examine these issues in a local context. More generally, many universities with a rural presence have capitalised on the extent to which their location generates and sustains specific research interests.

*Example:*

*The University [of New England] has long-standing linkages with the rural and regional community. The Audit Panel found this commitment permeated the entire University and expressed in a range of tangible ways. For example, the six [Cooperative Research Centres] in which the University is involved ... are all concerned with rural/primary industries (cattle & beef, sheep, poultry, cotton, weed control, and viticulture). Also, the University has established an Institute for Rural Futures, which provides a co-ordinating focal point for many of the University's research activities aimed at giving effect to its commitment to rural and regional communities. (AUQA 2004b p 18)*

Most academic staff that the audit panels met pointed to ways in which their individual research intersects with local communities. Universities have shared a significant amount of knowledge and skills informed by research initiatives with communities, without any profit motive. There are a number of examples in the audit reports on university research addressing local problems. However, defining measures to assess not only activity but also impact continues to be a challenge. The

recent attention given by Australian universities to measures of research impact is contributing to some useful discussions on this aspect.

Audit findings suggest there remain opportunities for universities to gain better leverage from their regional presence to develop regionally relevant research programs. A strong desire for the substance of regional linkages to be more steeped in research applications focused on the needs of the regional communities was noted in a few institutions. Universities have been advised to consider how to assist with creating and stimulating channels for regional groups to raise research possibilities with their universities.

A couple of universities stated that their research activities brought significant benefits to the community, but the perception of the community did not match that claim. The audit panels advised the universities to be more proactive in communicating their achievements in relation to the community orientation of their research activities and the benefits these bring to the communities.

#### **6.4 Industry collaboration and commercialisation**

Across the Australian university sector there are many institutional efforts to provide, or to promote, education and development programs tailored to the needs of commercial organisations and industry groups. Audit panels saw a number of different examples of how universities are building these productive partnerships. Universities have initiatives such as 'research parks' and 'technology parks' that, in many cases, are successful in attracting commercial groups to the campus and serve as a platform for increased collaboration with staff and students.

*Example:*

*The [University of Adelaide's] Research Park (Thebarton Campus)...which has been self-funding since inception, has been extremely successful in attracting university and commercial tenants. The Park currently houses 61 tenants, of which 21 are spin-off companies created collaboratively by staff and students. The Graduate Entrepreneurship Program, run at Thebarton, is aimed at assisting students who have a project with potential for commercialisation to become established in their own business. Students are provided with a scholarship and support in kind. They spend one day per week in structured activities that lead to the Graduate Diploma in Entrepreneurship and the remainder of the week developing their project. The number of students in the program at any time varies depending on the number of scholarships that can be provided and it has been realised that further sources of funding will be required to ensure the program's sustainability. This program could serve as a model for others to follow. (AUQA 2003a p52)*

Although some audit reports comment that there is scope for improving industry input into courses, the balance of audit findings suggests that the overall partnership of the higher education sector with industry and commercial organisations is fairly well-established by now.

Staff who met the audit panels shared the conviction that that the community outreach dimension of their work contributed something of worth to the region or local community, as well as opening up possibilities for commercial consultancy opportunities. Several audit reports observe that the extent to which an economic rationale is given for exploring community outreach activities varies considerably within universities.

In contrast to those audit reports that highlighted models of community engagement in research based on social service principles, a couple of audit reports commented that, among academic staff there was a perception that community engagement was seen as a step towards commercial initiatives with industry, with the consequence that such engagement was viewed and supported as a commercial activity rather than as an academic endeavour. Staff in some institutions felt that community engagement had to compete with teaching and research for resource allocation, and therefore it was unlikely to be pursued unless the prospect of financial benefit was evident. While 'win-win' situations are of course possible, especially where the competitiveness of regional industries and services is increased through engaged university research, there are acknowledged to be some issues to be worked through.

This note of caution was expressed in the following way in one audit report:

*...UTS will need to consider whether it views 'community' engagement as distinct from 'industry' engagement, which may also be seen as embracing the professions. The Industry Action Agenda, which is described as a forerunner to the Industry Engagement Action Plan, approaches the subject of engagement primarily from the perspective of diversifying income streams and advancing research. Whichever ways these two plans evolve, UTS will need to ensure that they reflect the full spectrum of the University's rich and complex interactions with industry, the professions and other communities, plus realistic expectations of the extent to which engagement will be demonstrated by financial commitments from industry. The need for the University to further diversify income streams will require UTS to clearly distinguish activities established for commercial reasons from those carried out to foster and deepen its engagement with relevant communities.*

(AUQA 2006c p11)

## 7 Traditional Outreach and Service

Most institutions open facilities such as the library and art gallery to their local communities, exemplifying traditional outreach activities that are common for nearly all universities. Many also provide or partner with their communities for shared cultural events. Some examples from audit reports are given below.

