

AUSTRALIAN
UNIVERSITIES
QUALITY AGENCY

**Report of an Audit of
Australian Catholic University**

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ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in this report. As necessary, they are explained in context.

ACU	Australian Catholic University
ACUNSA	ACU National Students Association
ASDU	Academic Staff Development Unit
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CEO	Catholic Education Office
CPG	Core Planning Group
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Technology
EFTSU	effective full-time student units
HDR	Higher Degree by Research
HoS	head of school
HE	higher education
IAR	Institute for the Advancement of Research
IT	Information Technology
ITCS	Information Technology and Communication Services
KPI	key performance indicator
PI	performance indicator
PVC (AA)	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs)
PVC (R&I)	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and International)
PVC (Q&O)	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Quality and Outreach)
QA	quality assurance
QMC	Quality Management Committee
RRTMR	Research and Research Training Management Report
SAI	self-accrediting institution
SMT	Senior Management Team
SRC	Strategic Review Committee
SRC	Student Representative Council
VC	Vice-Chancellor

OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) has been established to carry out audits of the Australian universities and other self-accrediting institutions and the state and territory higher education accreditation agencies. (AUQA's terms of reference ('objects') are listed in Appendix B.) AUQA is carrying out the first cycle of audits over the period 2002 to 2006, auditing about 10 organisations each year. In 2001, AUQA appointed a panel (for membership, see Appendix C) to carry out an audit of Australian Catholic University (ACU). (A brief description of ACU will be found in Appendix A.) The audit process adopted by AUQA, which is set out in the AUQA Audit Manual, is based on each organisation's own objectives. The major aim of the audit is to investigate the procedures the organisation has in place to monitor its activities and achieve its objectives, and to report on the effectiveness of these procedures in achieving the organisation's desired outcomes.

The Audit Process

ACU undertook a thorough self-review over the period leading up to the AUQA audit. The results of the various division and faculty reviews were very openly provided to AUQA with the Performance Portfolio. ACU's Performance Portfolio was accompanied by comprehensive supporting documentation, describing the University's objectives and the range of mechanisms it has in place to monitor the achievement of objectives and assure and enhance quality across its activities. Each section of the ACU Portfolio itself concludes with 'achievements' and 'priorities for improvement'.

The Audit Panel met for a day to discuss the ACU Performance Portfolio, and then the Panel Chair and two AUQA staff members visited ACU in North Sydney (MacKillop Campus) for a day to discuss the further information desired by the Audit Panel, and the program for the main Audit Visit of the Audit Panel to ACU. A subgroup of the Audit Panel visited the Melbourne (St Patrick's) campus on 30 September 2002. The Audit Panel convened at the North Sydney (Mackillop) campus of the University for three days (23-25 September 2002). The Audit Panel highly commends the University for the efficient and responsive manner in which this visit was managed, and more generally the openness of the overall approach to the audit.

During the audit visit, the Audit Panel met approximately 150 people (in addition to those met at the Melbourne (St Patrick's) campus) including senior managers, academic, administrative and technical staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, members of the University Senate, and representatives from professional bodies and ACU's communities in different states. The Audit Panel met staff and students from most of ACU's six campuses. A session was set aside to allow any member of the ACU community to meet the Audit Panel and one person took this opportunity.

This report records the conclusions reached by AUQA based on documentation, interviews, discussions and observations. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the ACU activities encompassed by the audit, the report should not be relied

upon to identify every instance of quality assurance procedures, or of their effectiveness or shortcomings. This report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit on 23-25 September 2002, and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently.

The report contains a summary of findings, and lists of commendations and recommendations. The latter suggest possible improvements and in some cases endorse actions already being undertaken by the University.

It is acknowledged that recommendations in AUQA audit reports may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for institutions and agencies where financial and other resources are constrained. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise these recommendations, and recognises that it is ACU's responsibility to respond as it is able.

The sequence of topics in this report is approximately that of the ACU Performance Portfolio, with variations that relate to the audit sampling process and the matters that arose therefrom.

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

ACU's character and context

ACU was established in 1991, incorporating four institutions in five cities. ACU has to accommodate three different state-based tertiary selection processes, varying state employment and accreditation requirements for professions (especially nursing and teaching that comprise the vast majority of ACU's students), and different legislative frameworks.

ACU has a distinctive mission and in consequence has the potential to make a distinctive contribution both within an Australian context of higher education and internationally in terms of its connections with a wider network of Catholic universities. ACU's Mission states that ACU "brings a distinctive spiritual dimension to the common tasks of higher education". The Audit Panel was convinced that substance is being given to this claim in the way that ACU operates, both internally and with its external constituencies.

Initial emphases

The two major emphases of its first decade have been on bringing the antecedent institutions together in spirit and organisational detail as well as name, and on inculcating a research ethos with identified areas of actual and potential research strength. Although these tasks will naturally continue, the distance travelled so far is very impressive, and provides a good basis for continuing development. As ACU is currently turning its attention to a new phase of strengthening the University, the Audit Panel found a good deal of new work (such as the culture of evidence and the Teaching and Learning Plan) that was only recently completed or has only just begun. Nonetheless, this is based on solid foundations.

Governance, planning and quality assurance

ACU demonstrates a strong commitment to strategic planning based on thorough consultation both within ACU and in its communities, and it is clear that the strategic plan is strongly influencing ACU's development. This commitment is matched by a willingness to openly review processes and outcomes, involving outside experts and internal and external stakeholders. At the present stage of development of the planning and review system, however, the links between the various levels of planning, particularly the strategic plan and faculty and unit plans, are not always clear. For this reason, there is some unevenness in the way the different objectives have been taken up in the different units. At various points in this report, there is reference to the need to build into the governance mechanisms a more explicit project-management system to ensure that ACU's strategic objectives are being addressed across the board, and that there are effective measures for addressing those objectives and means of measuring progress and performance against them.

In 2001, ACU had embarked on comprehensive faculty and institutional reviews, and these then formed an effective basis for the AUQA audit. The reviews gave rise to some consistent recommendations across the University. Several recommendations referred to a need for more structured information gathering, analysis and monitoring. ACU is acting on this under the term 'culture of evidence'.

The Learning Paradigm

ACU's Teaching and Learning Plan is currently under development, taking up the pedagogic challenge of replacing input-based teaching with outcomes-based learning. ACU refers to this as its new 'Learning Paradigm'. This emphasis is generally known (and supported) within the University, but ACU has as yet no formal way of ensuring its implementation. ACU needs to treat the implementation of the Learning Paradigm as a specific project, with a detailed project management strategy including means of ensuring resources are allocated as required, milestones are set and intended outcomes are achieved. As recommended in ACU's own Internal Quality Review, this more deliberate approach to project management should also be applied by ACU to other important initiatives.

Unit evaluations

Unit evaluations of various forms are widely carried out and demonstrate a culture of professionalism on the part of academic staff. It is expected (although not always done) that staff will report on the results to the head of school. Furthermore, there is evidence that changes are made as a result of the evaluations, and that students are aware of this. As an improvement of this system, ACU is moving towards including a greater number of common items in the evaluations. Further improvements are required in the handling of the resulting data so that ACU can be more confident of identifying and acting on areas of weakness.

Research

ACU has consistently followed a strategy to identify and support staff who are ready to undertake research, with a successful program of support for staff completing doctorates and other higher degrees, teaching relief for staff with grants or other periods of research-intensive work, and the adoption of priority areas for research development in research centres and 'Flagships'. Higher degree programs have also been developed in areas of strength.

Staffing

There is a high level of commitment by ACU to its staff, and of staff to ACU, their colleagues and their students. A new performance review system and a new workloads policy are being implemented. It is too early for AUQA to check their effectiveness, but staff are optimistic about them.

Community engagement

Community service has traditionally been an area of strength for ACU, which is building on this strength, in line with its Mission, as it moves out from its traditional areas towards non-Catholic communities. In line with this, ACU has re-defined its orientation toward the community in terms of community engagement (rather than service) indicating a greater degree of interaction between the community and the University in defining the nature of these activities.

International activities

ACU is moving slowly into international education, driven both by its Mission values and by the need to diversify its sources of funding. Whatever the motives, however, such operations carry financial and other risks, and ACU needs to minimise these by devising a standard set (or sets) of procedures for establishing and running off-shore and other collaborative programs.

The following commendations and recommendations are not prioritised by the Audit Panel. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the report.

Commendations

1. ACU is commended for substantially achieving its distinctive Mission goal of engaging “the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching, research and service”.
2. The Senate of ACU is commended for its strategic vision for the University and its clear definition of its own role in developing that vision.
3. The Vice-Chancellor is commended for his leadership in engaging the University community and external stakeholders in a thorough process of refining the distinctive character of ACU and on this basis developing the various campuses of the University as a single institution.
4. ACU is commended for the very thorough external reviews it has conducted in recent years.
5. ACU is commended for recognising the need for more consistent and systematic collection and use of shared data, and the ‘Culture of Evidence’ project that is intended to address this.
6. ACU is commended for including input from a wide range of internal and external sources in unit design and in course development and review.
7. AUQA commends ACU for the introduction by one faculty of sample cross-marking by other universities, as a means of ensuring comparability of standards, and the recent extension of this scheme.
8. ACU is commended for its involvement in the non-income generating program in Karachi that expresses its values and commitment to community engagement.
9. While acknowledging that ACU started from a low base, AUQA commends the embedding of a culture of research in the University over a short period of time, including ACU’s success in supporting staff to complete higher degrees.
10. AUQA commends the valuable service that is provided to the community by ACU students engaged in learning activities in a community setting.
11. AUQA commends ACU for the high level of commitment by staff exhibited to their students, colleagues and the University.
12. ACU is commended for the significant improvements it has made to the IT infrastructure and the processes put in place to gain stakeholder feedback and to benchmark services.

Recommendations

1. That ACU review the relationship between the Mission, Strategic Plan, and the annual plans of the faculties and units to ensure that each higher level of planning provides a framework for planning at the next level, and that taken together the successful implementation of the faculty and unit plans will also be the successful implementation of ACU's Strategic Plan.
2. That ACU consider how to enhance students' understanding of the nature and value of the national character of ACU, and formally engage the student body in the life of the University as a whole.
3. That ACU, as stated in its Performance Portfolio, further develop the channels of communication throughout the University.
4. That ACU give more thought to how the budget mechanisms, for example financial incentives and performance-based elements, may be used to encourage the activities needed to achieve the Mission and goals.
5. That ACU, its faculties and operating units reflect annually or biannually on the major opportunities for and risks to their activities and plans, and on possible actions to realise the opportunities while minimising the risks and limiting adverse consequences.
6. That ACU develop formal mechanisms, such as the adoption of project management tools, to assist in the implementation of all major strategies.
7. That the requirements of faculty, school and unit strategic implementation plans in relation to quality assurance and improvement be more clearly specified by the Quality Management Committee, to ensure that all parts of ACU identify areas for improvement and good practices to achieve improvement, and that a process be established for communicating these practices between faculties, schools and units.
8. That ACU investigate how it can best provide the technical and analytical support for an evidential approach to planning and review.
9. That in implementing the new 'Learning Paradigm', ACU identify milestones, reporting requirements, resources needed, and appropriate teaching and learning indicators; and ensure that it is widely understood and comprehensively implemented.
10. That ACU review its current approach to evaluation, and systematically implement procedures for obtaining student feedback on teaching and learning, with data relating separately to unit design and teaching quality, and in such a way that data is comparable between different units and different occasions and campuses on which a unit is offered, and is available to heads of school for consistency and other quality assurance purposes.

