

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of
Australian Film Television and Radio School

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OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

In 2006 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of the Australian Film Television and Radio School.

This Report of the audit provides an overview, and then details the Audit Panel's findings, recommendations, affirmations and commendations. A brief introduction to the Australian Film Television and Radio School (hereinafter 'AFTRS') is given in Appendix A; the mission, objectives, vision and values of AUQA are shown in Appendix B; membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix C. Appendix D defines abbreviations and technical terms used in this Report.

The Audit Process

AUQA bases its audits on each organisation's own objectives, together with the MCEETYA *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/>, and other relevant legal requirements or codes to which the organisation is committed. The major aim of the audit is to consider and review the procedures an organisation has in place to monitor and achieve its objectives. Full details of the AUQA audit process are available in the AUQA Audit Manual <<http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityaudit/auditmanuals/index.shtml>>.

On 15 December 2006, AFTRS presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) to AUQA along with various supporting materials. The Audit Panel met on 16 January 2007 to consider these materials.

The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to AFTRS on 30 January 2007. During that visit, the answers to questions and additional information requested by the Panel were discussed with the auditee, as was the Audit Visit program.

As a part of the audit of AFTRS, two of the state offices (Melbourne, Victoria and Perth, Western Australia) of the institution were also visited by Audit Panel members. On 27 February 2007, a delegation of the Audit Panel consisting of the Audit Director and another Panel member visited the Melbourne office, and the Panel Chair visited the Perth office. The main Audit Visit took place from 12 to 14 March 2007 at the North Ryde campus (Sydney) of AFTRS.

In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 90 people during the Audit Visit, including external members of the Council, Academic Board, senior management, teaching and administrative staff, technical staff, students, alumni and industry partners. In addition, because of AFTR's strong industry connections, further input was obtained via a survey of several industry organisations. The Chairperson of the Audit Panel had a telephone interview with the Minister for the Arts and Sport on 15 March 2007. Sessions were also available for any member of the AFTRS community to meet the Audit Panel but no one took advantage of this opportunity.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 14 March 2007 and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. It records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by AFTRS as well as other information available to the Panel. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of AFTRS' activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

This Report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A commendation refers to the achievement of a stated goal, or to some plan or activity

that has led to, or appears likely to lead to, the achievement of a stated goal, and which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. A recommendation refers to an area in need of attention, whether in respect of approach, deployment or results, which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. Where such matters have already been identified by AFTRS, with evidence, they are termed affirmations. It is acknowledged that recommendations in this Audit Report may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for the auditee. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise these recommendations, and recognises that it is the responsibility of AFTRS to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. Other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Introduction to Findings

Institutional context

AFTRS is a statutory authority of the Australian Government established under the *Australian Film, Television and Radio School Act 1973* (AFTRS Act or the 'Act') to seed the revival of the Australian film industry. It was granted Higher Education Provider (HEP) status under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* in 2005. It is a self-accrediting institution and offers a range of postgraduate programs. It operates as a specialist centre of excellence providing advanced, integrated education and training for exceptionally talented filmmakers and broadcasters.

Planning and attention to formal quality assurance processes have been influenced by the AFTRS' reporting mechanisms to the Australian Government, through the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA). With the recently acquired HEP status, AFTRS has dual reporting requirements to DCITA as a statutory authority and to the Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) as a HEP. To make the quality assurance processes more explicit and robust, AFTRS has recently developed plans and strategies specific to this issue and they are at various stages of implementation.

At the time of the audit, AFTRS was reflecting on its future and had put new systems and structures in place. A number of key areas of change were observed by the Panel. These include the reorganisation of teaching departments into multidisciplinary units, the reorganisation of the curriculum with a new graduate certificate, adding more group teaching and flexible delivery, new data management systems, a new campus, strengthening the activities of the state offices, attention to research and the search for a new director.

Governance and Management

Key responsibilities of governance and management rest with the AFTRS Council, the Executive Team and the Academic Board. This Report commends the strong and sound leadership in the Council and the Executive Team. The Council has a strong sense of cohesion and interrelatedness and pays good attention to risk analysis and internal audit. There is a high level of engagement among the Council members in guiding the strategic priorities of AFTRS. The Executive Team has a comprehensive understanding of the strategic priorities and action plans of AFTRS. Staff are well informed of the School's directions and they acknowledge the positive impact made by the Director of AFTRS in leading the institution.

AFTRS makes good use of the Management Forum, which is made up of all managerial level positions in the School, to generate ideas on operational matters and suggest improved ways of doing its core business, and to support planning, review and quality improvement across the institution.

Aspects of academic oversight at AFTRS warrant immediate attention. The Panel was concerned that the Academic Board does not function as effectively as it ought to in overseeing the academic activities and standards of the School.

Attention to key performance indicators through the Corporate Plan has been an established practice at AFTRS. It submits to the Minister for the Arts and Sport six-monthly reports against the Corporate Plan Performance Indicators. However, benchmarking with international comparator institutions has been informal and AFTRS has recognised the need for a formal approach.

There are also other areas that need attention such as the absence of women in the Executive Team, the low representation of women in other senior positions, implementation of formal performance review at all levels, and development of the central policy database. This Report has affirmations, recommendations and observations on these issues.

Teaching and Learning

The quality of teaching, education and training offered by AFTRS is well regarded by the industry. In response to changes in the industry, AFTRS is working to enhance the cross-disciplinary approach to its courses. To allow for cross-disciplinary courses and collaboration between departments as well as to effect administrative efficiencies, AFTRS has reorganised some teaching departments into broader, more flexible multidisciplinary units called 'pods'. The establishment of pods has facilitated the move away from a narrow craft guild model towards a more integrated and flexible model, better suited to digital production and distribution, and the directions of the industry in general.

To further strengthen its teaching and learning profile in 2005 and 2006, AFTRS has directed its planning towards flexible delivery of courses. Flexible delivery is still developing and the extent of success in different teaching areas is variable. AFTRS recognises the new challenges of expanding flexible delivery and has appointed key staff to ensure a professional approach to course development and flexible delivery. Comprehensive guidelines, curriculum structure and a delivery plan are being developed to ensure a consistent approach and methodology for flexible delivery of courses. AFTRS is also aware of the challenges related to the administrative aspects of flexible delivery. By building on the success of the flexible delivery of courses in the Radio Branch, and by attending to the issues in other program areas, AFTRS is well placed to expand this strategic activity.