*Examples:*

*A strength of the University, expressed perhaps most significantly through its community outreach portfolio of activities, is its support of the arts. The University has a major sculpture park, featuring the work of many contemporary sculptors and creating a relaxing and stimulating environment. This is complemented with about fifteen museums and galleries that are used for teaching, research and community outreach purposes....On campus, the Macquarie University Singers provide an opportunity for members of the University community to participate in a choir that provides public performances.*

(AUQA 2003c p 38)

*The University supports artistic, cultural and sporting activities in its regions in a variety of ways including a public lecture series, annual theatrical and artistic productions, financial support to local conservatoria of music and hosting the Western Region Academy of Sport. The University estimates its direct financial contributions to artistic, cultural, educational and sporting activities in the community in 2002 to have been in the order of \$650,000. This figure does not include 'in kind' contributions. (AUQA 2004f pp38–39)*

*The University has assembled under one organisational umbrella a range of impressive activities designed to link the University with its wider communities...The UWA Perth International Arts Festival traces its roots to 1953, when the University sought to help provide its region with access to performing arts and films. It is now the premier arts event in the state, involving a range of community partners (including other State universities). It was last formally reviewed in 2001. One of the findings of that review was that there is scope for greater community involvement, particularly with respect to managing the impact of the festival on the community... (AUQA 2004a p 50)*

These cultural contributions of many universities may be grouped within 'community service' activities that span teaching, research, service and volunteering.

An illustrative extract from a Cycle 1 self-evaluation is provided in the audit report of the University of New South Wales:

*The Performance Portfolio provided a range of examples of 'community activities', many with a focus on social justice in legal practice, such as the Kingsford Legal Centre, Australian Human Rights Centre, and National Children's and Youth Law Centre. Other outreach activities include projects with a physical presence in Sydney, such as the UNSW Community Development Project and UNSW Ecoliving Centre, but also programs with broader audiences, including the work of the Gifted Education Research Resource and Information Centre. There are also cultural contributions: the University hosts the Australia Ensemble and COFA's public exhibition spaces provide ready access for the local community. (AUQA 2006a p44)*

In addition, events that bring the community onto campus are hosted as part of a typical form of community service or engagement. One auditee indicated that it would soon 'formalise an annual program of public events on its campuses to strengthen the partnerships between the university and its local communities' and the panel endorsed this. Another audit report notes that '[a]ctivities such as the provision by VU of space for the Horn of Africa Communities Network reflect a view of engagement as providing access to the resources of the university, evident to the Audit Panel in the discussions with VU staff' (AUQA 2006f p15).

A further traditional form of community outreach is public engagement in learning and scholarship, which takes a variety of forms, including traditional free public lectures.

*The University has sought to provide leadership within the State through a program called 'Vision WA'. A part-time staff member has been dedicated to this project, which runs a seminar series concerning matters of interest to the State communities, backed up by a range of web services. Vision WA is supported by an external sponsor, and has represented a successful relationship between the University and private partners for the benefit of the State. (AUQA 2004a p50)*

Most universities facilitate access to academic expertise for media comment, although there has been some controversy in recent times when academics seek to speak publicly on matters that a university would regard as sensitive or confidential.

A commitment to capacity-building in other countries has been demonstrated by several Australian universities, one example from a 2002 audit report being the International Graduate Certificate of Education program offered in Karachi by the Notre Dame Institute of Education under the supervision of the Australian Catholic University. In commending the University for this program, the audit panel commented: '[T]his project is part of ACU's community engagement and is not an income-generating activity for the University' (AUQA 2002 p34).

A less typical form of outreach in Australia is the support of the University of Sydney for elite athletes, described as follows in the audit report:

*The University recognises that the needs of top performers in the sporting industry are such that even the most academically capable students may not be able to invest an ideal amount of time in their studies while at school, and as such may not attain the UAI scores of which they are capable. It also recognises the limited lifespan of a sporting career, and the need to assist these people with longer term career options. As such, it set out to establish a range of Sports Scholarships for elite sportspeople to enable them to attend university. In 2003, 210 athletes, from more than 40 sports were provided with financial assistance of up to \$4,000 and mentoring to reconcile academic and elite sports demands. There is also an 'Elite Athletes and Performers' special entry scheme, which provides 5 UAI points to assist eligible applicants with entry into their courses of preference. Students entering via a formal strategic relationship with the NSW Institute of Sport may receive similar help. An analysis of the performance of such students indicates that their academic achievements are in keeping with the average results for students at the University, suggesting that academic standards have not been compromised. (AUQA 2004g p 52)*

Taken overall, the Cycle 1 audit reports describe a wide range of outreach activities that support the intellectual, social and cultural life of communities, large and small. As observed earlier in this Report, audit panels have made positive comments about such activities while at the same time urging universities to clarify their overall goals for community engagement and how these activities fit within this broader strategy.