11. That ACU develop a plan and related policies for on-line access to learning resources in undergraduate courses and ensure their effective communication and implementation.
12. That ACU develop a comprehensive system for deciding which off-shore activities to engage in, for planning, implementing and controlling them, and for incorporating an effective quality assurance system.
13. That ACU regularly review ACUcom to ensure that the courses it conducts are of appropriate academic standard, and are consistent with ACU's Mission.
14. That further attention be given to the criteria defining the different kinds of research centres and, in particular, to the relationship between the flagship concept and research centres.
15. That the teaching / research nexus be addressed explicitly, and possibly as part of a formal approach taken to the implementation of the learning paradigm.
16. That ACU consider the role of research centres and flagships in research student training and, in particular, in the provision of resources to support research education.
17. That ACU undertake more formal and strategic workforce planning to ensure that it can continue to achieve its Mission under changing employment patterns and conditions.
18. That ACU work with the ACU National Students Association to develop a strong and effective role for the Association in decision-making and communication within ACU.
19. That ACU ensure that library funding is appropriate to properly support the academic programs on each campus, and give consideration to how it builds library resources to support the developing e-learning strategy.

1. MISSION

Australian Catholic University (ACU) is a publicly funded university, and AUQA was advised that student admission and staff appointment are open to all irrespective of religious belief. It was formed in 1991 from the amalgamation of four Catholic tertiary institutions, with an emphasis on teacher education, on eight campuses in five cities and four states/territories. The main tasks of its first decade have been

- to establish itself as a coherent single institution,
- to build a research culture and an academic profile consistent with the change from college to university status, and at the same time,
- to develop a distinctive position within the Australian higher education sector, on the foundation of the missions of its antecedent institutions,
- to make its Mission effective both in its internal arrangements and in its relations with the wider community.

Much thought, time and effort has been put into the first of these tasks, with a good deal of success in staff engagement with the University as a whole and the development of ACU-wide operational procedures. Mission development has been led by the Vice-Chancellor and Senate, building on the social commitment of the constituent colleges, but changing the institution in response to both internal needs and the changing external environment. However, there remains further work to be done, in particular to involve the students with the University beyond their particular campus (sections 7 & 8).

To address the second task, the mission of historical component institutions has been translated into that of a contemporary university. A significant aspect of this task has been to build on the existing tradition of scholarly teaching by the enhancement of the research activities (section 5).

In relation to the third task, the Mission states that “The University’s inspiration [is] located within 2000 years of Catholic intellectual tradition ... It brings a distinctive spiritual dimension to the common tasks of higher education. ... The University explicitly engages the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching, research and service”. With support from the Senate and the Chapters, senior staff have given thought to how this tradition can guide ACU in establishing a role that is relevant to the whole Australian community. While an explicitly religious interpretation of the values is available for those so disposed, the Mission has been developed in such a way that any student at ACU is exposed to the concepts and values of social justice without the necessary involvement of an explicit religious content. As the Mission further states, ACU “has a primary responsibility to provide excellent higher education for its entire diversified and dispersed student body”. Recent publications by the Vice-Chancellor and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Affairs) on contemporary challenges for Catholic universities, including ways in which a Catholic university’s mission can be inclusively reflected in its curriculum, exemplified the attention being paid to this issue in ACU. The experiences of a diverse range of students gave evidence of ACU’s success in this approach.

The core values that ACU is trying to express in its activities, and encourage its students to demonstrate, have general relevance to students and other stakeholders as citizens and in their personal lives, as well as a specific relevance to those who embrace Catholicism in their religious lives. Reflecting confidence in this wider relevance of its Mission, ACU has moved away from an earlier intent to address Catholic and non-Catholic aspects separately. The Audit Panel's interviews confirmed that staff, students and community members from both these groups find the breadth of Mission convincing and appealing. This will be further elaborated in various contexts below.

Despite the inclusiveness of its Mission, ACU is not trying to be 'everything to everyone', and has selected and defined its academic scope realistically, through a process where the Mission guides the ACU National Strategic Plan, and in turn the Plan sets the context for planning in the faculties and support units. Aspects of this specificity include an emphasis on the professions, social sciences, and humanities with a commitment to social justice, but eschewing the 'hard sciences'. The Audit Panel noted that more recently ACU has moved into and/or augmented its activities in information technology, business and exercise science, and it is not yet clear how distinctive social, ethical and religious dimensions will be incorporated into these new courses. The Audit Panel also noted that the commitment to some off-shore activities is not based on income generation but flows from the Mission and values, addressing equity, social justice, and aid-related values. This is unusual in the sector, and shows commendable consistency with the Mission.

The Audit Panel found much evidence of staff and students being familiar with the Mission and of its influencing their activities, including the decisions of some students to study at ACU. In this sense, the Mission animates ACU, with activities and directions being guided by the Mission. It is a point of attachment to ACU for staff, students and external stakeholders.

Overall, the Audit Panel was convinced that ACU is substantially achieving its Mission goal of distinctiveness in the sense outlined above, and that it has a distinctive feel and set of aspirations.

Commendation 1. ACU is commended for substantially achieving its distinctive Mission goal of engaging “the social, ethical and religious dimensions of the questions it faces in teaching, research and service”.

2. GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND PLANNING

2.1 Senate

Created from institutions in four states/territories, ACU was established as a limited company. This means that, alone among Australian universities, it is subject to sundry requirements of corporations law. The Members of the company are its founding dioceses and religious institutes, and the Board of Directors is the Senate (the body more commonly known in Australian universities as the Council). Influenced by the Hoare report on university management (1996), ACU decided to reduce the size of its Senate from 25 to 16 members. Senate now comprises the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, VC, eight appointees of the Members of the company, three academic staff, one general staff person and one student.

Senate has delegated to the VC the management of the University, and to Academic Board the implementation of academic policies. Senate retains authority for approving course proposals, and ACU's Senate maintains a closer watch on aspects of course approval than many Councils. This arrangement appears to work well for this University, with the Senate's attention to course approval and similar matters being focused on the relationship between proposed developments and ACU's Mission, rather than academic or operational issues more appropriately dealt with by Academic Board or other committees.

The McKinnon-Walker-Davis benchmarks identify clarity in the relation between a university's Council and Academic Board as a desirable indicator, and such clarity is evident at ACU.

Commendation 2. The Senate of ACU is commended for its strategic vision for the University and its clear definition of its own role in developing that vision.

The VC and the Senate work closely together and appear to form a mutually supportive partnership. The VC's leadership is expressed through key planning documents such as the Strategic Plan and annual priorities, while the Senate provides advice, support and information which ensure that the VC's leadership is well founded in both the Senate's aspirations for the University and the community's perception of its achievements and challenges.

A distinctive feature of ACU is the four Chapters, based in ACT, NSW, Queensland and Victoria, that provide an interface between ACU and the respective communities. The VC or his nominee is on each Chapter, and the local Archbishop appoints other interested people from the local community. The Chapters are an effective mechanism by which ACU links into its various external communities, and are useful in bringing in people who are committed to ACU. The VC's membership and attendance at the meetings has assisted in the integration of ACU's component parts, each of which is closely associated with a particular Chapter. Chapters include the local Senate members; conversely, some people join Senate after being members of a Chapter, and therefore already bring to Senate a good knowledge of ACU. The Chapters act as advisory bodies to the Senate, but have no direct governance role in ACU. These arrangements are effective, too, in enabling the Senate to overcome the difficulties posed for

ACU by virtue of its status as a multi-state University (such as conflicting legal and professional demands).

As the board of directors for ACU Limited, Senate is accountable to the Members of the Company, and this requires special induction processes to ensure that Senate members are aware of their responsibilities as company directors. This, together with the current practices of the association with Chapters and the close working relationship with the VC provides an effective mechanism to induct new Senate members.

Senate has a Standing & Finance Committee, an Audit Committee, a Goals Committee (which always reports to it but is not a formal committee of it) and an Honorary Awards Committee. The Goals Committee is the body with primary responsibility for the evolution of the Mission statement and interaction with the University community in guiding and informing about this evolution. This Committee, chaired by the PVC (AA) and with the VC as a member, has been instrumental in the widespread Mission dissemination and understanding alluded to in the previous section.

Senate is conscious of the need for self-improvement, and occasionally reviews its own operations. One such review resulted in a restructure of Senate committees in order better to discharge Senate's responsibilities. In April 2002, Senate adopted a statement on governance in which it commits itself to regular reviews of governance.

2.2 Strategic Intent and Plans

In 1998, the VC conducted an extensive 'Listening Exercise'. The input he received was transcribed, and distributed widely. As a result, people had evidence that their views were heard and recognised even where the decisions finally made went against their own personal desires. The effectiveness of that exercise has resulted in a very strong and widespread concept of ACU as a 'listening university', and the Audit Panel observed that this has reinforced the strong commitment expressed by many staff and students to ACU. By his commitment and involvement, the VC has been instrumental in building a national university (see section 2.4 on the national/local balance), and has generally carried the staff and ACU community with him.

Commendation 3. The Vice-Chancellor is commended for his leadership in engaging the University community and external stakeholders in a thorough process of refining the distinctive character of ACU and on this basis developing the various campuses of the University as a single institution.

This input gathered by the VC from the staff and external experts led to ACU's current Strategic Plan. The Plan covers the period 1999 to 2008, which is rather a long period, especially as the Plan contains no intervening milestones (a gap remarked on in the recent Internal Quality Review; see section 3.2). The Plan contains 26 recommendations covering, inter alia, teaching, learning, structures, strategies and directions. ACU provided the Audit Panel with a report on progress on these recommendations, and most recommendations were reported as being 'on target' or 'in progress'. However, the very long time period covered by the Plan, and the generality of its recommendations, has caused some difficulty with

scheduling and monitoring of progress in a way that provides timely warnings to management if implementation is not proceeding to plan. The Audit Panel observed for example that the 'Strategic Plan Priorities and Targets 2002' (in the 2002 Educational Profile) are somewhat distant from the Strategic Plan recommendations, giving the impression that the production of this document was a planning activity in its own right, rather than a periodic assessment of the success of the Strategic Plan itself. (Cf. section 2.8.)

The VC informed the Audit Panel that ACU had decided not to produce a revised Strategic Plan each year, but he considered it would be useful to consolidate the changes that have evolved mid-term. There does appear to be a need for a planning stage between the long term ACU Strategic Plan and the annual planning of the faculties and operational units. Earlier this year, the Senate decided to hold a retreat in the middle of 2002 to review the broad strategic directions of and emerging priorities for ACU in the light of the current Commonwealth review of higher education (HE). On the basis of this, at this time which is half-way through the decade covered by the ACU Strategic Plan, it may be useful to more closely guide faculty and unit planning by updating the Plan, or by producing a briefer document based on but sharpening the priorities of the Plan.

Following the agreement on an institutional Strategic Plan, the three faculties and other areas (including libraries, personnel, student administration etc.) have created their own plans, based on the Strategic Plan. ACU has also created a Research and Research Training Management Plan (as required by DEST), a Teaching and Learning Policy, a Community Service Management Plan, and a Quality Management Policy. (These are discussed in the relevant sections below.) Each relevant area is expected to embed its interpretation of the ACU Strategic Plan and the University's approach to quality assurance and improvement in its own Strategic Implementation Plan.