The teaching branches conduct Mid-Year Curriculum Reviews to review curriculum and to coordinate planning of the curriculum for the award courses for the following year. Although this process is not as structured as formal curriculum reviews, it seems to be effective in achieving its goals.

Policies on student assessment are in place and students are well informed of the policies. However, the nature of student assessment needs attention. The Panel noted lapses in student assessments that should have been monitored more carefully. When AFTRS encompasses expanded flexible delivery groups, problems associated with student assessment are likely to become more complex. This Report recommends that AFTRS strengthen its oversight and monitoring of student assessment procedures to ensure that the system provides fair, valid and consistent judgements of student work.

A significant characteristic of the staff profile is the industry experience and involvement. However, a particular risk AFTRS has to deal with is the regular staff turnover. While the industry background of the staff has facilitated the mentoring process, it also poses challenges to the roles the teaching staff have to play as teachers. AFTRS has a professional development program to support staff in their teaching role. While the teacher education for new staff is in place, staff induction for their specific job responsibilities seems to be patchy and variable. The professional development and training provided for staff is good and this Report has a commendation on that.

Other areas that need attention include coordination of quality monitoring of the state offices and embedding graduate attributes in courses.

Research

Explicit attention to research at AFTRS has gained momentum only very recently. Although staff are enthusiastic about undertaking research, AFTRS has not provided an adequate research framework within which this can occur. There is a need for a clearly focused philosophical position on the nature of the research which best fits AFTRS' purpose.

In an effort to develop a more formal approach to research, AFTRS has developed a Research Plan and established internal structures and developed functional areas of research. The Centre for Research and

Screen Studies has been reconfigured to take on the role of planning and overseeing the School's research program. Two new functional areas, namely, the Centre for Screen Business and the Laboratory of Advanced Media Production, have been established with key research responsibilities. These activities are a clear indication of the capability of AFTRS in industry focused research and development.

AFTRS has established a Research Committee to advise the Academic Board on the research proposals. While establishment of this committee is an important initiative, its terms of reference should be broadened so it can set research directions, monitor industry opportunities and manage the research effort.

AFTRS needs to ensure that staff research contributes to the industry. Research supervision needs to reflect the capabilities of the staff through their experience as researchers. Further, staff need adequate time for their own research to enhance research supervision which has implications for workload. There are also resource implications in providing adequate support for research students in terms of library and research funds. In other words, AFTRS needs to reconceptualise research and develop a comprehensive research implementation plan addressing the issues of staffing, infrastructure and support systems, prior to expanding its student research.

Industry Engagement

There is a strong and clear alignment in the AFTRS Act and mission, objectives and strategies in the Corporate Plan regarding industry engagement. AFTRS is very successful in its mission to support the industry and it continues to maintain, deepen and expand its relationship and engagements with the industry. The industry has high regard for the education and training offered by AFTRS. This Report commends AFTRS for its success in attracting industry support, including industry-funded scholarship, guest lecturers and in-kind support.

Indigenous Focus

AFTRS states that it seeks, through education and training, to provide an avenue for Indigenous Australians to express themselves, in their own way, through control from behind the camera. Through the Indigenous Program Initiative (IPI) AFTRS has been implementing various strategies to identify potential Indigenous candidates and to support them when they gain entry into AFTRS programs. This Report commends AFTRS for its long-standing support for Indigenous education that is matched with external funds, strongly supported by the Council, and by successive directors of AFTRS. However, embedding Indigenous perspectives into the programs across the curriculum needs attention.

The Indigenous Development Strategy (IDS), developed in 2006, is structured on the successful existing support measures of the IPI. AFTRS has made available some resources in order to roll out the projects proposed in the IDS. The impact of IDS should be seen in a few years.

Student Services, Support and Facilities

AFTRS has satisfactory arrangements for support facilities and associated services to its students. Relocation to the new campus will require AFTRS to explore how some of these services will be supported. The new Student Information Management System is expected to streamline the data management. The library services and technical facilities are commendable.

Communication and New School Project

AFTRS has embarked on two major initiatives that have significant bearing on its positioning as a leading media school. One is the attention to communication strategies to establish its position with stakeholders; this Report commends AFTRS for its focus on communicating to its external community its positioning and branding as a leading media school. The other initiative is its forthcoming move to an inner city campus, closer to relevant industries. The relocation project has placed great pressure on staff time but the manner in which AFTRS is planning for the relocation to the new campus, the level of involvement of staff, the use of external specialists at appropriate times, the planning for human resources contingencies, and the attention to business continuity issues, are commendable.

A summary of commendations, affirmations, and recommendations follows. These are not prioritised by the Audit Panel. They are listed below in the order in which they appear in the Report.

Commendations

1. AUQA commends the Council of AFTRS for its effective governance, and for its contribution as a source of ideas and expertise, and as a channel for industry feedback.....11
2. AUQA commends AFTRS for its Mid-Year Curriculum Review which serves as a valuable process for bringing staff together to review and reflect collectively on current offerings and experiences and to think strategically on future developments and planning.20
3. AUQA commends AFTRS for the professional development policy and support provided to staff.....22
4. AUQA commends AFTRS for successfully addressing its mission with respect to industry engagement in education and training.....29
5. AUQA commends AFTRS for its success in attracting industry support, including industry-funded scholarships, guest lecturers, in-kind support, and high level of employment of its graduates.29
6. AUQA commends AFTRS for its long-standing support for Indigenous education that is matched with external funds, strongly supported by the Council, and by successive directors of AFTRS.....31
7. AUQA commends AFTRS for the quality of its library, collection and services in support of the needs of the students and staff of AFTRS.....33
8. AUQA commends AFTRS for the quality of the technical facilities made available to AFTRS' students in support of their advanced education and training, and for the responsiveness of the technical staff.33
9. AUQA commends AFTRS for its focus on communicating to its external community its positioning and branding as a leading media school.34
10. AUQA commends the planning for the relocation to the new campus, the level of involvement of staff, the use of external specialists at appropriate times, the planning for human resources contingencies, and the attention to business continuity issues.35

Affirmations

1. AUQA affirms the Council's recognition of the need for systems to ensure corporate continuity and corporate memory.11
2. AUQA affirms the emerging attention to key performance indicators and benchmarking for quality enhancement and encourages AFTRS to explore further opportunities for formal benchmarking with international comparators.14
3. AUQA affirms AFTRS' plan of action to develop a central, searchable policy database.15
4. AUQA notes that AFTRS has identified the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning and affirms its efforts in implementing appropriate strategies to address this issue.19