## 8 Social Inclusion

Australian universities receiving support from the Australian Government are responsible under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* for ensuring equity of access. Equity outcomes in higher education are monitored through the annual Institution Assessment Framework (IAF) portfolio submitted to the Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR, formerly DEST)) and biennial Equity Visits to universities. The IAF documents are among various documents the audit panels consider in their investigation and audit panels have considered how well universities are achieving their objectives in respect of equity groups, which include: students from low socio-economic status areas; rural and remote students; Australian students with English as an additional language; and students with disabilities.

Most universities have a separate unit with responsibility for provision of advice and services in relation to equity. However, a range of other operational units also provide equity services to the students and staff of institutions. Student support units such as Indigenous centres, academic language and learning units, study skills support groups, and health and counselling units, provide academic and social support in concert with the equity office.

The audit reports contain many observations and major conclusions on how well these units function to assist students from diverse backgrounds to participate in and succeed at university and how universities embody equity concepts in their operations. The latter series of observations discuss in particular actions are aimed at achieving gender equity (particularly for senior appointments and research) and Indigenous employment, in senior appointments, enabling women in research, supporting NESB students.

Not surprisingly, institutions that have developed strong relations with their regional communities and whose locations reflect a desire to increase access to university from those communities usually attract a large per cent of domestic commencing students from within these catchment areas. One regional auditee has approximately 45% of its Commonwealth-funded students from rural/remote locations. A significant portion of these students are the first generation in their families to attend university. In response to this, some institutions have outreach activities, such as briefings and information leaflets for first-year students and their parents, which are intended to ease students' transition to university life.

It is evident that every institution audited by AUQA has shown, in overall terms, attention to equity groups. Equity and social inclusion is discussed and contextualised in audit reports in relation to:

- institutional goals and objectives
- targets (access, participation, retention, success)
- top management support

- articulation
- community and regional engagement
- institutional culture, including respect for diversity and inclusivity
- student learning and other support.

Of the various equity and social inclusion issues, Indigenous peoples have received significant attention (Stella and Woodhouse 2006). Sixteen of 24 commendations on social inclusion in Cycle 1 audit relate to or include specific mention of Indigenous student and staff participation and success. Audit findings with specific reference to Indigenous issues are summarised in Section 2.4 of this Report.

While Indigenous issues have received a major emphasis in AUQA audit reports, similar observations are found on other equity groups as well. Next to Indigenous issues, audit panels have paid attention to 'women' as an equity group and people from 'low socio-economic groups' and 'rural and remote locations'. In general, universities have been applauded by audit panels for the many good practices they have developed to make connections with prospective students from equity groups.

As indicated above, increased attention to supporting students in their transition to university study is now a notable feature of many Australian universities' student services. Enabling and transition programs are often targeted to students with little family experience of university, with the aim of increasing access and improving success.

*Example (Murdoch University):*

*A key aspect of this commitment [to equity and social justice] is the suite of enabling courses offered by Murdoch that provide 'alternative entry paths for a range of designated equity groups'. (PF p57) The main courses are:*

- *UniFocus — a full-time, ten-week bridging course for students who would like to study at Murdoch's Peel or Rockingham campuses. This enabling course is clearly part of the University's community engagement strategy in the Peel/Kwinana/Rockingham region.*
- *UniAccess — a four-week, on campus, pre-university course held in January each year at the South Street campus, and targeted at students from equity groups, including: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders; ESL students; and Year 12 students who are not enrolled in Tertiary Entrance Examination subjects.*
- *UniQuest — a full-time, one-week, on-campus, free pre-university course held in August and October at both South Street and Rockingham campuses. It too targets designated equity groups, including from low-income, rural and remote categories.*

(AUQA 2006b p29)

Transition programs are also targeting non school-leaver students who may be returning to study as adults, and a specific challenge for Australian universities is in

providing effective transition support for students studying online or through distance education.

Many Australian universities have demonstrated tangible results and achieved success at varying levels. Although most commendations are specific to a program or particular group, the AUQA audit panel commended Deakin University 'for its manifest commitment to equity and access which allows individuals and groups who might otherwise not be able to participate in higher education to do so' (ref). Similarly, some universities have been commended for a culture that values inclusivity and diversity. Such valuing of diversity includes respect for the diversity and cultures of international as well as for the diversity of local students.