The faculties and other units are at a relatively early stage in building their own plans. The Audit Panel examined the faculty plans and found that they are quite different in format, some relating more closely to the ACU Strategic Plan and some to the ACU Mission. The Faculty of Arts and Sciences refers its objectives to the 26 recommendations in the ACU Strategic Plan; while the Faculty of Health Sciences includes a detailed report of the previous two years against PIs, with discussion of the results achieved.

These faculty and unit plans confirm that there is a strong planning culture in ACU, and progress to date is satisfactory, but it is not clear that the various plans have clearly articulated roles nor that they fit together in a coherent system of planning. It will be important for ACU to maintain the momentum generated by the recent reviews (see section 3.2) and this audit. ACU must also ensure that the faculties and other areas continue to specify agreed forms of evidence of performance (PIs), targets for achievement in these areas, and means of gathering this evidence, and that they are adequate to provide a basis for making decisions about the success of various activities and what might be done to improve outcomes consistent with planning targets. It is a responsibility of the Quality Management Committee (QMC) (section 3.1), specified in its terms of reference, to assist in the development of PIs. Addressing this collection of related issues is described in the Performance Portfolio and the recent reviews as the development of a 'culture of evidence' (section 3.3). As one example of the importance of

developing this culture, the Audit Panel noted the need for data to be incorporated more rapidly into ACU's planning to guide timely action such as, for example, responding to the changing school-leaver / mature age balance of some student groups.

Recommendation 1. That ACU review the relationship between the Mission, Strategic Plan, and the annual plans of the faculties and units to ensure that each higher level of planning provides a framework for planning at the next level, and that taken together the successful implementation of the faculty and unit plans will also be the successful implementation of ACU's Strategic Plan.

2.3 Committees

ACU has a rather complex set of committees relating to planning and management. In addition to the already-mentioned Goals Committee of Senate, there are the Core Planning Group (CPG, consisting of VC, PVCs, Executive Director and Director of Personnel Relations: policies, budget, resources, reviews); Senior Management Team (SMT, which is the CPG plus Deans); Strategic Review Committee (which is CPG plus Rectors and some Directors: monitoring the Strategic Plan; discussions of strategic initiatives); and Executive Team (CPG plus Deans and Directors: senior discussion forum). While this seems cumbersome, it may have been necessary to involve a large number of managers in planning and review to ensure wide understanding of and commitment to the strategic planning and quality assurance process of a single unified institution. In this context, the Audit Panel notes that all existing committees are being reviewed, as recommended by the Internal Quality review (section 3.2), and will be terminated if they no longer 'add value'. This project is scheduled for completion by the end of 2002.

2.4 Local and National Aspects

The establishment of a single institutional identity has recently been publicly symbolised by a formal 're-branding' from 'ACU' to 'ACU National'. In practical terms, however, the institutional identity of ACU has been forged in face to face meetings of staff across the campuses. While ACU has the capacity to use tele- and video-conferencing widely, staff travelling for meetings – particularly senior staff travelling – was reported to the Audit Panel as ACU's usual *modus operandi*. While noting the benefits of meeting face to face, the Audit Panel is also mindful of the load this places on senior staff, and the costs incurred by the institution. There is a risk that the ways of working necessary for the creation of a single institution will become standard practice for ACU, irrespective of their long-term efficiency or effectiveness, and the Audit Panel suggests that the VC should monitor the extent to which very frequent travel remains necessary and is compatible with the other demands upon senior staff.

Despite the work on establishing a unified institutional character, ACU must still accommodate three different state-based tertiary selection processes, varying state employment and accreditation requirements for professions (especially nursing and teaching that comprise the vast majority of ACU's students), and different legislative frameworks. Partly for this reason, most schools are state-based, with a head of school (HoS) in each state. The HoS provides a

point of focus for local public servants, employers and industry partners. For good reasons, therefore, different campuses and schools are given the scope to take initiatives. Consequently, there are differences in the extent, timing and manner in which matters are handled, making it difficult for central collation and monitoring. (Cf. section 2.8.)

Unlike the staff, students are not generally conscious of ACU as a single multi-campus institution, but experience it and regard it in relation to their own campus. They are generally very positive about their own local context and its arrangements but unclear about its 'national' status and what that means for them. Their attitude to the national university is usually neutral, but becomes somewhat negative if services they need are located elsewhere and are therefore more difficult to access; or requirements are introduced at one campus because of institution-wide considerations. This points to a need to communicate more clearly to students the benefits to both staff and to the students themselves of each campus being part of the larger university, and to respond to their concerns when it appears that what makes sense locally is given up for some larger institutional imperative.

Students expressed a high degree of support and commitment to ACU, but the more formal mechanisms of representation reveal some weaknesses. They appreciate the strong collegiate identity on each campus, and report that academic staff are both available for consultation and responsive to student feedback. Despite the effectiveness of these informal channels of communication and influence, students find it difficult to engage with decision-making processes of the University except through their communication with individual staff. This contrasts with staff, who have both the collegiate interaction and (occasional) formal 'listening' (as in the VC's Listening Exercise).

Recommendation 2. That ACU consider how to enhance students' understanding of the nature and value of the national character of ACU, and formally engage the student body in the life of the University as a whole.

These observations provide some validation of ACU's own identification of communication as an outstanding issue: "... despite the use of formal communication channels, the issue of communication remains as an ongoing challenge ..." (ACU Performance Portfolio, p24; see also p22). Most of the mechanisms mentioned and contemplated are downwards. (The VC's Listening Exercise, mentioned above, is a notable exception.) While, as noted, this communication from the top has had very significant benefits so far, it is essential that the routine 'bottom-up' channels of communication be developed.

Recommendation 3. That ACU, as stated in its Performance Portfolio, further develop the channels of communication throughout the University.

The concept of ACU as a single national institution has been effectively communicated to external stakeholders. ACU's local communities appreciate the positive community orientation of the University while also recognising the benefits of the campus being part of ACU National. The communities are clear that ACU should aim to be both local and national.

2.5 Branding

ACU has had a receptive market in Catholic schools (through Catholic Education Offices), Catholic hospitals, and other service and welfare organisations. Links with these bodies, and with the Chapters of Senate, have largely provided the market intelligence needed by ACU. However, as ACU is broadening some course profiles (for example into business, IT, and environmental studies), it will be necessary for ACU to become more professional, systematic and explicit in its market research. This has already begun and much initial work has been done since the appointment of a Director of Marketing in 2001, including focus group sessions being held to identify stakeholder views on the ACU brand.

One of ACU's stated priority targets is to 'develop specific branding for Catholic and non-Catholic communities'. However, the re-branding to ACU National was undertaken, and it was decided that this was appropriate for both communities. To ensure that the brand and market position are clear, lists of courses that are incompatible with ACU's Mission are now being compiled, and will be considered for termination or revision at the end of 2002. (See also the work on viability of courses, section 4.2)

Several marketing strategies have been developed and are being tested in 2002. Mostly they are projecting an institutional image outwards, and concerted effort will need to be directed at gaining input information on the wider market needs, relevant to specific course offerings.

2.6 Finance

ACU uses an adjusted relative funding model. The CPG does the initial planning, allocating funds for administration, other overheads, project funding, and strategic initiatives. The remainder of the budget is allocated on the basis of weighted EFTSU, through the PVC (R&I) for research and the PVC (AA) for the other operations of the faculties. Research funds are distributed partly on postgraduate student numbers and partly through contestable grants and allocations (for example to support the activities of the Institute for the Advancement of Research (section 5.1) through staff 'buying out' their teaching time). Deans also have the authority to provide discretionary funding, for example to the Flagships (see section 5.2).

It appeared to the Audit Panel that a relatively high proportion of the budget is being distributed in a rather formulaic way, reducing the capacity to allocate resources to support strategic priorities in teaching, research etc. The Audit Panel noted some instances where the structure contains an element of incentives (eg in the distribution of income from on-shore international students), and also that the income from ACUcom (section 4.6.5) is used for strategic initiatives. However, benefit may be gained by reviewing the distribution of the budget to provide further incentives to support the achievement of the priorities in the Strategic Plan. It may be significant that the only finance-related indicators in the current version of the Culture of Evidence (section 3.3) are about income. ACU may wish to consider using measures such as percentage of budget allocated to research development, or community engagement, as ways of testing the extent to which planning for future performance and current expenditure are aligned.

Recommendation 4. That ACU give more thought to how the budget mechanisms, for example financial incentives and performance-based elements, may be used to encourage the activities needed to achieve the Mission and goals.

2.7 Risk Management

ACU has paid explicit attention to risk management for some years. The Strategic Plan identifies clear opportunities for ACU to innovate and develop its profile and also identifies potential problems that might arise. Senate has taken on the responsibility of risk management, and in 1999 it established an Audit Committee of Senate to identify weaknesses and risks in its major operational processes. The Audit Committee engaged KPMG to facilitate the Executive Team's development of a risk profile. The main areas identified for attention have been the high level of dependence on DEST funding (82% in 2000), and risks arising from staffing matters.

While not questioning the value of engaging consultants to assist in developing a risk profile, nor the outcomes of that project, the Audit Panel was concerned that there is not a well-developed culture of risk management throughout all areas of activity in ACU. The issue here is that universities are operating in rapidly changing circumstances, and there needs to be a continuous process of identifying opportunities and risks, and managing the risks. The Audit Panel was not able to get a clear picture of how risk management is a continuous process within ACU. Some operational structure (eg a designated staff position such as an internal auditor) is needed to support the task of risk management and report to the Audit Committee.

Recommendation 5. That ACU, its faculties and operating units reflect annually or biannually on the major opportunities for and risks to their activities and plans, and on possible actions to realise the opportunities while minimising the risks and limiting adverse consequences.

2.8 Project Management

In general ACU has good strategic vision, but has not developed a methodology for the efficient roll-out of the resulting strategies through a regular and systematic process of project definition, planning, management, evaluation and modification. In many discussions, for example of ACU's system for student evaluation of teaching, the Audit Panel found members of the University very clear on *what* is to be done, and eloquent on *why* this was valuable, including frequent references back to the Mission, but much less clear on *how* change is being brought about and *what stage* the process has now reached.

As ACU moves into a phase of implementing a number of substantial initiatives, such as the new learning paradigm (section 4.1) and the move to community engagement (section 6.1), and those emerging from the various processes of external and internal review prior to the audit, including the culture of evidence project (section 3.3), it will be changing on diverse fronts,

affecting all staff and all campuses. Under these circumstances, explicit project management is necessary to ensure those innovations are fully understood and implemented across ACU.

Recommendation 6. That ACU develop formal mechanisms, such as the adoption of project management tools, to assist in the implementation of all major strategies.

A more explicit system for project management would support senior staff responsible for implementing new policies and procedures through documentation of intended outcomes, specification of milestones and the overall timeframe for change, what is open for local interpretation and what should be standard across ACU, the responsibilities of staff including the various levels of management in relation to the project, and a communication strategy to ensure all who are affected by the change are well informed of what is proposed.

Other activities to which this recommendation may be relevant are mentioned in sections 3.1, 4.2, 4.5 and 5.3.