5. AUQA affirms the direction being taken by AFTRS in implementing the expansion of flexible delivery, ensuring consistency in the expansion, and the appointment of expert educational personnel to support the expansion in a systematic way.20
6. AUQA affirms the efforts of AFTRS to coordinate the state offices and integrate their activities and accountabilities into central planning, and to strengthen the quality control measures operating at state level.....23
7. AUQA affirms AFTRS' implementation of the integrated student information management system and urges AFTRS to pay attention to data security, quality control and staff training.32

Recommendations

1. AUQA recommends that the Academic Board pay further attention to its role in monitoring quality and standards to ensure robust academic oversight of all curriculum matters, including curriculum renewal, new developments, and credit transfer.....12
2. AUQA recommends that AFTRS strengthen the formal performance review of staff at all levels.15
3. AUQA recommends that AFTRS embed its intended graduate attributes into programs and courses and ensure a stronger alignment of assessment tasks and grade criteria with the attributes.....19
4. AUQA recommends that AFTRS strengthen its oversight and monitoring of student assessment procedures to ensure that the system provides fair, valid and consistent judgements of student work.21
5. AUQA recommends that AFTRS develop a research framework which has a clear industry research and development focus.25
6. AUQA recommends that the Academic Board through its Research Committee take a proactive role in establishing the research focus and directions of AFTRS.....26
7. AUQA recommends that AFTRS develop a comprehensive research implementation plan addressing the issues of staffing, infrastructure and support systems, prior to expanding its student research.....27
8. In the light of the long-standing commitment demonstrated by AFTRS towards the development of an Indigenous voice in film and broadcast, AUQA recommends that AFTRS examine the need and the opportunity to embed Indigenous perspectives into the programs across the curriculum.30

1 ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW AND AUDIT CONTEXT

AFTRS is a self-accrediting institution established under the *Australian Film, Television and Radio School Act 1973* to seed the revival of the Australian film industry. It is a statutory authority of the Australian Government. Established on the European model as an independent national academy, it was granted Higher Education Provider (HEP) status in 2005 under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*.

The key functions of the School as set out in the legislation are:

- (a) to provide advanced education and training by way of the development of the knowledge and skills required in connexion with the production of programs;
- (b) to conduct and encourage research in connexion with the production of programs;
- (c) to conduct such seminars and courses of education or training for persons engaged, or to be engaged, directly or indirectly, in connexion with the production of programs as are approved by the Council;
- (d) to co-operate and make arrangements with other institutions and persons for purposes in connexion with the production of programs or the provision of education or training... (AFTRS Act pp3–4).

The AFTRS Act also provides for AFTRS to award degrees, diplomas and certificates in relation to the education and training it provides. AFTRS offers postgraduate qualifications in a range of disciplines relevant to media industry. The teaching and training methodology for the full-time courses at AFTRS is very intense with a mentoring approach. For most specialisations the annual intake may not exceed four students. In 2006, AFTRS had 139 staff including senior management, 115 full-time students, and approximately 3045 participants in industry professional training programs across Australia.

Considering the special nature of the institution, there is no doubt that AFTRS is carrying out its education and training functions well. It operates as a specialist centre of excellence providing advanced, integrated training for exceptionally talented filmmakers and broadcasters. However, at the time of the audit, AFTRS was reflecting on its future and had put in place new systems and structures, the impact of which will be seen only after a few years. This Report has to be seen in the light of these organisational characteristics and contextual factors.

1.1 *Vision and Mission of AFTRS*

The AFTRS vision is to provide leadership through a passionate commitment to excellence in creativity, innovation and enterprise. Its mission as presented in the Corporate Plan 2005–2008 is:

To advance the success and sustainability of Australia's screen and broadcast industries by developing the skills and knowledge of talented individuals and undertaking leading-edge research. AFTRS aims to transform the abilities of individuals and strengthen the skills base of the industry.

While AFTRS has been successful in its industry-oriented training functions, attention has been paid to research only recently. The advanced training programs offered by AFTRS are well regarded and chapters 3 and 5 of this Report discuss them. Areas that need attention in the research function of AFTRS are discussed in chapter 4 of this Report.

1.2 *Planning and Quality at AFTRS*

Planning and attention to formal quality assurance processes have been shaped by the AFTRS' reporting mechanisms to the Australian Government, through the Department of

Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA). AFTRS reports the operations of its programs against its Corporate Plan objectives to the AFTRS Council. Its planning and review processes come under direct scrutiny from DCITA and the Minister for the Arts and Sport, through six-monthly reports against Corporate Plan Performance Indicators. The Corporate Plan itself has to be approved by the Minister and the format of the Plan is largely determined by departmental requirements. This, coupled with the small size and specialised nature of the institution, has resulted in a centralised planning approach. But the range of opportunities created within AFTRS for input from relevant groups has resulted in a consultative and iterative approach to implementation of plans. Feedback from relevant groups shapes further planning and review processes and this approach has proved to be effective at AFTRS.

AFTRS acknowledges in its Portfolio that, until recently, it had had no explicitly defined quality processes. Its reporting requirements and staff enthusiasm were driving the quality controls. To make the quality assurance processes more explicit and robust, AFTRS has taken initiatives. Various plans and strategies specific to its key functions have been developed and are at various stages of implementation. The sections that follow discuss in detail the adequacy of those quality assurance arrangements.

1.3 Audit Context

As mentioned earlier, at the time of the audit, AFTRS was reflecting on its future. The mission statement and Corporate Plan underwent changes in 2005 to take into account the changing industry environment and the significant challenges confronting the School over the planning period 2005–2008. The rapid changes in the industry in the tools of production, the platforms for delivery of productions and the devices on which audiences receive media programs, have been noted by AFTRS. The revisions to the Corporate Plan and its strategies have been in response to these changes.

The Capital Management Plan (2005–2008) noted that the status of AFTRS as a HEP brings increased reporting and student tracking requirements that necessitate improved student data management as a high priority. At the time of the audit, AFTRS was introducing a new data management system. Planning for the relocation to the new campus was in an advanced stage and AFTRS had plans in place to achieve the move by early 2008. Also the search for a new director had just been initiated.