*Example (Flinders University):*

*A Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice Toolkit was developed in 2004 by the Equal Opportunity Unit and the SDTU for staff and students to provide practical guidance in carrying out discussions about cultural diversity within teaching and learning, research, leadership and administration, and University community contexts. Its value has been recognised by two other universities, which have purchased the toolkit under licence. The Audit Panel applauds the University for development of the toolkit, although notes that work remains to be done to widen awareness amongst staff and students of the toolkit and its benefits. (AUQA 2006d p 24)*

Overall, audit panels appear eager to encourage and promote university action to promote social inclusion and broader participation and success in higher education. At the same time, audit panels have examined the outcomes that are actually achieved by institutions, particularly with regard to targets and national and State/Territory comparative data.

Despite their generally positive comments on any action to increase social inclusion, audit panels are also aware that national data do not indicate any widespread increase in participation or success for many equity groups. A number of audit reports contain recommendations asking universities to lift their performance in comparative terms.

It is to be hoped that the attention being given to social inclusion by the current Australian Government is reflected in support for universities to increase their efforts to engage productively with relevant communities to improve equity outcomes.

## 9 Recognition of Good Practices and Post-audit Progress

From its inception, AUQA has stressed its support for auditees in their enhancement activities, and AUQA has established a number of schemes to make tangible this support. One of these initiatives is the Good Practice Database (GPDB), whereby commendations with a high transferability value to other organisational settings are written up by the auditee and published online.

Another post-audit mechanism for accountability as well as for enhancement is the progress report that an auditee has had to submit to AUQA 18 months after the publication of the Cycle 1 audit report. (For Cycle 2 audits, progress reports must be provided after 12 months.) Collectively, audit progress reports are a useful source of information on actions taken by universities to address the areas for improvement identified in audit report affirmations and recommendations. As with the audit reports themselves, many improvement actions are specific to the institution. Nonetheless, a look across the university sector can reveal some common methods employed by institutions to bring about positive changes.

### 9.1 Good Practice Database (GPDB)

As a quality enhancement strategy, AUQA administers a searchable online collection of good practices available through its website. A good practice is a system or activity that has been commended through national audit processes by AUQA as adding value for the auditee and its stakeholders, and that can be adapted and transferred to other organisational settings. Only Commendations from audit reports are considered for the GPDB. With the permission and cooperation of the auditees, these good practices are made freely available via the GPDB website. Since the launch of the GPDB on 27 November 2003, individual good practices have been accessed over 75,000 times. Today, the GPDB has become a key resource for higher education practitioners and managers as it provides a collection of good practices across the spectrum of activities carried out by auditees.

Good practices are classified under 13 topics, including 'community and industry engagement' and 'Indigenous'. Other topics may also include good practices that relate to community engagement or social inclusion. Of the around 90 commendations in audit reports that explicitly relate to some aspect of community engagement, 36 have been included in the GPDB. The full list of relevant GPDB commendations that became GPDB good practices is at **Appendix 2**.

As mentioned earlier, audit panels have made positive observations throughout the audit reports and a reading of the full reports is necessary to identify some of the good practices appreciated by the panels. It should also be noted that not all commendations are selected for the GPDB, only those that can feasibly be transferred to other organisational settings are considered. A closer reading of the audit reports indicate that in several institutions there are other initiatives that are effective and appropriate to the institutional contexts but these may be too difficult

to generalise or transfer to other settings. A lack of transferability may be particularly the case for community engagement projects and relationships.

Additionally, some practices that had the potential for to be commended were very new at the time of audit. For example, one of the auditees had formed a working group to consider criteria for benchmarking and performance measurement of community engagement. Some scoping work for this project had been undertaken but it was at a very preliminary stage. The audit panel endorsed the university's efforts to address the difficult question of performance measurement in community engagement and the Cycle 2 audit might show how well the institution has progressed on this initiative.

A survey conducted in 2005 by AUQA on the usefulness of the GPDB indicated that universities referred to the good practices when developing new policy and practice and when reviewing/updating existing policy and practice. Given that around 20 per cent of the good practices in the GPDB currently relate to community engagement, it is reasonable to generalise that this finding holds good for institutional learning in community engagement.

## **9.2 Audit progress reports**

In general, the progress reports indicate how well institutions have progressed in areas that needed improvement at the time of audit. The public nature of audit reports and the requirement to submit progress reports provides an incentive for institutions to act on audit recommendations and affirmations.