3. Quality Assurance

3.1 Quality Management Committee

ACU has continued the commitment to formal quality assurance structures and processes since the early 1990's reviews by the Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. The ACU organisational structure supporting quality assurance and improvement was reconsidered in the development of the Strategic Plan 1999-2008, which recommended that "formal quality management should be embedded and integrated in the system so as to enhance quality outcomes within each area of the University. The Quality Management Committee and the Quality Improvement Committee should interface (or integrate) to ensure this embeddedness". The latter option was taken, and the Quality Improvement Committee was merged into the QMC and its functions added to those of the QMC. ACU has further shown its commitment to quality by appointing a PVC(Quality & Outreach) (PVC(Q&O)), who chairs the QMC, which is advisory to the VC. Thus, the QMC is a high-level committee (with membership not dissimilar to that of the Strategic Review Committee).

QMC works to a brief document on policy and priorities. There has been an explicit attempt to avoid this Committee being seen as relieving others of the responsibility for quality, and also to avoid developing the processes for managing quality as a parallel stream of activity alongside strategic planning and review. To this end, all areas of ACU are required to develop and implement annual quality management plans, consistent with the QMC document, but these plans should be embedded "within the overall strategic implementation plans of each organisational unit" (ACU Performance Portfolio, p13) which respond to the University's Strategic Plan. The totality of the area plans then comprises the University quality management plan. The PVC(Q&O), assisted by the Manager (Q&O), is responsible for ensuring that this policy is implemented throughout ACU.

As reported above (section 2.2), the Audit Panel examined the three faculty strategic implementation plans, which contain the faculties' quality management plans, together with the corresponding plans of other operational units (including the Libraries, Student Administration and Finance Directorate). The plans vary a great deal in both the material that they cover, and the way this material is treated. While this variation is to be expected when responsibility for planning is devolved to the faculty and unit level, it does raise the issue of whether ACU's Strategic Plan and Quality Management Policy are giving sufficient form and direction to planning and quality assurance at the faculty and unit level to ensure that the strategic implementation plans, and the review activity which is associated with their development, constitutes an effective planning and quality assurance system for ACU.

The Audit Panel formed the view that the system is not as effective as ACU wishes it to be. This view is also evident in the external faculty reviews and internal quality review that formed the basis for the development of ACU's Performance Portfolio. One factor is that ACU currently lacks a management information system for regular checking of outcomes against plans as a basis for ensuring the quality of the University's activities, other than through major intermittent reviews such as the recent faculty and institutional quality reviews (section 3.2).

The membership and positioning of the QMC in ACU's structure means that the Committee has been able to feed information downwards, and to hold areas responsible for responding. It also means that staff realise that ACU places a high priority on quality assurance. However, ACU also needs a systematic approach to discussing the relative success of different faculty and unit approaches to planning and review. This would enable it to reflect on whether the diverse forms and content of the various faculty and unit strategic implementation plans are each best adapted to the needs of the particular area, and to identify instances of good practice in review and planning and spread the information across ACU. This appears to be an appropriate task for the QMC, but it is not explicit in the QMC's terms of reference.

As indicated in many places in this report, the Audit Panel found examples of quality improvement. Currently, the improvements stem mainly from staff commitment to ACU and ad hoc initiatives (see for example section 4.1 on the Learning Paradigm). ACU's dispersed nature on multiple campuses is relevant to this fragmentation, and in this context it is noteworthy that many different units have engaged so strongly with ACU's strategic priorities, including many instances of good practice (eg the strong involvement of external stakeholders in course planning and the use of external examiners). However, ACU now needs systems which efficiently and effectively provide means for monitoring results and sharing ideas through a quality assurance and improvement cycle.

Recommendation 7. That the requirements of faculty, school and unit strategic implementation plans in relation to quality assurance and improvement be more clearly specified by the Quality Management Committee, to ensure that all parts of ACU identify areas for improvement and good practices to achieve improvement, and that a process be established for communicating these practices between faculties and units.

3.2 Reviews

As indicated in section 2.2, ACU is committed to the planning part of the quality cycle, and planning is occurring throughout, with the strategic planning process functioning also as the quality management process. As will now be described, through its program of explicit reviews, ACU has also embarked on the review part of the quality cycle. However, the completion of the quality loop through feedback is not so well accomplished.

“The process of formal reviews, with participation of external experts, has been adopted as a key quality mechanism” (ACU Performance Portfolio, p21). Reviews over the period 1998 to 2002 included aspects of International Marketing, Information Technology, Personnel Relations, Postgraduate Courses, Media Production and the Office of the PVC(AA). In 2001, ACU decided to conduct formal reviews of each of the three faculties, together with an overall review of all organisational areas. The faculty reviews were carried out by panels with predominantly external membership, and the overall review was assisted by an external consultant. When ACU was selected for AUQA audit in 2002, these four reviews were used as the basis for the Performance Portfolio. The results of the reviews were very openly provided to AUQA with the Performance Portfolio.

Commendation 4. ACU is commended for the very thorough external reviews it has conducted in recent years.

The Audit Panel found itself in agreement with a good number of the recommendations made in the four reviews. Some of these will be alluded to in the relevant sections of this report. Clearly, it is too early for ACU to have acted on all these recommendations, but the major suggestions have been noted in the Performance Portfolio as ‘priorities for improvement’. As it builds on these reviews, and this audit, ACU will need to further prioritise the large number of actions identified.

Review cycle times have been stated for faculties and courses (at least once every five years), and it will be important for ACU to maintain its commitment to a continuing review system (of some sort) in order to monitor its progress and achieve improvements. The Audit Panel suggests that such intensive, external review be an intermittent activity against a backdrop of a more frequent and less intensive process for providing feedback for a quality assurance and improvement loop.

3.3 Culture of Evidence

At present, the schools and other areas are keen to self-reflect and evaluate their own performance, and there is a great deal of detailed in-depth discussion of issues. This individual and collegial professional commitment to evaluation and improvement, however, lacks a clear institutional reference point. An individual or unit looking to assess the performance of their school or unit may turn to the Mission (which by its nature is at a high level of generality) or strategic plans (whose purpose it to focus on selected areas for priority action rather than set comprehensive targets for all areas of performance). As a result, there is no easily established overall picture of performance, which is illustrated by the tendency for reviews, including the faculty and unit submissions to the internal quality review, to be descriptive and reactive rather than analytical. There is also a tendency for individual schools to put in place their own quality assurance systems, and in this context the Audit Panel noted that two schools and the Victorian office of ACUcom have ISO9001 certification, and other schools intend to follow suit.

In discussing support for planning and review, section 2.2 alludes to the need for indicators to be specified, data collected in relation to these indicators, and structured data made available to the areas that need to use it. This is particularly pertinent to the quality assurance and improvement role of strategic planning and review, enabling the effective completion of the feedback loop. ACU already enjoys positive feedback in a number of ways (including some CEQ scores, graduate employment rates, graduate employer satisfaction), but there is an indication from the four reviews that the collection and use of data for feedback and improvement purposes is rather informal and patchy. Such data as exists is often not made available to other areas where it would be of use. On the basis of the reviews, ACU stated in its Performance Portfolio that “... the use of systematic qualitative and quantitative data in reviewing the strengths and weaknesses of procedures and academic activities across the institution” is a ‘priority for improvement’ (p20).

The Audit Panel supports the proposed development of what ACU is calling ‘a Culture of Evidence’ (section 3.3) as essential to ensuring that the cycle of strategic planning and review, in which quality assurance is intended to be embedded, can focus sharply on whether ACU is producing the outcomes it plans, at a level that is satisfactory, according to both its own and its stakeholders’ judgments. The culture of evidence would give the common benchmarks for judging performance and identifying goals that has hitherto been missing.

The VC has provided an internal grant for work to determine a limited number of academic-related qualitative and quantitative KPIs to be agreed and tracked at University level, and also used to characterise core elements of the performance of each of the faculties, schools and research services. This work is under way with a target completion date of the end of 2002. The Audit Panel saw the current draft of these indicators, which is in the form similar to that known as a ‘Balanced Scorecard’, with indicators in the areas of teaching-learning, research and finance/income. At present, the proposed indicators are fairly standard, and do not capture the Mission-specific characteristics of ACU. The Audit Panel encourages this initiative and suggests that further work be done on this aspect of the project.

It is intended to produce a document which will contain instructions for every indicator, including its sources. Faculty and unit review reports will then be expected to provide interpretations of their performance against the indicators, giving reasons for changes etc. The ‘Scorecard’, or a subset of it, will form a set of ‘Vital Signs’ that are susceptible to straightforward and frequent checking. It would also be beneficial if faculty and unit plans project future values or trends in the indicators, which would then provide the framework for individual and collegiate professional self-evaluation which the Audit Panel believes is currently lacking.

In implementing the ‘culture of evidence’ project, ACU should take note of the recommendation on project management (section 2.8).

Commendation 5. ACU is commended for recognising the need for more consistent and systematic collection and use of shared data, and the ‘Culture of Evidence’ project that is intended to address this.

To get most value from this increased attention to the gathering and use of data, it will be important to enhance the quality of data-gathering from students and staff, concentrating on what is most useful to ACU rather than what is easiest to measure. The PIs must readily and reliably report ACU’s selected vital signs, and these should be closely connected to the achievement of its Mission.

The Audit Panel noted that the culture of evidence project is being jointly managed by the PVC (AA) and the PVC (Q&O), and undertaken by members of their staff. The work would be greatly assisted by improving the existing capacity for institutional research. Such an enhanced capacity for data and information handling and analysis would also provide support to ACU in all its planning and review activities.

Recommendation 8. That ACU investigate how it can best provide the technical and analytical support for an evidential approach to planning and review.

This support might be achieved through the establishment of an office of institutional research. A desirable infrastructure would include such an institutional research function or office, together with the necessary resources to ensure consistent and integrated planning, policy development, implementation and review, and risk assessment and management.

4. Teaching and Learning

4.1 Policy on Teaching and Learning

As observed in section 2.2, a number of ACU-wide plans and policies are relatively new. One of these is the Policy on Teaching and Learning, which was adopted by Academic Board in May 2002. The Policy establishes the need for staff development, resources and feedback, and describes characteristics of quality teaching and learning, with particular reference to adult learners. Like the Quality Management Policy, the Policy on Teaching and Learning is very brief, and it delegates to the faculties the responsibility for giving effect to its principles.

The Policy on Teaching and Learning refers to a 'Learning Paradigm', which is 'embedded in the University's Strategic Plan'. The term 'learning paradigm' is not in fact mentioned in the Strategic Plan, but the Audit Panel was informed that the term is intended to denote 'outcomes-based learning' in contrast to 'input-based teaching'. To assist in implementing the Strategic Plan, a number of working papers were written, including one on the Learning Paradigm. As a result, the term 'learning paradigm' is already widely-known among staff at ACU, even though the Teaching and Learning Plan, upon which its implementation will be based, is not yet in place. The Audit Panel commends the introduction of the 'learning paradigm' and notes that staff will be expected to support and implement this new emphasis.

The procedures for ensuring quality in teaching are to be described in the faculties' annual strategic implementation plans. To assist in this process, the Teaching and Learning Committee, a standing committee of Academic Board, is currently drafting a University Teaching and Learning Plan for consideration by Academic Board in 2003.

Current thinking about the implementation of the Teaching and Learning Plan includes coverage in HoS checklists; coverage in the VC's assessment of deans and PVCs; targeted staff development; seminars by recipients of Teaching Development Grants and winners of awards for excellence in teaching.