The Learning and Teaching Plan and Research Plan were developed in 2006. New strategic priorities such as expanding flexible delivery of courses, and strengthening the national remit through other state office activities were still evolving. Other key areas of change in teaching and learning included the reorganisation of teaching departments into multidisciplinary units, and the concomitant development of group teaching and flexible delivery.

Attention to research, efforts to structure the curriculum more systematically, embedding graduate attributes in the curriculum, and formal quality assurance processes have been more recent considerations.

Given this context, AFTRS has made good use of the self-assessment conducted as part of the AUQA audit, to reflect on its directions for the future, strategic priorities and the progress made to date. Although the Performance Portfolio discussed the structures and technological facilities of AFTRS rather than its ‘people’ or ‘human resources’, the Audit Visit made it clear to the Panel that the strength of AFTRS is its people and AFTRS is aware of this. Heavy reliance on people has both advantages and disadvantages especially in times of change, but AFTRS has initiated formal systems to address the disadvantages. Building on the strength of its people – an engaged Council, a dynamic Director, a dedicated Executive Team, experienced and expert staff, enthusiastic and talented students, and a supportive industry—AFTRS is well positioned to enhance its image as the leading media school nationally and with an international reputation.

2 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The governance and management of AFTRS derive from the provisions of the AFTRS Act. As an agency of DCITA, AFTRS is accountable to the Australian Government through the Minister for the Arts and Sport, and operates within the broad parameters of government policy. The Uhrig Review, conducted by the Australian Government in 2005–06, confirmed AFTRS' status as an independent agency under the portfolio, governed by the provisions of the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997*.

As a statutory authority of the Australian Government, AFTRS aims to ensure that its operations meet the standards set in the Principles of Public Sector Governance identified by the Australian National Audit Office. AFTRS has dual reporting requirements, to DCITA as a statutory authority and to DEST as a HEP. This places AFTRS in a situation with very different relationships and accountabilities between its stakeholders such as the government, Council, industry, staff and students. The Panel found that AFTRS manages this complex relationship well.

Key responsibilities of governance and management rest with the AFTRS Council, the Executive Team and the Academic Board. A suite of plans is in place to support the governance and management functions of AFTRS. The Corporate Plans have objectives relating to the need to manage the organisation efficiently and effectively. The Capital Management Plan (2005–2008) links with the Corporate Plan to ensure that major strategic activities are supported by specific capital management actions. AFTRS has a Risk Management Plan and a Fraud Control Plan which provide a framework for the School's approach to responsible management of resources.

Overall, the Panel found the leadership to be commendable. However, academic oversight at AFTRS in many important areas is yet to be systematised. This is largely due to the small size of the institution, and the mentor-oriented approach to teaching that relies heavily on the expertise of the staff who may not have formal academic training. Although academic oversight seems to be working more or less satisfactorily at AFTRS, in view of the proposed expansion and consolidation in many areas of teaching, and also in view of the recently acquired HEP status, AUQA urges AFTRS to strengthen the role of the Academic Board to meet its terms of reference and ensure that academic oversight is robust. The following sections discuss these audit conclusions.

2.1 Council

AFTRS is governed by a Council which reports to the Australian Parliament through the Minister for the Arts and Sport. The Council has nine members:

- Three members appointed by the Governor-General
- Three members from the Convocation appointed by the Council
- One AFTRS staff member elected by staff
- One AFTRS student elected by students
- The Director, ex-officio.

This combination of appointment by the Governor-General, appointment by the Council and election from the campus community has ensured an appropriate mix of experience, expertise and enthusiasm in the Council. The industry background of the Council members has been the backbone to the Council in discharging its responsibilities for the policy-making on AFTRS

activities and for monitoring the overall performance. It also facilitates the Council's function to 'provide and maintain strong communication links with the film and broadcasting industries'.

The Council regularly monitors its performance and in 2004 organised an external review, which highlighted areas for improvement. The Panel found the Council documentation, such as the Council meeting papers and the Handbook for the Council Members, to be thorough and indicative of a well-run body.

The Council has been successful in establishing its role in key decision-making in the governance structure of AFTRS. It has ensured that budget-making and approval remains an iterative process between the Executive Team, the Council and government.

The Council has a strong sense of cohesion and interrelatedness and pays good attention to risk analysis and internal audit. There is a high level of engagement among the Council members in guiding the strategic priorities of AFTRS, enlivened by individual autonomy and collective involvement. The Panel noted that at times the Council engages with individual students by taking a role in tracking graduates and helping them in their careers in the industry.

Commendation 1

AUQA commends the Council of AFTRS for its effective governance, and for its contribution as a source of ideas and expertise, and as a channel for industry feedback.

The Council is aware of a few areas that need attention, such as succession planning and corporate continuity at various levels of management, including increased representation of women in senior positions. The Panel noted that in overseeing the succession plan of AFTRS, including the search for the new director of AFTRS, the Council has a collaborative role with DCITA.

The Council appoints three members from the Convocation, which according to the AFTRS Act (pp12–13) includes all present and past members of the Council, interim Council and staff, and past students. Although the Act gives the Chair of the Council the power to convene the Convocation, it does not appear that this has ever occurred.

As a small institution, AFTRS relies heavily on individuals, rather than on systems, for both its governance and management functions, which has both positive and negative implications. In times of change this might pose risks around issues of corporate continuity and corporate memory. The Council has recognised these risks and is taking steps to address them.

Affirmation 1

AUQA affirms the Council's recognition of the need for systems to ensure corporate continuity and corporate memory.

2.2 Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee

The Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee (FARM) is a standing committee of the Council, assisting in responsibilities relating to financial reporting, business policies and practices, accounting polices, and management and internal controls. It also ensures the integrity of the internal audit function and looks after the AFTRS' risk management and fraud control plan. It is chaired by an external member of the Council.

The name and some of the stated duties of FARM suggested to the Panel that the Committee might exercise a conflicting set of responsibilities. However, the Panel was assured that FARM in fact plays the role of an audit rather than executive finance committee. Given the separation of

direct financial management from audit and risk functions, AFTRS may like to consider reviewing the Committee's name and functions, and ensure that its actual remit and focus are clear.

FARM develops an annual audit plan identifying areas to be reviewed in the coming year. On the basis of this plan, the internal auditors review a selection of AFTRS management areas or processes to ensure compliance with legislation and good practice. AFTRS acknowledges that the reports produced to date have been valuable in monitoring, reviewing and improving its management processes. The Panel found evidence that both internal audit and risk management were soundly conducted and that recommended improvements were acted upon.