As mentioned earlier, the Cycle 1 audit reports were published over a period of five years, from October 2002 to November 2007. Institutions where 18 months or more has elapsed since the publication of their audit reports have submitted progress reports. The progress reports indicate that institutions have taken action on almost all recommendations recorded in the audit reports, or have developed plans to do so.

AUQA expects institutions to report on affirmations and recommendations as a minimum. However, AUQA assumes that the auditee will consider the audit report in totality and integrate appropriate actions with its other planned activities. Therefore, although progress reports mostly address action taken on recommendations and affirmations, some institutions have covered the other suggestions for improvement noted by the panels in the text of the audit reports. This section looks at only the actions reported against affirmations and recommendations.

A range of institutional actions have been reported, some of which are described briefly below. As the progress reports have been received over a period of several years, the year of submission is also given, identified as (PR: 200x).

### **Strategy, policy and leadership**

The University of Newcastle (PR: 2005) appointed a Director of Regional Engagement as a secondment for twelve months to 31 August 2004. The Director was responsible for the development of a Regional Engagement Strategic Plan. A background

document, 'Regional Engagement: A Multidimensional, Integrated and Collaborative Practice Across the University of Newcastle', generated a series of informative brochures for circulation across the University and a Regional Engagement website was developed. The University of Newcastle Strategic Initiatives Funding provided for a Corporate Approach to Regional Development project.

A regional engagement benchmarking project at Southern Cross University (PR: 2005) provided the University with significant insight into the types of strategies and processes used by other universities. Subsequently, the University has established an Office of Regional Engagement reporting to the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research).

The University of South Australia (PR: 2005) established a working group to articulate a strategy for community engagement. The University Steering Group on Regional Engagement was established with the Dean of the Whyalla Campus of the University as the Director of Regional Engagement (located at Whyalla). His principal responsibility is to coordinate University activity for developing sustainable university experiences in regional South Australia.

The University of New England (PR: 2005) employed a Director, Development Office, while the Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Development) provides coordination and strategic direction for partnerships and community engagement.

Charles Darwin University (PR: 2007) has approved a definition of community engagement and an action plan has been developed and is being implemented for community engagement. A Community Engagement Coordinator was appointed in 2006 to help foster community engagement activities.

The University of Tasmania (UTAS) (PR: 2007) developed a Community Engagement Policy and supporting Procedures after an extensive consultation process. It also formed the UTAS Community Engagement Reference Group, which encourages community engagement projects that achieve the goals expressed by the University of Tasmania Community Engagement Priorities, coordinates scholarly documentation of community engagement involving the university and performance against the University of Tasmania Community Engagement Priorities.

The Progress Report of the University of Melbourne (PR: 2007) states that it has developed a key focus on community engagement through the creation of the position of Deputy Vice Chancellor (Innovation and Development), whose portfolio includes knowledge transfer and engagement with the broader community. A Cultural and Community Relations Advisory Group has been established and will develop a Cultural and a Community Engagement Policy for the University.

The Progress Report of the University of Wollongong (PR: 2007) reports a strong response to its new award and grant scheme across all faculties and campuses — 12 nominations received for inaugural community engagement staff award in 2006, 13 in 2007; 31 expressions of interest received for 2007 Community Engagement Grants with 17 projects funded since 2005.

Central Queensland University (PR: 2008) has developed a comprehensive Community Relations Plan strengthened leadership for research relevant to community needs and reporting responsibility for its Campus Advisory Committees. The University has also held planning forums at several campuses.

### **University-wide partnerships**

Charles Sturt University (PR: 2006) commissioned the Western Research Institute to conduct a study of the economic impact of CSU on its regional areas and campus cities. The report was made public in May 2005. Internal reporting systems were enhanced to enable reporting on the extent to which CSU's courses support specific regional communities and cohorts of students, for example those from remote areas.

Deakin University (PR: 2006) commenced implementation of recommendations of the audit report regarding the operations of its Community Reference Groups. It also established a central alumni office and developed an alumni engagement strategy.

Central Queensland University (PR: 2007) conducted a formal needs analysis survey with community leaders to develop a comprehensive Community Relations Plan. A Development Officer has been appointed recently (June 2007) who is responsible for alumni, development and to a large extent community engagement.

The University of New South Wales (UNSW) (PR: 2007) restructured the UNSW Foundation to better support the University's strategic direction for Community Engagement.

### **Engaged teaching and research**

The University of Southern Queensland (PR: 2004) initiated a project to build a database of research capabilities, as a means of furthering research linkages with the community.

At the University of Ballarat (PR: 2004), staff developing or reviewing policies are required to identify and request input from key stakeholders depending on the focus of the policy being developed. The University has also established a Pathways and Articulation Policy that provides the framework for the further development of pathways between Higher Education and TAFE.