While the Audit Panel is confident that the adoption of the new 'Learning Paradigm' betokens a commitment to student-centred learning, the Audit Panel was not convinced that there is a sufficiently robust plan for implementing the paradigm. For example, there appear to be few opportunities for staff to become familiar with different student learning styles and new educational theories, or the implementation of the latter in teaching strategies. Attention to the teaching / research nexus (section 5.3) is also relevant. It will be necessary for ACU to treat the achievement of the new learning paradigm as a project to be specifically managed (section 2.8), and not rely on individual staff to move in this direction without clear and explicit guidance and training.

Recommendation 9. That in implementing the new 'Learning Paradigm', ACU identify milestones, reporting requirements, resources needed, and appropriate teaching and learning indicators; and ensure that it is widely understood and comprehensively implemented.

ACU has specified two distinct sets of ‘graduate attributes’, for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and is commended for its initial work on this. Some explicit work has been done on developing these (for example in relation to hospital work in nursing). ACU is encouraged to work on strategically embedding them, again using a project management approach. (Cf. section 5.4.)

4.2 Course Approval and Review

“The University’s Academic Board has accepted the principle of ensuring that all of ACU’s degree programs involve Mission-focused units and areas of study, and communicate visibly and forcibly the integrative force of the University’s institutional Mission” (ACU Performance Portfolio, p11). Course outlines inspected by the Audit Panel suggest that this goal is being achieved.

ACU has a set of Procedures for Course Approval, Amendment and Review (‘the Blue Book’), which was revised in May 2002. This is a thorough procedural manual. When a new course is envisaged, the relevant dean appoints a Course Development Committee. These committees have a strong involvement of external people, including potential clients, external academic members, alumni, students and industry representatives. Furthermore, for each unit of the course, two external moderators are asked to assess the quality of the unit descriptions. This external involvement provides a high level of assurance, at least at the input stage, that the course will be of an appropriate standard for an Australian university and will achieve its aims.

Commendation 6. ACU is commended for including input from a wide range of internal and external sources in unit design and in course development and review.

According to the Blue Book, a course proposal is expected to specify objectives, its relation to ACU’s Strategic Plan, teaching / research link, inclusivity of groups traditionally under-represented in higher education, resource needs and availability, market need and a business plan. However, the Blue Book is only partially integrated with other aspects and ideas about course development at ACU. For example, it does not yet reflect the new learning paradigm, nor refer to student-centred learning or the difference between the old and the new pedagogy. Graduate attributes are mentioned (categorised as intellectual, professional and values) but it is not clear how they are to be addressed in the course proposal. These observations are consistent with the Audit Panel’s view, stated above, that ACU lacks a comprehensive plan for ‘rolling out’ the learning paradigm and the new pedagogy (see section 2.8). Rather, the present situation requires individual course developers to be champions of the change in the pedagogy and pick up ACU’s corporate commitments in teaching and learning.

From the Course Development Committee, a proposal goes to faculty board, Academic Board and Senate. Senate retains the power to approve courses and has taken a direct interest in doing this. Partly for this reason, curriculum is generally common across the different campuses.

In relation to the scope of courses offered, ACU is paying specific attention to its academic profile or ‘brand’. It has well-defined employer targets, principally Catholic schools, through

Catholic Education Offices, Catholic and other hospitals, and service and welfare organisations. It appears from feedback, including the Graduate Destination Survey and the Course Experience Questionnaire, that it is satisfying these clients very well, and that the graduates themselves are generally positive about their ACU experience.

A major exercise is currently being undertaken to identify and terminate non-viable courses and those that do not fit with the ACU 'brand'. Decisions will be made at the end of 2002. The aim is that no undergraduate course has fewer than 30 students and no postgraduate course has fewer than 20 (although there may be some exceptions). The Audit Panel checked the lists of course and unit reductions that have already taken place in each of the faculties over the last three years, and commends this focus on viability and Mission.

4.3 Standards

4.3.1 Standardisation

As already mentioned, ACU pays explicit attention to the standards of a course when it is initiated. The attention to comparability of actual standards achieved, both across ACU campuses and with other institutions, is now receiving increasing attention.

To address the former, ACU has now introduced, and extended to all campuses, a policy of standardisation, or 'grading on the curve', with indicated percentages expected in each grade. The laudable intent is to ensure that ACU is operating as a single institution, and that students are not inappropriately disadvantaged (or advantaged) by attending one campus rather than another. The perennial concern about such policies is that they act as a straightjacket on staff and students, suppressing professional judgement and diversity. To reduce this effect, the policy only applies to classes of more than 30 students. The Audit Panel also ascertained from examples that major departures from the standard percentages have been accepted when supported by convincing explanation.

Nonetheless, ACU needs to continue to reflect on this policy to ensure that it is not antithetical to the new learning paradigm of student centred-learning, which will require a move to tailoring assessment requirements to students' needs and interests in a way that will make statistical moderation more problematic, since students will not necessarily be undertaking common assessment tasks.

It was mentioned in section 2.4 that students tend to regard their own ACU campus as 'the university', and not to be aware of ACU's national nature, except when it affects them adversely. Standardisation is a case in point, as it was extended from some campuses to the whole University, and there was some concern among students that considerations relevant to other campuses were being imposed on them. As is clear from the preceding paragraphs, this is not a correct interpretation, but it illustrates ACU's continuing need for a high level of communication.

ACU also needs to ensure a high level of continuing communication between staff of the same course on different campuses to avoid inconsistencies, and not merely smooth them over through standardised grading.

4.3.2 Moderation

Honours theses are externally marked, which is not uncommon, but shows commendable attention to standards and comparability. In 2000 the Faculty of Arts and Sciences extended this to third year assignments on the basis of sampling. This system has proved successful, and in September 2002 it was extended to the other faculties and to cross-campus marking of common units.

The system adopted by the Faculty of Arts and Sciences is for most schools to have a random sample of 10% of assignments or examinations externally marked in a final semester subject in each course. External markers have been drawn from the University of New South Wales, University of Technology Sydney, the University of Melbourne, Deakin University, Griffith University, NSW Board of Studies and Sydney Graduate School of Management, among others.

The Audit Panel examined the reports of the pairs of marks or grades awarded by the internal and external markers. These reports generally include a useful narrative comment on possible explanations for any significant discrepancies. The comparisons show that on the whole the internal and external marks are in quite close agreement, and the discrepancies are not all in the same direction. These results provide a welcome confirmation of parity of standards between institutions. In a couple of cases there were rather large discrepancies which were 'explained away' in the narrative comment, rather than being further investigated. It will be important not to lose the value of the system by not following up instances that appear to warrant it.

Commendation 7. AUQA commends ACU for the introduction by one faculty of sample cross-marking by other universities, as a means of ensuring comparability of standards, and the recent extension of this scheme.

4.4 Unit and Program Evaluations

The Audit Panel found that academic staff are professionally committed to evaluating their subjects and their teaching, and employ a diversity of strategies to do so. ACU has a Unit Evaluation Program administered by the Academic Staff Development Unit (ASDU). While use of these evaluation forms is not mandatory, staff are encouraged to use them, and it is mandatory for all lecturers to make some report to their HoS about each unit at the end of the semester, evaluating strengths and weaknesses. In practice, therefore, many staff choose to use the ASDU evaluations to provide data for this report. The Audit Panel was also told that staff do not have to evaluate every unit every semester, but that each staff member should evaluate at least one unit each semester. The Audit Panel noted that nursing courses are evaluated in each state every year and student exit surveys are undertaken.

The Audit Panel received varying accounts of the protocols governing use of the results of the unit evaluation data, with some saying that the HoS receives the data, and others that this is at the discretion of the individual concerned. Part of the variation in response no doubt relates to whether the data being referred to is the raw data, or a summary, but overall the Audit Panel found it hard to get a clear account of the use of unit evaluation in quality assurance, despite

the very strong commitment of staff to improving the quality of their teaching and the evident student satisfaction with the teaching.

Consistent with the Audit Panel's finding, the recent external faculty reviews and the internal quality review highlighted that there is considerable variation in the way formal unit evaluation data is gathered and used within and across faculties. This level of flexibility is not entirely desirable, as it makes it difficult for ACU to know how much data is collected and how it is used. Furthermore, the large item bank from which lecturers may choose for their formal unit evaluations has some problematic implications. Firstly, it means that it is impossible to get consistency or comparability between the various evaluations. Secondly, it means that each evaluation may cover both the unit and the teaching, making it difficult to identify the source of any issues that may need to be addressed. The latter was a source of concern to the internal quality review panel.

This level of variability means that ACU is not in a position to usefully combine results of individual unit evaluations, nor confirm that processes are in place to ensure that critical student feedback is taken into account in unit and course review. In short, while there is a strong individual professional commitment to evaluation, it remains an individual rather than an institutional activity. The Audit Panel therefore supports the identified priority for improvement (ACU Performance Portfolio, p28) to expand the existing procedure for obtaining systematic student feedback on teaching and learning for use by individual lecturers.

Recommendation 10. That ACU review its current approach to evaluation, and systematically implement procedures for obtaining student feedback on teaching and learning, with data relating separately to unit design and teaching quality, and in such a way that data is comparable between different units and different occasions and campuses on which a unit is offered, and is available to heads of school for consistency and other quality assurance purposes.

The Faculty of Arts and Sciences has already given thought to ways of moving towards a more orderly system, and recently agreed a Faculty-wide common set of 10 questions to be used by every lecturer. Each lecturer then has free choice of a further 10 questions. This system is likely to be adopted across ACU. ACU has foreshadowed in its Performance Portfolio that all faculties should have new survey instruments in place by 2003.

Although the use of student evaluation is not universal, students interviewed by the Audit Panel indicated that they consider their views are heard. The Audit Panel found evidence that actions have been taken as a result of student feedback, and that students have been informed of the actions taken.

4.5 Flexible Delivery

ACU provides a range of flexible modes including electronic delivery, weekend teaching and concentrated teaching blocks. Students appreciate these options and ACU's willingness to put

in place special arrangements for individual students at times of personal hardship or difficulty.

ACU contracted with NextEd to provide technical support through Blackboard, a learning management system, for 14 postgraduate courses to be offered on-line. This was undertaken for a trial period of three years, which concludes this year. The enrolments have not been as great as expected. ACU will soon be reviewing the project and deciding on its future.

ACU is about to introduce a learning shell for on-line use at the undergraduate level, drawing on its experience at the postgraduate level. However, the undergraduate programs will use the WebCT learning management system. The Audit Panel enquired about the wisdom of using two platforms, and was told that faculties and schools can make their own choice. However, the Audit Panel was informed that the Core Planning Group has decided that ACU can only provide internal support for one major platform. ACU has already established an On-Line Education Advisory Committee for this purpose. It is chaired by the PVC (AA), which should ensure that its thinking is closely linked to the teaching and learning imperatives. One project already in preparation is the creation of a WebCT unit on the nature of teaching and learning at ACU. Clearly ACU has some work to do on clarifying this area, and a comprehensive 'on-line education plan' is needed (see section 2.8).

As with the implementation of the Learning Paradigm (section 4.1), the Audit Panel suggests to ACU the use of a structured project management approach to the implementation of flexible learning at undergraduate level especially given the capacity of decisions made by individual campuses or faculties to create costs for the support divisions of the University, such as the need to support two on-line learning platforms if different parts of ACU are free to opt for different systems.

Recommendation 11. That ACU develop a plan and related policies for on-line access to learning resources in undergraduate courses and ensure their effective communication and implementation.