2.3 *Academic Board*

The Academic Board, chaired by the Director of AFTRS, reports to the Council. It is composed of seven *ex-officio* and five nominated senior members of the staff, and two elected representatives. It has terms of reference “[t]o make recommendations to Council regarding the approval of curriculum and monitor the delivery of academic programs within the School, and to advise Council on all academic matters affecting the educational programs of the School, and affecting students of the School.”

The Academic Board functions through three subcommittees, namely, the Student Review Board, the Postgraduate Courses Committee (PGCC), and more recently the Research Committee. Curriculum development generally originates at the departmental level, and changes to the curriculum are submitted to the PGCC, and then to the Academic Board. The Student Review Board reviews the progress of full-time students and determines whether or not they are eligible for the award of a degree.

The Panel was concerned that the Academic Board does not function as effectively as it ought to in overseeing the academic activities and standards of the School. In the absence of any formal benchmarking, the role of the Academic Board is fundamental to ensuring quality. The Panel noted that, on some of the student assessment related issues, the Academic Board has not exercised its oversight adequately. The Panel saw instances of external examiners' reports on student assessments that have not been followed-up for further actions to ensure quality (section 3.7).

Proposals for curriculum changes also need to be examined by the Academic Board more rigorously. The proposed strategic direction regarding the Graduate Certificate programs, expansion of flexible ways of offering courses, and articulation arrangements into higher level courses, will pose new pressures on academic governance. As the new curriculum structure evolves, it will require the Academic Board to have rigorous and robust academic oversight of all curriculum related issues.

The Board will also need to manage its policy on credit transfer as the Graduate Certificate programs are developed and students are using this pathway into the Master's programs. The role of the Board in monitoring quality and standards has to be made explicit in processes and procedures such as the approval of the Learning and Teaching Plan.

Recommendation 1

AUQA recommends that the Academic Board pay further attention to its role in monitoring quality and standards to ensure robust academic oversight of all curriculum matters, including curriculum renewal, new developments, and credit transfer.

The Academic Board maintains strong industry links. The Panel was advised that each of the School's two Industry Advisory Groups has a member of the Academic Board in its membership to strengthen this link.

The Academic Board is yet to institute an annual review of its performance to monitor how well it is fulfilling its objectives. The external review of the Council conducted in 2004 indicated that AFTRS would benefit from review of other areas such as academic oversight and AFTRS is considering such a review mechanism. AUQA supports this thinking and urges AFTRS to give priority to the review and strengthening of the Academic Board.

2.4 Executive and other Management Groups

Operations and activities of AFTRS are overseen by the Director, who manages affairs according to general policy determined by the Council. Five senior managers covering five broad areas of management report to the Director; they constitute the Executive Team. The Executive Team meets fortnightly to review a range of policies and matters of strategic importance. The performance of the Team is reviewed annually.

The Panel saw much evidence of strong and sound leadership in the Executive Team which seems to have a comprehensive understanding of the strategic priorities and action plans of AFTRS. The Team is successful in taking the School community along in its planning and implementation and staff are well informed of the School's directions. The staff acknowledge the impact made by the Director of AFTRS as a leader, consolidator and as an advocate for AFTRS internally and externally.

Absence of women in the Executive Team and the low representation of women in other senior positions have been recognised by AFTRS. Although AFTRS states that this imbalance arises from the nature of the media industry, the Panel believes that special initiatives to attract talented women from the media industry to senior positions at AFTRS will bring positive results.

The AFTRS Management Forum (AMF), made up of all managerial level positions in the School, generates ideas on operational matters and provides solutions to improved ways of doing its core business. The group meets monthly with specific agendas and business papers for consideration. This supports the work of the Executive Team in implementing plans as well as in attending to quality improvement issues. In effect AMF fulfils some of the quality improvement roles elsewhere played by an Academic Board. AFTRS makes good use of the AMF collegially, to support planning, review and quality improvement across the institution.

2.5 Corporate Plans

AFTRS' Corporate Plans are developed on a three to four yearly cycle, with updates undertaken each year. The objectives of the AFTRS Corporate Plan 2005–2008 (p8) are stated as follows:

- 1. AFTRS will offer high-quality programs and courses that provide unique opportunities to achieve excellence in creativity, innovation and enterprise.*
- 2. AFTRS programs and activities will be integrated with industry, and show leadership through support for screen and broadcast innovation and success.*
- 3. AFTRS programs and activities will be learner-centred and flexibly delivered.*
- 4. AFTRS will attract students, teachers and collaborators of the highest calibre.*
- 5. AFTRS will successfully communicate its position, values and activities to all its stakeholders and will be engaged in a creative dialogue with them.*
- 6. AFTRS will manage its operations effectively, efficiently, responsibly and strategically.*

AFTRS reports the operations of its programs against its Corporate Plan objectives to the AFTRS Council at six meetings per year. The Corporate Plan 2005–2008 identified the following major strategic areas for attention in 2006:

- New School Project
- Flexible Delivery
- Industry-focused teaching
- CRICOS Registration
- AUQA Audit
- IT Infrastructure Upgrades

Good progress has been made on these areas except for Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students (CRICOS) registration. At the time of the Audit Visit, only Australian citizens and permanent residents were being considered for admission into AFTRS award programs. In 2005, AFTRS explored the possibility of admitting international students into its award programs, giving consideration to matters such as the facilitation of a broader cultural experience on the campus, promoting the AFTRS brand internationally and generating additional revenue. A clear proposal has yet to be developed. The Panel was advised that AFTRS may not take this proposal any further because of resource requirements and additional reporting and compliance that are required of HEPs that enroll international students. However, the current Corporate Plan has CRICOS registration as one of the major strategic areas for attention, requiring AFTRS to clarify its stand to stakeholders.

2.6 Key Performance Indicators and Benchmarking

Attention to key performance indicators (KPIs) through the Corporate Plan has been an established practice at AFTRS. It submits to the Minister six-monthly reports against Corporate Plan Performance Indicators. Recent developments with both the Learning and Teaching Plan and Research Plan, and strategies identified in those plans have given a new dimension to the KPIs. To monitor progress towards the success of those strategies and the realisation of the objectives of these plans, more work is being done to fine-tune the KPIs.