Murdoch University (PR: 2008) has taken various actions to integrate engagement as part of the core business of teaching and research and to separate engagement from university service in its academic promotions policy. The University has also clarified management responsibilities for regional campuses and regional stakeholder engagement.

The University of Western Sydney (PR: 2008) has given significant emphasis in its Learning and Teaching action plan to engaged teaching and engaged research, and is defining the distinctiveness of its student experience through the systematic development of a program of engagement with Greater Western Sydney. In addition, and as part of a whole of university community engagement strategy, the University

has created and filled a number of new positions and is working on a quality management framework for engagement.

### **Traditional outreach**

The University of Western Australia (PR: 2005) has included as a priority in its Operational Priorities Plan 2006–2008 the development of a university-wide communications strategy and the updating of the University's Marketing Plan, and states that both will impact significantly on efforts to enhance and coordinate community service activities. The University has undertaken a review of community service/outreach activities to recommend more effective ways for the University to coordinate, manage and promote its range of cultural and intellectual activities.

### **Social inclusion**

The University of Adelaide (PR: 2005) appointed the Executive Dean, Humanities and Social Sciences as 'Champion' for Indigenous matters to be an advocate across the University community for Indigenous issues and to provide assistance and guidance to the Director of the Centre for Aboriginal and Indigenous Research and Studies. An Indigenous Issues paper was developed to discuss an employment strategy and cultural awareness training. It has employed an Equity and Diversity Consultant who will address some aspects of the Indigenous Education Strategic Plan.

James Cook University (PR: 2006) revised its Equal Opportunity Strategic Plan and incorporated it into the Human Resources Strategic Plan. An external review of equity and disability services was conducted in 2005. Recommendations from the review are being implemented, including the development of a Disability Plan. The University has instituted equity bursaries to complement the Commonwealth Learning Scholarship Scheme. With a Pro Vice-Chancellor undertaking responsibilities for community engagement, a plan has been developed in cooperation with the University's External Relations Manager to focus on community engagement.

Edith Cowan University (PR: 2006) developed the position paper, 'A Framework for ECU's Engagement' and a paper on Indigenous Enrolments. The Equity Committee and ICC examined Indigenous enrolment statistics and trends at their respective meetings. In the second half of 2005 new arrangements for allocating and managing the Higher Education Equity Support Program (HEESP) funding were developed and a range of new initiatives, e.g. Portfolio Entry Pathways, scholarships and outreach programs, were funded to improve outcomes.

La Trobe University (PR: 2006) established the Office of the Director, Indigenous Education, and developed specific Indigenous Australian Access procedures, including dedicated recruitment activities. It established a suite of bursaries available to Indigenous Australian students and developed Enabling or Pre-Tertiary opportunities. La Trobe's new Strategic Plan 2006–2010 places its regional mission in the context of its broader vision to advance communities. The University has established a Regional Managers Group as a senior advisory group on regional policy and planning matters.

The Progress Report of Queensland University of Technology (PR: 2007) reports on the projects its faculties have undertaken to embed Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum.

### **Overall**

A reading of the Progress Reports reveals that clearly a good deal of work has gone into maintaining the momentum generated through the preparation for AUQA audit. An analysis of institutional actions by AUQA in 2006 indicated that auditees that submitted progress reports have reported an average of over 50 improvement actions per institution. It is reasonable to generalise this analysis to other aspects including community engagement.

It is also true that in some universities, the progress statements made against the recommendations on community engagement are statements of intent rather than results of action. A couple of progress reports explain why no action has been taken. A few others mentioned delays due to external factors. In another case, the community engagement element was clubbed with other aspects of the recommendation: the progress report discusses those other aspects but not community engagement. These instances are only a few and AUQA has had further interaction with auditees to clarify their progress reports. However, AUQA relies on the paper trail and does not validate those actions. Cycle 2 will investigate how institutions have acted on a sample of the Cycle 1 recommendations and affirmations. It should also be noted that these progress reports were produced 18 months after the publication of the audit report and during the time since the progress report, institutions may have taken further action.

## 10 Conclusion

The picture that emerges is that of consolidation and further development. While institutional policies and strategies are developing only now in some institutions, many others have consolidated their plans and are beginning to demonstrate tangible outcomes. Much action has been taken to enhance the visibility of community engagement and a higher profile is evident. There are signs as well of the 'professionalisation' of community engagement, accompanied by much greater recognition within Australia of an international scholarly literature on the relations between universities and their communities.

For many universities, collaboration with industry and schools is growing stronger, but more attention is needed to foster two-way relationships, research with a community engagement orientation, and in some cases, relations with alumni. Tracking and measuring community engagement require more work as well. Overall, however, it is an encouraging scenario.