4.6 International Education

4.6.1 International Students

Responsibility for international students resides principally as follows. The International Education Office has primary responsibility for international students studying in Australia; ACUcom provides non-award courses; and off-shore award courses are handled through the faculties. To better co-ordinate these activities, the International Education Office and ACUcom have recently been brought under the same director, with whom faculties are expected to collaborate closely.

ACU has a relatively small number of international students, although this number may grow as ACU has made "increasing the University's income through fee-paying international students" (ACU Performance Portfolio, p34) one of its priorities from the Strategic Plan 1999-2008, in order to diversify its funding sources and "assist in reducing the financial dependency on Government funding". The prime area of growth is intended to be in on-shore and non-

award courses. The aim is different with off-shore award courses, and in this ACU's approach is unusual in the Australian context. ACU states that the faculties will continue to offer these "on a limited basis", and that "emphasis will be placed on meeting specific community needs relevant to the University's Mission and social justice commitment" (ACU Performance Portfolio, p36).

4.6.2 Students in Australia

ACU has about 400 international students on-shore. Almost all of these are at the North Sydney campus. With this relatively small number of international students, support for them appears to be sufficient, although there is a desire for career guidance to find part-time employment. ACU mentions in its Performance Portfolio that the disproportionate number of international students studying at the Sydney campuses is putting pressure on the student services, and this finding was confirmed by the Audit Panel. The Students Representative Council arranges functions for the international students.

4.6.3 Students Abroad

There are only about 150 international students off-shore. Currently the largest number of off-shore students (over 80) are in a two-year International Graduate Certificate of Education program in Karachi. This ACU award is offered by the Notre Dame Institute of Education under the supervision of ACU. The program began in 1995 and was thoroughly reviewed in 2000. The course is taught by staff of the Institute (some of whom are Australian Sisters of Mercy, and others who have a master degree from ACU). Each unit is subject to a formal evaluation each time it is conducted. Also, each unit has a moderator (most of whom are staff of ACU, with some from other Australian universities) who marks a sample of students' work.

While these arrangements cover important quality assurance issues, the Audit Panel notes the lack of a comprehensive agreement with the Notre Dame Institute of Education covering all aspects of the program relevant to its quality assurance. Such an agreement should, include the admission of students, the setting of assignments, the determination of the sample of papers for marking by ACU staff, procedures for dealing with discrepancies in marks and periodic review of the contract conditions. It would also provide for the ability to withdraw from the contract if ACU is no longer confident that it is being implemented to its satisfaction.

It is reported that all graduates of the program have found employment. Also, graduates may obtain a BEd from the University of Karachi on successful completion of the required examinations. Most of the graduates have done this, usually filling top positions in the results. The student numbers are expected to remain at the current level.

This project is part of ACU's community engagement and is not an income-generating activity for the University.

Commendation 8. ACU is commended for its involvement in the non-income generating program in Karachi that expresses its values and commitment to community engagement.

The Audit Panel also investigated the Master of Educational Leadership, offered in Mauritius and New Zealand (a total of about 30 students). The course is treated as integral with the operations in Australia: it was reviewed as part of the faculty review, assignment setting and marking is done in Australia, and the same unit evaluation system is used. A liaison person at each site alerts ACU staff if problems arise and a visit is needed.

The Audit Panel inspected the documentation relating to a BBus(Accounting) about to be introduced in collaboration with Caritas Francis Hsu College in Hong Kong. A surprising gap in the overall document of agreement was the omission of reference to assessment procedures. However, they are well-covered in the associated documentation, which must therefore form part of the contract. In this course, ACU staff will do the teaching, set the assignments and examinations, mark the examinations (50% of the weight), and moderate some of the assignments. The Audit Panel suggests that a formal requirement for occasional evaluation of the Hong Kong tutors be introduced. CPA Australia accreditation is being sought.

Despite the adequacy of the proposed procedures for the BBus(Acc) in Hong Kong, the Audit Panel believes that the current system leaves too much responsibility to individual schools and faculties, with no clear specification of ACU's expectations. Although, as mentioned above, off-shore award courses are intended to be a limited operation, it is necessary to have systematic procedures and parameters for planning, implementing and controlling them.

Recommendation 12. That ACU develop a comprehensive system for deciding which off-shore activities to engage in, for planning, implementing and controlling them, and for incorporating an effective quality assurance system.

The proposed procedures for the BBus(Acc) in Hong Kong would be a good starting point for this.

4.6.4 Other Collaborations

The program in Karachi is described as 'accredited by ACU'. A similar phrase is used in an agreement with the Lutheran Church of Australia for the co-operative preparation of teachers for Lutheran schools. However, paragraph 4.6 of the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes states that "Universities and other self-accrediting institutions do not have the power to accredit the courses of other institutions." It is important, therefore, that (whatever the term ACU actually uses) awards made in ACU's name are fully under the control of ACU's quality assurance procedures.

4.6.5 ACUcom

ACUcom is the commercial arm of ACU's educational activity and provides ELICOS and other non-award courses, including a large number of English language courses, principally for Japanese and Korean students. On-shore activities include running management courses for large corporations. ACUcom's main business is in NSW and Victoria, with a small amount in Queensland. Total ACUcom income has been gradually increasing, and is increasingly important for funding new strategic initiatives and projects.

The few permanent staff have an annual performance review. The main appraisal is through feedback on the courses, and many of the part-time staff have been used by ACUcom for a long period. Only about 15% of the staff are from ACU, as most of the courses require the involvement of current practitioners. The ACUcom Victorian office has ISO9000 certification.

Quality considerations relate more to the markets served than to the ACU Mission, and without a very strong input from staff who have been responsible for inculcating that Mission. It is not clear how ACUcom relates to or achieves the values embedded in ACU's Mission. While there is a strong quality control exercised by market forces, and its ISO quality system, on the activities of ACUcom, which are all in the commercial sphere, that is not an adequate insurance against the potential risk to the reputation of ACU from the activities of ACUcom operating outside ACU's systems for quality assurance.

Recommendation 13. That ACU regularly review ACUcom to ensure that the courses it conducts are of appropriate academic standard, and are consistent with ACU's Mission.

5. Research and Research Training

5.1 Research Culture

When ACU became a university in 1991, it emerged from a group of institutions known more for teaching than research. Less than 20% of staff held a doctoral qualification, research grants were uncommon, and ACU catered largely for undergraduate students. As the Australian understanding of a university entails a balance between teaching and research and includes the concept of research-based teaching, it was necessary for the new University to increase the awareness of and involvement in research. A number of mechanisms for achieving this have been used.

Firstly, staff have been (and are still being) encouraged and supported to complete doctoral and other higher degrees. Schools are being provided with teaching relief for this purpose. This means of course that other staff have been willing to take up the slack in a spirit of co-operation for the overall benefit of the University (supplemented by an adequate supply of casual sessional staff: see section 7.3). Research-active staff members have valued and taken advantage of these opportunities. Over 90% of staff now hold higher degrees (compared to the national average of less than 70%), and 50% of staff have doctoral awards.

Secondly, staff are assisted to undertake significant amounts of research through the mechanism of the Institute for the Advancement of Research (IAR). This is a concept rather than a physical entity - staff seconded to the IAR may be on any campus and do not physically relocate. Secondment is through application and competitive selection. Staff within the IAR are provided with full time release from undergraduate teaching duties for an agreed period, and are thereby freed to pursue an extended piece of research work. They continue with any postgraduate supervision and administrative duties. They also contribute to the strengthening of the research culture through seminars on grant applications, publishing strategies, etc.

IAR is highly appreciated by staff and the Audit Panel believes that its existence has helped many individual staff develop their research record. The Audit Panel was less clear, however, on how the IAR is supporting ACU's strategy for focusing research effort in areas of strength, through the centres and flagships (section 5.2). It would be desirable to clarify whether there is the intention of aligning the two, and if not, confirming that resources are available to adequately support what would then be two separate research development strategies.

Thirdly, ACU has doubled its higher degree by research (HDR) candidates since 1998 and tripled its research grant income in the same period.

Fourthly, ACU has established 'flagships' and research centres (see below).

Commendation 9. While acknowledging that ACU started from a low base, AUQA commends the embedding of a culture of research in the University over a short period of time, including ACU's success in supporting staff to complete higher degrees.

5.2 Flagships and Research Centres

5.2.1 Research Centres

ACU has created a number of research centres for the usual reasons of focusing and augmenting research efforts and results, and providing a supportive milieu for research students. Centres should be such that their creation relates to ACU's Mission and enhances ACU's activities. Centres are expected to be financially viable and to provide annual reports. They are reviewed every three years, and are terminated if they are no longer financially viable or not achieving the desired enhancement of research activities. Currently, ACU has seven research centres.

In view of the focus of ACU research strategy upon research centres, the Audit Panel investigated the situation of staff not within a research centre and was satisfied that the criteria for research support are not tied to membership of a centre. Staff spoke very highly of the support offered by the Institute for the Advancement of Research and regard it as offering very real incentives for research.

5.2.2 Flagships

In 2000, the VC introduced the concept of a Flagship. In ACU's Performance Portfolio they are described as 'key areas for research development' (p30), and the Audit Panel had difficulty in understanding the difference between these and research centres. On investigation, it emerged that Flagships are seen as areas which demonstrate ACU's character as well as its research strength. A Flagship is intended to be an area that ACU considers to be a priority, and with which it wants to be publicly associated. Thus they are expected not only to be strong research areas (and could therefore include one or more research centres) but also to be areas of possible community engagement and teaching strength. They can also act in a mentor role to other staff, for example by running training programs.

Six Flagships were established in 2000 and reviewed after two years of operation. At this time, one was 'de-recognised' (and another created). The case of the one that was demoted is instructive: it began with small numbers of staff, and some then left. It is unlikely that such a small group would have been designated as a research centre. The definition of a Flagship means that an area may be so designated, not because it is already strong, but because it is an area that ACU wishes to develop in support of its characteristic Mission. The difference between research centres and Flagships may perhaps be characterised as being between performance and track record for the former, and aspiration and identity for the latter.

The Audit Panel recognised the value of the Flagship concept and the high level of responsibility they are expected to bear in the achievement of ACU's Mission. The Audit Panel noted that the VC has been able to provide some strategic funding for them. Nonetheless, it is the faculties that are expected to draw up the business plans and associated funding to support the Flagships (Research and Research Training Management Plan, 2003-2005, p51). Otherwise, Flagships (and centres) appear to sit outside the main line of support which runs through deans and heads of school. Generally, Flagships have been successful in attracting external funds (perhaps five times the internal support).

As Flagships are seen as flag-bearers for the University, ACU needs to strengthen its specification of Flagships and their structure, with a commitment to University funding on the basis of a long-term business plan that is appropriate to that specification. Otherwise, they have a serious risk of failing. In general, the Flagships and research centres are positively regarded by staff and are therefore having a beneficial effect, but they could be more strategically deployed.

There is a lack of clarity in the distinction between the different kinds of research centres and the flagship concept. ACU Guidelines refer to three levels of research centre (Faculty, University, and Senate) as well as flagships (although the Senate centre category has now been superseded by the Flagship concept (see below)). However, there is considerable overlap in the criteria defining research centres and flagships and no clear mechanism for the recognition of one kind of research centre rather than another. Although it is suggested that a centre may move up this 'hierarchy' there are no criteria for the progression, nor stated consequences in terms of status or resourcing. Directors of Research Centres and Flagships interviewed by the Audit Panel were also unable to describe the significance of these differences.