AFTRS states that it has no national comparator and therefore benchmarks itself against other comparable institutions internationally, and against its ability to identify and meet industry needs. However, benchmarking with international comparator institutions has been informal and much of what AFTRS claims as benchmarking initiatives are in terms of visits to other institutions, discussions with peers, and participation in conferences. Although some of the visits to comparator institutions have resulted in useful reports, which contain analysis of developments and institutional practices that would be helpful to AFTRS, the Panel noted that opportunities presented by benchmarking are not fully realised. The Panel is of the opinion that as a part of the ongoing work to position the school, AFTRS should be able to publicly identify and communicate to its stakeholders more clearly where it stands in comparison with the other film and media schools of the world.

Affirmation 2

AUQA affirms the emerging attention to key performance indicators and benchmarking for quality enhancement and encourages AFTRS to explore further opportunities for formal benchmarking with international comparators.

2.7 *Human Resource Management*

AFTRS has a positive vibrant atmosphere in which both staff and students are highly satisfied with the institution. It is viewed by staff to be a very good employer. Students and staff demonstrate high levels of commitment to AFTRS and enthusiasm for its strategic direction. They are happy about the functioning of AFTRS and their own role in it.

Performance management for the senior executive team is well in place where the Director reviews performance annually against an agreed set of objectives based on the Corporate Plan. In principle this has been extended to all staff. The AFTRS Enterprise Bargaining Agreement certified in May 2005 allowed for the performance management scheme to be extended to all staff and this was implemented in January 2006. While informal performance review occurs almost on a weekly basis, implementation of the formal performance review process, including documentation, is patchy and variable. This may give rise to possible industrial issues in the future.

Recommendation 2

AUQA recommends that AFTRS strengthen the formal performance review of staff at all levels.

Similar to the informal way of managing performance is the access to, and awareness about, the policies of the institution on various aspects such as workload. AFTRS has initiated efforts to develop a central, searchable policy database and the Panel urges AFTRS to continue with this development.

Affirmation 3

AUQA affirms AFTRS' plan of action to develop a central, searchable policy database.

Some of the human resource aspects regarding staff profile and professional development are given in a later part of this Report. This section should be read in conjunction with section 3.8.

2.8 *Other State Offices*

With the head office in Sydney, AFTRS extends its national remit through the state offices, which offer industry-relevant training programs and professional development opportunities called National Industry Training Programs. The state office programs are particularly suitable to those who wish to broaden their skills without undertaking full-time study. AFTRS has state offices in Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and Tasmania; these offices report to the Marketing and Development Branch.

The state offices have a significant role in making the national remit of AFTRS visible. In an effort to provide a stronger national profile and to become less Sydney-centric, AFTRS is strengthening the activities of the state offices. A part-time MA course in Screen Composition is offered through the Melbourne office. The Centre for Screen Business established in Melbourne plans to offer MA courses in the near future.

A delegation of the Panel visited the state office at Melbourne and spoke to a group of short course students. Staff informed the Panel that the maximum number of students taken for a course is ten and that the entry level of the participants is assessed and graded to ensure that the group has an appropriate level of skills to work compatibly; applicants who are considered to have insufficient skills are referred to other media training groups. Students complained strongly about the very late notification of a training place, but were otherwise satisfied with their experience. In respect of facilities, there is a well-equipped computer laboratory and an informal arrangement

exists with the Victorian College of the Arts when more specialised equipment and facilities are required.

Some state offices have limited operations. The Panel Chair visited the Perth office which is a one-man office. This office attempts to identify local market needs through regular consultation with local industry bodies and designs short courses or events to meet these needs. The office ensures that the AFTRS provision in Perth does not duplicate what is on offer from the other educational and training institutions of the locale. The short courses or events offered by the Perth office currently do not seem to articulate with any other AFTRS courses and the Perth office does not seem to have any role in flexible delivery. The office also does not have any facilities attached to it but negotiates with local institutions to offer courses and events using their facilities. There is a good collaborative approach between the state offices and local institutions. (See section 3.9 for observations on the quality assurance arrangements of the courses offered through the state offices.)

3 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching and learning functions of AFTRS set out in the Act have been articulated into objectives and strategies in the Corporate Plans. The Corporate Plans covering the period 2001–2005 elaborated the objectives as below:

Objective 1: Through national access to education and training, prepare students and industry practitioners to the highest creative, technical and professional standards for sustainable careers in the screen, radio and new media industries.

Objective 2: Encourage graduates and industry practitioners to develop a confident creative voice in order to express their ideas and to tell a diversity of stories from an Australian perspective.

The Corporate Plan 2005–2008, while retaining the key elements of the earlier Plans, has fine-tuned the key objectives, strategies and performance indicators. The key objectives relating to teaching and learning in the current Plan are:

Objective 1: AFTRS will offer high-quality programs and courses that provide unique opportunities to achieve excellence in creativity, innovation and enterprise.

Objective 2: AFTRS programs and activities will be integrated with industry, and will show leadership through support for screen and broadcast innovation and success.

Objective 3: AFTRS programs and activities will be learner-centred and flexibly delivered.

AFTRS has been successful to a large extent in achieving these objectives. Industry has high regard for the quality of education and training offered by AFTRS. (Objective 2 is discussed in chapter 5: Industry Engagement.) To further strengthen the realisation of the above objectives in 2005 and 2006, planning was directed towards two major strategic activities, namely, flexible delivery and industry-focused learning. Flexible delivery is still developing and the extent of success in different teaching areas is variable. By building on the success of the flexible delivery of courses in the Radio Branch, and by attending to the issues in other program areas, AFTRS is well placed to expand this strategic activity.

The Panel noted AFTRS' commitment to continuous self-improvement through activities such as the Mid-Year Curriculum Review and industry involvement in program development and delivery. Informal quality improvement dialogue is a constant within the School but a more formal culture of quality assurance is not yet fully established. Formal quality assurance and monitoring systems need attention and, in particular, academic oversight by the Academic Board needs strengthening. The Learning and Teaching Plan (2006–2009) also needs to be implemented and monitored.