The emerging pattern from AUQA Cycle 1 audit reports is that institutions have either paid enhanced attention to community engagement issues or have initiated plans to do so. Considering the positive comments of the audit reports as indicative of good practices in community engagement among Australian universities, especially where community engagement features strongly in institutional plans, the list below summarises these features.

The university:

- has well defined community engagement goals
- takes seriously its responsibilities to community engagement
- demonstrates explicit commitment to community engagement
- has specific strategies to guide the community engagement goals of the university
- has effective plans to implement the community engagement activities and performance indicators to monitor outcomes and achievements
- provides university-wide leadership and coordination for community engagement
- has dedicated senior portfolios for community engagement
- assures a university-wide understanding of the mutual benefits of community engagement
- has effective plans to support staff for community engagement
- has mechanisms to recognise staff for their contribution to community engagement

- establishes a constructive community presence in the life of students and staff at the university
- establishes strong links with local communities
- recognises and promotes understanding of and respect for community groups, their knowledge and cultures
- has successful preparatory and training programs for students and staff active in community engagement
- has effective liaison programs with other educational sectors
- has linkages with industry and other community groups
- has programs to reach out to students and parents to support access to and participation in higher education
- has resources and advisory structures to provide expertise and energy for supporting community engagement activities
- establishes a focus on community engagement issues as an issue of relevance to the whole university community
- pays attention to embedding community welfare perspectives into curriculum and research
- pays attention to research on aspects of community engagement, possibly including targeted funding.

The considerable number of commendations in Cycle 1 audit reports suggests that, in general, AUQA has found Australian universities to be positively considering their community interactions and social obligations. The good practices relating to community engagement and inclusion in the Good Practice Database (GPDB) indicate that the Australian higher education sector is rich in opportunities for institutions to learn from each other in engaging with their various communities.

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*Note: All AUQA audit reports for universities are available at: <http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityaudit/universities/>. The references below to audit reports that have been quotes from in this Report.*

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## Abbreviations

AUCEA ..... Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance

DEEWR ..... (Federal) Department of Education Employment and Workplace Relations

DEST ..... Department of Education Science and Training

GPDB ..... AUQA's Good Practice Database

IAF ..... Institutional Assessment Portfolio

MCEETYA..... Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

PR ..... Progress Report (in response to AUQA Audit Report)

## Appendix 1      Cycle 1 AUQA Audit Reports

<b>S. No.</b>	<b>Month and Year of Release of audit report</b>	<b>Name of the Institution</b>
1	October 2002	University of Southern Queensland
2	October 2002	Curtin University
3	November 2002	University of Ballarat
4	December 2002	Australian Catholic University
5	January 2003	The University of Newcastle
6	March 2003	University of Adelaide
7	March 2003	Swinburne University
8	June 2003	University of Canberra
9	July 2003	Macquarie University
10	September 2003	University of Queensland
11	October 2003	Southern Cross University
12	November 2003	Notre Dame University
13	December 2003	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
14	April 2004	Griffith University
15	April 2004	University of Western Australia
16	May 2004	The University of New England
17	August 2004	University of South Australia
18	September 2004	James Cook University
19	October 2004	Edith Cowan University
20	November 2004	Charles Sturt University
21	December 2004	The University of Sydney
22	February 2005	Deakin University
23	February 2005	Bond University
24	March 2005	La Trobe University
25	August 2005	Queensland University of Technology
26	October 2005	Charles Darwin University
27	November 2005	University of Tasmania
28	January 2006	The University of Melbourne
29	February 2006	Central Queensland University
30	March 2006	University of Wollongong
31	March 2006	University of New South Wales
32	August 2006	Murdoch University
33	August 2006	University of Technology, Sydney
34	December 2006	The Flinders University of South Australia
35	December 2006	Monash University
36	December 2006	Victoria University
37	January 2007	University of Western Sydney
38	February 2007	University of the Sunshine Coast
39	November 2007	Australian National University

## **Appendix 2      Commendations that became GPDB entries**

AUQA commends Victoria University for its evidence-based approach to understanding the changing nature of the western region of Melbourne, and for the ways the University is using this understanding to determine how best it can contribute to the region's further cultural, social and economic development.

AUQA commends Bond University for the way it mobilises and maintains contact with its alumni.

AUQA commends CDU's secondary school liaison programs.

AUQA commends CSU for the manner in which it has whole-heartedly embraced its commitment to regional communities and for a clear desire to improve and extend relationships with communities, for mutual benefit.