Recommendation 14. That further attention be given to the criteria defining the different kinds of research centre and, in particular, to the relationship between the flagship concept and research centres.

5.3 Teaching/Research Nexus

The ACU Performance Portfolio states that "the Strategic Plan places an especially high priority on ... enhancing the nexus between research and teaching-learning" (p29). Furthermore, the 'Blue Book' requires new course proposals to address this issue. The Audit Panel discussed the teaching / research nexus with a range of staff. Quite a number of staff appeared to have little understanding of its significance or meaning beyond the usual interpretation of 'active researchers teaching in their area'. Other staff, however, were able to provide evidence of a range of ways in which the connection can fruitfully be made. These included the role of evidence-based practice, the concept of learning as research that differs only in that the learning is not original work, the scholarship of teaching, data analysis in laboratory contexts, immediate feedback from conferences, etc. The Audit Panel formed the view that the implementation of the teaching / research nexus is relying on individuals and that it is not being rolled out in a systematic manner.

Although the concept of the teaching / research nexus is being effectively addressed at ACU, it appears to depend heavily on personal professional knowledge of staff, rather than being made explicit through specific ACU definitions and examples. As a consequence, the good practice is not widely known across the University. ACU should actively seek out such practice and encourage its application elsewhere. Again, section 2.8 is relevant.

Recommendation 15. That the teaching / research nexus be addressed explicitly, and possibly as part of a formal approach taken to the implementation of the learning paradigm.

5.4 Research Students

As mentioned above, ACU has greatly increased the number of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students over recent years (from 80 EFTSU in 1998 to 188 EFTSU in 2002). Such a rapid change can put great pressure on a system, but ACU appears to be handling it satisfactorily. In keeping with an emphasis in its Mission, ACU is specialising in professional doctorates.

Research students have two supervisors, with the principal supervisor required to have a doctorate to supervise doctoral students, while the associate supervisor may be less experienced and be learning the supervisor role. The process for accepting a research student and appointing a supervisor includes final approval by the PVC(R&I) and appears to be quite robust. ACU is targeting the top masters students for admission to PhD, and the enrolment numbers suggest that this strategy is working. There would be value in encouraging supervisors and students to use a standard process to structure their initial discussions to ensure that there is mutual understanding and acceptance of the respective responsibilities. Since there is much in the early stages of candidature which is common to all students, and more that is common to all students in a particular discipline, the Audit Panel recommends that ACU consider developing a structured induction program for research students which takes them from enrolment to submission of their detailed research proposal. Such a program could usefully include seminars on the University's research degree procedures and requirements, support for research students, general advice on writing a research thesis, and in discipline groups, on sources for information and the connection of the students with a research seminar or circle of researchers in related fields.

There is an annual reporting process, with the student seeing the supervisor's comments before the report is submitted to the head of school. The process for taking up problems was not discussed with students but appears to be adequate, and no problems were brought to the Audit Panel's attention. The EdD students have more coursework than the PhD students, with the result that their study program has more structure, and hence the students have more active support. Many students are full-time, but there are also many who are holding responsible positions (eg as school principals) and whose study program is therefore constantly fragmented.

The University Research and Research Training Management Committee has started to develop systematically the research training offered and to draw up a map. However, when asked about this, the directors of research centres appeared to be unaware of it. One gap is that research centres have been given a special role for the development of research cultures, including that for research students, yet the formal management of postgraduates is outside research centres (through heads of school, for example) and there seems to be rather poor communication between the relevant committee charged with oversight of research training and the directors of research centres who should be instrumental in delivering it. For example, the University Research and Research Training Management Committee does not appear to have any member specifically drawn from the research centres (although a member in another capacity may also be a centre director).

Recommendation 16. That ACU consider the role of research centres and flagships in research student training and, in particular, in the provision of resources to support research education.

ACU has specified a set of graduate attributes for HDR students. To check the achievement of these attributes, as well as other aspects of the students' experience, ACU is introducing in 2002 a survey of postgraduate students. The survey, which is to be run annually, is adapted from the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ).

6. Community Engagement

6.1 Students and the Community

The ACU Mission states that “Australian Catholic University seeks to make a specific contribution to its local, national and international communities” (ACU Performance Portfolio, p32).

Part of this contribution arises from ACU’s traditional academic strengths. 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’). Educational courses require each student to complete 80 hours per semester engaged in activities with the community (a total of 24,000 person-hours per semester from 300 students). In addition many of the research activities are also focused on providing a contribution to the community.

Commendation 10. AUQA commends the valuable service that is provided to the community by ACU students engaged in learning activities in a community setting.

The response of students to the community involvement is variable. Whereas some students that the Audit Panel met are very aware of their role in community activities, others see the placements etc. only as apart of the course and not as a specific community engagement initiative. However, the majority of students were aware (at least in general terms) of ACU’s social and service ethos before enrolling.

An outcome from the faculty and Internal Quality Reviews was the decision to redefine the relationship with communities from the concept of community service to community engagement. This was seen as being less uni-directional, and representing a more interactive and collaborative relationship between ACU and each of its communities.

This conceptual shift is supported by members of professional bodies and the community, who are very positive about ACU, its staff and its graduates. They also consider that the relationship is of a collaborative nature with benefits flowing both ways. However, not all staff are aware of the change in emphasis. Furthermore, community engagement does not infuse all aspects of activity. It will be important to ensure that the set of PIs developed in the culture of evidence project include indicators of the development of community engagement down to course level.

The Audit Panel formed a view that ACU may not be fully aware of the extent of developments in professional areas in other institutions, assuming that it continues to be a national leader in its traditional areas of strength (such as teaching and nursing). For example, despite the strong tradition of community service, staff had not absorbed the implications of the shift from

community service to community engagement. More systematic attention may be needed to making the community engagement paradigm explicit for ACU to maintain leadership in its traditionally strong areas.

6.2 Indigenous Affairs

Consistent with its Mission and values, ACU has an extensive set of strategies for Indigenous education. These are based on a 'Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation' which was adopted by Senate in 1999. ACU has three Indigenous support units and three Indigenous Advisory Committees. The Indigenous Support Units located on Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne campuses provide academic and personal support for Indigenous students undertaking courses and are working with staff on Indigenous perspectives. Staff from the support units are involved with students from the time that students apply as it is considered that the personal relationship is necessary. Staff interviewed that are involved with Indigenous students are positive about the programs provided.

Education of Indigenous students is a high priority in ACU's equity policy, and there are courses in Sydney and Brisbane specifically for Indigenous students. Three such courses are a Diploma of Education, a Diploma of Business Administration and a Bachelor of Education. The last-named is focused on field-based learning, designed specifically for the NSW Department of Education. There were 40 graduates from these programs in 2001. Over recent years there has been a steady increase in the numbers of Indigenous enrolments, which is against the national trend.

Many of the Indigenous students study 'away-from-base', that is they attend campus twice each semester for approximately five days and then undertake the remainder of their study from home. This arrangement enables the students to continue their work in schools and also to work with their local communities.

All undergraduate teacher education students undertake a core unit in Indigenous cultural perspectives. However, some course combinations can bypass this requirement: for example a student who has completed a degree and then undertakes a Diploma of Teaching is educated for teaching but without completing a unit in Indigenous cultural perspectives. ACU should address this anomaly.

Increasingly, Indigenous perspectives are being incorporated into all courses as they are reviewed. ACU performs comfortably above the national average on all four equity indicators for Indigenous students (access, participation, retention, success).

Indigenous education is a significant part of ACU's activities, and is important to the University's mission-related goals. The Audit Panel was satisfied that ACU is carefully monitoring its performance and achieving good outcomes in this work.

7. Staffing

7.1 Commitment

The Mission of ACU is reflected in the strong culture of pastoral care exhibited by and for staff, and the commitment of staff to the goals and ethos of ACU. The Audit Panel observed a broad willingness of staff to cross faculty and campus boundaries, for example to work in collaborative teams and to offer double degrees. The typical academic 'silos' are not much in evidence, and staff are very supportive of (even when critical of) the University, and of each other. Although there is no formal mentoring system, a good deal of voluntary and informal mentoring takes place.

Commendation 11. AUQA commends ACU for the high level of commitment by staff exhibited to their students, colleagues and the University.

In keeping with its Mission, ACU endorses and values work/life balance and has incorporated specific conditions relating to this in the recent Enterprise Agreements. ACU was awarded the inaugural Australian HR award for Best Provider of Work/Life Balance.

7.2 Staff Support

7.2.1 Induction

A comprehensive induction process has been developed and set out in a manual, and is undertaken at all levels in the University. Casual staff are not included in the formal induction process, but induction for this group of staff is carried out at the local level. The induction does not include induction to teaching, and this could be a useful addition for academic staff (possibly with the involvement of the Academic Staff Development Unit). Training is provided centrally for supervisors to enable them to carry out the induction process. Despite this, the three faculty reviews all report some dissatisfaction with the induction system, and ACU clearly needs to check on the reason for this.

7.2.2 Staff Development and Review

There are separate staff development policies and procedures for general staff and academic staff. The ASDU was established to promote, facilitate and coordinate access to professional development opportunities in areas identified as being a high priority to ACU. The Personnel Relations Directorate oversees policies and procedures for the development of general staff. Funding is allocated to the ASDU for staffing and to provide some centralised development activities and programs, such as Overseas Study Program. Other funding for staff development activities is provided at the local level. It may be necessary for ACU to review the tasks expected of the ASDU in relation to the resources available to it.

To date, most of the thinking in professional development has concentrated on research development and IT training, including on-line teaching and learning. It is now necessary to devise a broader plan for professional development, in line with major strategies, including for

example the imminent Teaching and Learning Plan, and to develop a culture of systematic support.

The performance review system has been refreshed with a view to a formal performance review being undertaken every two years with an informal review being held in the alternate year. The review system will incorporate the identification of individual staff development requirements, which in turn will inform the courses offered by the ASDU. This more formalised approach to ascertaining staff development requirements will assist in gaining greater value from the funding available for staff development needs. Staff are positive about their experience of reviews conducted to date and are aware of the new system. ACU has recognised the need for explicit attention to be paid to career progression planning for general staff.

7.2.3 Workloads

The current academic workload agreement is expressed in terms of hours. Staff find this system rather cumbersome and inflexible, and feel it gives too little acknowledgement to duties other than teaching. The current Enterprise Agreement for academic staff included a provision to develop and implement a new Academic Workload Policy based on the allocation of points for tasks carried out. This is being tried out in parallel with the existing system. Staff displayed a positive view of the new system because of the incentive to flexibility and change in practices. Staff expect it to permit a more realistic recognition of an appropriate weight to be attached to different kinds of activity and achievement, including the balance between research and teaching.

7.3 Workforce Planning

ACU is implementing a human resources management system to replace the existing payroll system. This new system is expected to provide more sophisticated human resources management data to support planning and decision making.

Over recent years, there has been a changing staffing profile due to the development of the ACU, a greater strategic approach to its operations, the emphasis on augmenting staff qualifications through doctoral study, the increase in research activity, industrial pressures with regard to the use of fixed term contracts and casual staff, and the changing demographics of the student population.