3.1 Reorganisation of Teaching Departments

AFTRS programs are largely organised around the specialisation of the teaching departments that represent the major disciplines of the screen and broadcast industries: cinematography, design, digital media, directing, documentary, editing, producing, radio, screen composition, script writing, sound and television. To allow for cross-disciplinary courses and collaboration between departments as well as to enhance administrative efficiencies, AFTRS has reorganised some

teaching departments into broader, more flexible multidisciplinary units called ‘pods’. AFTRS had the following three pods:

- Drama (Directing, Producing and Screen Writing)
- Centre for Post-Production (Editing, Sound, Screen Composition and Post-Production)
- Digital Interactive Media

AFTRS considers that the formation of pods complements the continued modification of courses to reflect new technologies and new processes particularly in the areas of editing, sound, cinematography, and digital post-production pathways. It also supports the development of cross-disciplinary occupations, such as producer-writers. The Panel noted the development of some interdisciplinary collaboration and there is growing support among staff for this change although the extent of support is variable. The establishment of pods is a rational response to changes in the industry, which has seen a move away from the narrow craft guild model towards a more integrated and flexible model, better suited to digital production and distribution.

With the reorganisation of the teaching departments, AFTRS is also planning to bring in a major change of approach to course design and delivery. AFTRS intends to expand its current curriculum with what it refers to as a ‘structured learning approach’ through the creation of a suite of new graduate certificates. These will be made up of accredited short-course modules covering the non-production components of the School’s Graduate Diplomas. The aim is to provide a common foundation program which can be delivered at any AFTRS location and serve as a pathway into subsequent Graduate Diploma and Masters level courses. Although development of the new approach was still at an early stage at the time of the audit, the Panel was impressed with the conceptual work being done by the curriculum developers, and considered that the new approach has the potential to strengthen AFTRS’ academic programs while addressing a number of problem areas.

3.2 *Learning and Teaching Plan*

The AFTRS Learning and Teaching Plan (LTP) is a recent initiative covering the period 2006–2009. It has been developed with reference to the Corporate Plan 2005–2008, the AFTRS Graduate Attributes, the AFTRS Teaching Philosophy and the AFTRS Learning and Teaching Guiding Principles; all of these reflect AFTRS’ attention to improving quality of teaching and learning. At the time of the Audit Visit, the LTP was still in the draft stage and implementation was awaiting the development of the action plan.

The objectives of the LTP are to:

- Cultivate within our students the AFTRS graduate attributes.
- Provide quality learner-centred programs.
- Support and encourage excellence in teaching.
- Develop quality curricula and learning designs that are content and needs specific.
- Develop a culture and environment where communities of practice can grow.
- Provide quality flexible programs of study that meet the needs of a range of student profiles throughout Australia and overseas.
- Facilitate, oversee and review the learning and teaching plan and other relevant educational strategies.

The Plan has identified various strategies that have the potential to ensure that AFTRS will achieve its learning and teaching objectives. However, the LTP needs further development to capture the directions being taken in strategic areas such as flexible delivery and achievement of graduate attributes. Although the LTP has identified strategies to expand flexible delivery, the associated structured curriculum and quality monitoring are still developing. The Academic Board needs to take a stronger role in accelerating the implementation and monitoring of the LTP (section 2.3). Acknowledging that the LTP provides an initial framework to work on, AUQA encourages AFTRS to monitor the strategies identified in the Plan for their impact.

Affirmation 4

AUQA notes that AFTRS has identified the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning and affirms its efforts in implementing appropriate strategies to address this issue.

In relation to the achievement of the graduate attributes, the objective “Cultivate within our students the AFTRS graduate attributes” needs attention. A statement of graduate attributes have been made available to students for the first time and further reflection is needed by AFTRS to ensure that the graduate attributes are appropriately embedded in courses and programs. In addition, AFTRS needs to give attention to the associated monitoring processes to ensure alignment of assessment tasks with the intended graduate attributes.

Recommendation 3

AUQA recommends that AFTRS embed its intended graduate attributes into programs and courses and ensure a stronger alignment of assessment tasks and grade criteria with the attributes.

3.3 *Student Admission*

AFTRS students are selected nationwide on the basis of an application, portfolio of previous work, and an interview. There is no academic prerequisite. AFTRS offers courses at Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, MA and MA Honours levels. In most cases, study in a discipline at a lower level can be articulated into a higher qualification (see section 3.7 for Recognition of Prior Learning policy).

3.4 *Program Development and Delivery*

Teaching departments develop proposals for new programs and units which are submitted to the Academic Board through the PGCC. Minor changes to curriculum are undertaken by teaching departments, but if more than 30% of the content changes the approval of the Academic Board is required. The Panel formed the view that the approval processes need strengthening to ensure that they provide a rigorous examination and follow-up of proposals.

AFTRS considers that its award courses can be distinguished by three features, namely, production-based learning, mentoring, and collaboration. The Panel found that these distinguishing characteristics have been embedded well in the program delivery. Students who met the Panel were very positive about their course experience.

The Corporate Plan 2005–2008 focuses on developing a curriculum to enhance the sustainability both of the industry in Australia and of individual careers. Two major areas of activity have been designed to address this issue. One is the development of cross-disciplinary courses based on the rationale that future careers in the industry will be more likely to succeed if the skills acquired at AFTRS are multidisciplinary and flexible. The other initiative is designed to give students business skills. To this end, units relating to screen business have been integrated into the full-

time curriculum. Students were positive about the benefits of these initiatives and those who were employed or involved in industry projects expressed satisfaction with the work-related projects.

3.5 *Flexible Delivery*

In the last three years there has been a significant move to broaden the options for access to award programs by developing flexible approaches to the offering of courses. Under this mode, courses will be offered in a series of modules, some supported partly by online materials, which can be undertaken over an extended period of time. These options allow students to undertake a form of part-time study in courses previously offered only as part of the full-time program, to extend the time taken to achieve a recognised qualification, and to undertake these courses in locations other than Sydney. AFTRS is experimenting with different elements of flexible course delivery.

In 2005, flexible delivery options were offered in two disciplines, Radio and Screen Composition. The experience of these two disciplines and in particular the success of flexible delivery in the Radio Branch has been used to expand the concept of flexible delivery in other disciplines. AFTRS recognises the new challenges that this expansion poses for course development and delivery, especially in the light of articulation arrangements to achieve recognised qualifications. The appointment of an Educational Designer and a Curriculum Coordinator is a significant step towards applying a professional approach to course development and flexible delivery. The Panel noted the enthusiasm of the key staff involved in this process. Comprehensive guidelines, curriculum structure and a delivery plan are being developed to ensure a consistent approach and methodology for flexible delivery of courses. AFTRS is also aware of the challenges related to the administrative aspects of flexible delivery.

Affirmation 5

AUQA affirms the direction being taken by AFTRS in implementing the expansion of flexible delivery, ensuring consistency in the expansion, and the appointment of expert educational personnel to support the expansion in a systematic way.