AUQA commends Deakin University for its strategy to link with, and serve, the needs of its rural and regional communities.

AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its role in implementing Precincts, a concept which demonstrates a substantial and effective commitment to community partnerships.

AUQA commends JCU for the relationship that it has established with the northern Queensland region and its various communities; and especially for successful examples of the Millennium strategies being enacted in respect of its priority objectives for Participation and Engagement.

AUQA commends the University for developing an effective articulation relationship with the NSW TAFE Hunter Institute and for supporting this relationship with robust quality assurance systems

AUQA commends the University of New England for a wide range of examples of positive community linkages, including Access Centres, relationships with Indigenous communities and sharing facilities.

AUQA commends the University of New England for the School Recommendation Admissions Scheme (SRAS) which provides students with effective pathways to university entrance and also helps develop a relationship of trust between UNE and Schools.

AUQA commends UniSA's commitment to, and range of activities in, community engagement, particularly the UniSA Northern Adelaide Project.

AUQA commends UoM for the Mentor Program for High Achieving Senior Secondary School Students, which serves the double purpose of enriching the learning experience of secondary school students and giving UoM postgraduate students an opportunity to develop their mentoring skills

AUQA commends UQ for its schools outreach work, particularly the 'Bright Minds' initiative.

AUQA commends UTAS on the very positive engagement with the Tasmanian community including several strong partnerships: A key partnership with the state government; and the development of University activity in the northwest through the Cradle Coast Campus.

AUQA commends Flinders for the development of innovative degrees that draw on the strengths of the University and meet the needs of industry, including Nanotechnology, Cultural Tourism and the Graduate Entry Medical Program

AUQA commends JCU for its engagement with CRCs and for having a focus on collaborative research which also positively contributes to community engagement in northern Queensland.

AUQA commends La Trobe University for examples of course advisory committees being used very effectively in enhancing the appropriateness of courses to the needs of relevant external communities while maintaining academic standards.

AUQA commends SCU for its success with Collaborative Research Centres across the designated Areas of Research Strength through a strategy of concentrating on comparative advantage in Linkage grants and a focus on opportunities that are regionally valued.

AUQA commends SUT for its Industry-Based Learning program, which is assisting it in achieving the objective of providing programs with an applied orientation.

AUQA commends the Adelaide University's Research Park (Thebarton Campus) which has developed a successful business model and which supports existing companies and contributes to the establishment of start-up companies in South Australia. The Graduate Entrepreneurship Program, run at the Thebarton campus, is also commended.

AUQA commends the Newcastle University for developing an innovative University Industry Scholarship Scheme that provides benefits to the University, local industries and students.

AUQA commends the valuable service that is provided to the community by ACU students engaged in learning activities in a community setting.

AUQA commends UNSW for its management of the Co-op Program, which supports the University's values and is successful in attracting highly-qualified and motivated students.

AUQA commends QUT for its active efforts to integrate its facilities into the local environment and for the initiatives to work with the community to develop QUT's 'real world' profile.

AUQA commends the University of Sydney's sporting partners and for its strong sporting scholarships program.

AUQA commends CDU's establishment of the Indigenous Support Unit, the Indigenous cadetships, and the cross-cultural awareness training program.

AUQA commends CDU's recognition of its vital role in Indigenous development and its commitment to valuing Indigenous people

AUQA commends Central Queensland University's Nulloo Yumbah centre for establishing a concentration of expertise and energy for indigenous issues which will benefit the University and its wider stakeholders.

AUQA commends Deakin University's Institute of Koorie Education for the community-based learning model that is successfully providing Indigenous students with access to higher education.

AUQA commends Murdoch University for the range and quality of the enabling and foundation units, particularly in terms of the way in which they assist students in various equity categories and from disadvantaged and lower socio-economic backgrounds to enter the university through multiple mechanisms.

AUQA commends the Newcastle University for taking seriously its responsibilities to indigenous education and for helping its indigenous students achieve notable success, particularly in the area of health.

AUQA commends the University of New England for the TRACKS program, which demonstrates a strong commitment to the fulfilment of the University's goals for indigenous education.

AUQA commends the University of Sydney for its innovations in attending to the needs of people with disabilities, notably through online access systems and advanced methods for signage.

AUQA commends The University of Western Australia for the support it provides to Indigenous students and most particularly for the success it has with its preparatory programs for professional courses.

AUQA commends UNSW for the programs for prospective Indigenous students provided by the Nura Gili Indigenous Programs Centre and for the high success and retention rates of Indigenous students of the University

AUQA commends UoM for the successful implementation of the Melbourne Access Program and the Access Melbourne scheme, and the consequent progress towards the achievement of its equity targets for student enrolment.