ACU uses casual academic staff. The Audit Panel discussed the implications of this, and found a recognition that this has benefits and drawbacks. Drawbacks include possible extra support load on other, full-time, staff and low level of availability to students. Off-setting this at ACU was evidence that casual staff are often on campus for longer than the class contact time, and in some cases provide students with their work or home telephone numbers and email addresses for contact outside class times. Benefits are that casual staff can bring in a flow of fresh ideas and current experience of modern industrial practice. Those people supervising students in work placements are also functioning as casual ACU staff. A positive view was expressed to the Audit Panel, by staff, students, and external bodies, that a good mix has been achieved and that the diversity of teaching staff has a beneficial impact on the quality of teaching. Furthermore, ACU supports its casual staff well and integrates them into the University.

The changing nature of the workforce means that some strategic workforce planning is necessary and potential problems need to be recognised in the risk management practices. Matters requiring attention are not only the planning of the right permanent / casual mix, but also addressing the aging workforce and adopting appropriate succession planning. The right type and balance of professional development should also be included in such planning. It was not apparent where the responsibility for such workforce planning lies within the organisational structure.

Recommendation 17. That ACU undertake more formal and strategic workforce planning to ensure that it can continue to achieve its Mission under changing employment patterns and conditions.

8. Administrative and Support Services

8.1 Support for Learning

The Mission and ethos of ACU is to have a strong commitment to the support and care of students. The Audit Panel found that both Catholic and non-Catholic students value the ACU ethos and values. The Dean of Students' role includes providing specific support in the areas of counselling, academic skills and support for the development of the Student Representative Councils (SRCs), of which there is one on each campus). The two smaller campuses each have a Rector who acts as the VC's representative on the campus, providing a channel for messages to the campus, and giving the campus a voice in ACU's decision-making fora. The position also promotes a culture where students are encouraged to participate in the life of the campus and the development of ACU. Each of the three PVCs is the Vice-Chancellor's representative in the local region, analogous to the role of the Rector at Ballarat and Canberra. This task is a significant extra responsibility for the PVC, and the PVC is in general not so obviously a person who can be approached by students in the same way as a rector. ACU might consider creating a separate rector role on the larger campuses.

ACU has achieved strong results in student and graduate surveys and students speak positively of the availability of and support by individual staff, as well as by ACU's support systems. However, too much emphasis on a supportive environment could lead to students becoming dependent on staff, and indeed an internal review revealed that there is some tendency towards co-dependency. As a result, actions are being undertaken to develop a greater independence. Initiatives include the provision of services and information, such as career information being available on the web site instead of only via a counsellor. The Audit Panel was informed by staff that students are encouraged to become independent learners and they considered that this is being achieved. This development will be strengthened by the full implementation of the new learning paradigm.

8.2 Students Representative Councils

It is evident that students have a high regard for the communication with, support from, and interaction with individual staff members. As discussed in section 2.4, however, formal communication channels are in need of strengthening as the students' perception is that they do not have an effective voice. There appears not to be a common understanding between ACU and the students of the role and place of the SRC. Just as with ACU itself, this is complicated by the dispersed structure. The student view is more attuned to their local SRC branch and they do not consider issues from a 'SRC National' perspective. Thus it is not clear whether the ACU National Students Association (ACUNSA) is in fact 'the University students association' or 'a federation of student associations'. ACU is aware of and is working towards addressing the issue, with a specific project on this proposed for 2003. Also, a student grievance system is being put in place.

Recommendation 18. That ACU work with the ACU National Students Association to develop a strong and effective role for the Association in decision-making and communication within ACU.

This should also take into account the role of the student member of Senate.

ACU could also consider students' active participation in ACUNSA or an SRC as part of student learning, ie as a form of community service for the purposes of the curriculum. This might also help to address the reported high failure rate for student campus presidents.

8.3 Information Technology

ACU recognised the crucial need for a reliable and effective IT infrastructure to support a multi campus institution. In 2001 the Information Technology and Communication Services (ITCS) unit was restructured and given the role of providing an increasingly integrated University-wide infrastructure and improved teaching and learning facilities. Uniform standards for equipment have been established and progressively implemented. The infrastructure is the same standard across ACU, which is a considerable achievement and one which makes it much easier for staff to work across the institution as a whole. Security of the network has been improved with authentication and authorisation processes implemented.

Significant work has been undertaken to gain feedback from users and to benchmark the services provided. An externally-facilitated review of service delivery has been conducted, with 75 randomly selected staff and 75 students interviewed to ascertain their perception of the standard environment for computer laboratories. Benchmarking activities with other universities in this area is through CAUDIT (Council of Australian University Directors of Information Technology). The Audit Panel generally gained a very favourable impression of developments in the IT area. Relatively minor negative comments were made by staff on the effectiveness of video conference facilities; and by students that they are given only a relatively small allocation of hard disk space and there is no easy system for students to transfer their data to a readily available storage system such as CD-ROM.

One of the ACU identified priorities for improvement (ACU Performance Portfolio, p36) is that data will be collected for indicators in respect of each of the major services provided by ITCS, and performance on these indicators will be monitored regularly, with input from the clients of the services. The Audit Panel strongly supports this action as it will assist in ensuring that the IT services continue to improve and effectively support the functions of the University.

Commendation 12. ACU is commended for the significant improvements it has made to the IT infrastructure and the processes put in place to gain stakeholder feedback and to benchmark services.

8.4 Library

At the time ACU was formed there were eight small libraries with collections designed to support teaching. The creation of ACU as a single institution and the expansion of the research area has provided a challenge to the Library. There is a continuing pressure to provide increased financial resources to enhance the Library service. The Library has been successful

in bids to increase the budget, which alleviates but does not solve the resource issue. Also, income from some fee-paying courses is allocated to the Library.

The Director of Libraries receives proposals for new courses and/or changes for comment, so that he can indicate what the implications are for library resources. The consequences of the library's inability to support a new course with appropriate learning resources, however, were unspecified, in particular whether the library's inability to support a course development would delay the course or trigger more resources for the library. It is relevant that national comparative surveys show that while the library's service level is good (in the top quartile) its resources and facilities are below average. This perhaps suggests that the judgement on whether courses can be properly resourced should be more stringent.

Several initiatives have been implemented to address the resource issue. These include a shift to electronic resources offered online, inter-campus loans and subsidising students to purchase a reciprocal borrower's card for use at other libraries. Some students expressed frustration concerning the inter-campus loans as these are only permissible if the book is not in the collection at their 'home' campus but does not take into account the availability of the book.

Staff are appreciative of the service the Library provides in assisting the sourcing of materials when they are not available in the ACU collection, but students are using other libraries in preference to ACU libraries

Recommendation 19. That ACU ensure that library funding is appropriate to properly support the academic programs on each campus, and give consideration to how it builds library resources to support the developing e-learning strategy.

8.5 Administrative Services

The Academic Registrar has national responsibility across all six campuses for the key administrative functions including admissions, enrolments, timetabling, examinations and graduations.

Students interviewed were generally satisfied with the availability of and access to services. This is consistent with the findings of an investigation carried out in late 1999 for ACU by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education of The University of Melbourne. This study tested student and staff perceptions of the Academic Skills Unit, the Campus Ministry and the Counselling Service, and found a high percentage of student satisfaction with the services. A 'one-stop shop' for students is available on each campus for administrative, financial and other matters.

Concerns were raised by staff and students about the academic timetable which is now developed nationally. Concerns include: long breaks between lectures (particularly difficult for students who do not reside close to campus so therefore are not in a position where they can go home and return later for the next lecture); and the lateness of the posting of the timetable e.g.

in first semester the timetable came out during orientation week. ACU expects to produce the timetable much earlier in future.

8.6 Facilities

The ACU Performance Portfolio described recent and current consolidation and improvement of campuses including the closure of the Castle Hill campus in Sydney, the consolidation of the Melbourne operations onto one campus and the opening of a new Brisbane (Banyo) campus. The Audit Panel noted the amount of work that has been done in the consolidation of campuses and did not further explore this area. Positive comments were received on the opportunity provided for input from staff and students in the development of plans for the Brisbane campus and on the standard of facilities across the campuses. Students made minor comments that additional leisure space would be desirable, but understood that space is already at a premium.

APPENDIX A: AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

Australian Catholic University commenced operation on 1 January 1991 and now has six campuses in Ballarat, Brisbane, Canberra, Melbourne, and Sydney (2). The University was formed by the amalgamation of four Catholic institutions of higher education in eastern Australia, and is incorporated as a company limited by guarantee (Australian Catholic University Ltd).

The governing body is the Senate which consists of the Chancellor, Pro-Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor, eight persons elected by the members of the Company, three persons elected by and from the academic staff of the University, one person elected by and from the general staff of the University and one student of the University. The University has also established four Chapters, based in the regional communities it serves, which provide advice to the Senate on local needs and demands, and serve as important links to community interests.

The University had its origins in the mid-1800s when religious orders and institutes began preparing teachers, and later nurses, for Catholic institutions. Through a series of amalgamations, relocations, transfers of responsibilities, and diocesan initiatives, more than 20 historical entities have contributed to the creation of Australian Catholic University. The University is a public university, open to all, and is a member of the Association of Commonwealth Universities and the International Federation of Catholic Universities.

An Academic Board is constituted by the Senate to administer and implement academic policies. The three foundation faculties are Arts and Sciences, Education, and Health Sciences. Courses are offered in a range of fields, including business administration, exercise science, hotel management, indigenous education, information systems, midwifery, music, nursing, philosophy, psychology, social science, theology, visual arts & design. The University has two programs available in all faculties leading to the award of degrees by research only: Master of Philosophy and Doctor of Philosophy. Research degrees include Doctor of Philosophy/Master of Psychology, Master of Music and Master of Social Science, Doctor of Education and Master of Education, Master of Exercise Science and Master of Nursing. The University's research activities are focused through identified flagships and research centres.

There are three Pro-Vice-Chancellors (located in Brisbane, Melbourne, and Sydney) with delegated responsibility for assigned areas of University policy (Academic Affairs, Quality and Outreach, and Research and International). Each Pro-Vice-Chancellor is the Vice-Chancellor's representative in the local region, as are the Rectors at Ballarat and Canberra. Each of the three Faculties is headed by a Dean and there are six Directors with national portfolios.

Each campus has a Student Representative Council, and there is a national student body, ACUNSA (Australian Catholic University National Students Association) located at a different campus each year. In 2001 the University had 10,493 students, 386 academic staff and 422 general staff.

APPENDIX B: THE OBJECTS OF AUQA

1. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of QA arrangements relating to the activities of Australian universities, other self-accrediting institutions (SAIs) and state and territory HE accreditation bodies.
2. Monitor, review, analyse and provide public reports on QA arrangements in SAIs, and on processes and procedures of state and territory accreditation authorities, and on the impact of those processes on quality of programs.
3. Report on the criteria for the accreditation of new universities and non-university HE courses as a result of information obtained during the audit of institutions and state and territory accreditation processes.
4. Report on the relative standards of the Australian HE system and its QA processes, including their international standing, as a result of information obtained during the audit process.

APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL

Ms Judith Duffy, Audit Director, AUQA, Melbourne, Victoria (panel member to 9th August, 2002)

Professor Elizabeth Harman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Edith Cowan University, Perth

Professor John Holmwood, Director, Graduate School of Social Sciences, University of Sussex, UK

Professor Michael Rowan, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Education, Arts and Social Sciences, University of South Australia, Adelaide (Panel Chair)

Dr David Woodhouse, Executive Director, AUQA, Melbourne, Victoria (panel member from 1 July 2002)

Mr Nicholas Zorbas, Consultant, Melbourne, Victoria

Executive Support:

Ms Betty Taylor, Audit Officer, AUQA, Melbourne, Victoria