In addition to the Radio Branch's success in the flexible delivery of courses, the Panel also noted the outreach and community engagement of the Branch, in particular its support for regional broadcasting.

3.6 *Curriculum Review*

The teaching branches conduct Mid-Year Curriculum Reviews (MYCR) to reflect on experiences and to coordinate planning of the curriculum for the award courses for the following year. All teaching staff are invited to review current teaching activities and plan for the following year and most staff use the opportunity to share their feedback and ideas with others. Staff members from the other state offices are also involved in this process. The Panel found that AFTRS uses these reviews for strategic planning in relation to the activities of the teaching departments. Although this process is not as structured as formal curriculum reviews, it seems to be effective in achieving its goals.

Commendation 2

AUQA commends AFTRS for its Mid-Year Curriculum Review which serves as a valuable process for bringing staff together to review and reflect collectively on current offerings and experiences and to think strategically on future developments and planning.

3.7 *Student Assessment*

The assessment policy and the policy on plagiarism are communicated to the students through the Handbook, the Student Manual, and through the student induction program. Assessment in most programs is per unit and cumulative. Students who met the Panel indicated that they would appreciate more guidelines about what was expected of them in assignments. This is an area that could be dealt with through the teacher training programs and enhancements to the teaching guide.

For assessable short courses and full-time courses, assessment results are recorded in the students' records. This can be used for credit transfer. For the other short courses, students receive a course completion certificate and assessment is optional.

Students can apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) for units of study or practice if they can demonstrate that their industry or academic experience has provided them with the skills and understanding that they would have gained by completing particular units. Short courses offered by AFTRS can also be considered under the RPL policy. Students who have grievances on any aspect of their assessment can make an appeal to the Academic Board.

Although policies on assessment are in place and students are well informed of the policies, the nature of student assessment warrants attention. The Panel noted lapses in student assessments that should have been monitored more carefully. The Panel saw evidence of student assessments where the Academic Board had not monitored the implications of the examiners' reports with care. When AFTRS encompasses expanded flexible delivery groups, problems associated with student assessment are likely to become more complex. The proposed strategic direction regarding the Graduate Certificate programs, flexible delivery, structured curriculum and articulation arrangements necessitate making the assessment procedures rigorous, systematic and transparent. As discussed earlier, the Academic Board needs to strengthen its oversight on assessment related issues.

Recommendation 4

AUQA recommends that AFTRS strengthen its oversight and monitoring of student assessment procedures to ensure that the system provides fair, valid and consistent judgements of student work.

3.8 *Staff Profile and Staff Development*

A significant characteristic of the staff profile is their industry experience and involvement. All teaching staff members have a number of years of experience in the screen and broadcast industries. Even for non-teaching positions an understanding of the industries is usually a requirement. A large number of industry professionals are involved as guest lecturers in AFTRS programs.

To ensure currency in industrial experience staff generally return to the industry after completing their contract with AFTRS. This has both advantages and disadvantages; a particular risk AFTRS has to deal with is the regular staff turnover.

While the industry background of the staff has facilitated the mentoring process, which has been one of the key distinguishing features of program delivery at AFTRS, it also poses challenges to the roles the teaching staff have to play as teachers. To support staff in these roles, AFTRS has introduced mandatory teacher training programs for all new teaching staff. The Teaching Guide is a resource for the new staff but it will require revisions to cater for the expansion of flexible delivery. In a similar manner, the teacher training program may also need developments to support the changing role of the teachers in the flexible delivery of courses. At present, the Educational Designer offers support to teaching staff in these functions. As a part of teacher

training, AFTRS has to address the need for greater clarification and standardisation of key terminology so that common understanding exists throughout AFTRS in the use of terms such as 'flexible learning' and 'structured curriculum'.

AFTRS has a Training and Development Policy which facilitates professional development of staff through participation in a range of training activities and programs such as training courses, seminars, workshops, exchanges, and work attachments in the industry. The Panel noted that some departments have supported also sessional staff participation in short courses.

Staff of the state offices who develop short courses have the opportunity for professional development by active involvement in the industry and by attending conferences. Staff devise projects and course ideas in consultation/collaboration with industry practitioners.

Commendation 3

AUQA commends AFTRS for the professional development policy and support provided to staff.

While the teacher training for new staff is in place, staff induction for their specific job responsibilities seems to be patchy and variable. The Panel noted that many staff have had previous acquaintance with AFTRS in other capacities which might have acted as an informal induction program. However, considering the future plans of AFTRS to expand, the Panel encourages AFTRS to design and implement a more formal and comprehensive program for induction. (section 2.7 also discusses some of the staff related aspects.)

3.9 State Offices

As a part of the Industry Training Programs, the state offices offer short courses, workshops and seminars. Some of the short courses can articulate into award programs governed by the Recognition of Prior Learning policy.

The state offices identify the market needs and collaborate with the teaching departments of the Sydney campus to develop the short courses. The Panel was advised that the Academic Board has the oversight of these short courses and follows the same approval processes as any other AFTRS course.

Some short courses are modules which can articulate into part-time programs. Student assessment at the end of the short course is optional. Those who decide to use the short courses for articulation will be assessed during an additional session or under the Recognition of Prior Learning policy.

Evaluative feedback is collected from students at the end of the course and is considered by the staff for further action. Keeping track of short course alumni has not been adequate; staff claim that students often return to the state offices for more modules and training. The students who met the delegation of the Panel at the Melbourne office came from various backgrounds. They were appreciative of course quality as well as the training they received.

The Panel found that interaction between the staff of the state offices and the teaching staff of the Sydney campus was constrained because the Sydney staff were very busy. Quality control in some state offices is problematic and is reliant upon the teaching departments having the time to work with the state offices. AFTRS has noted this and steps have been taken to get more consistency into the content and delivery of the curriculum. To this end, each state office takes particular responsibilities for a specific area, while the overall responsibility for course development and marketing of a particular course lies with one officer who may be placed in any one of the state offices. For example, the state office in Adelaide specialises in developing short

courses and events in digital media in consultation with the teaching departments of the Sydney campus. This system is an attempt to ensure a balance between centralisation and decentralisation. The centralisation in course development and the role of the teaching departments in ensuring the quality of the course content are seen by both AFTRS and the Panel as good measures to ensure standardisation and quality of the short courses. These processes are still evolving.

AFTRS proposes to expand its Graduate Certificate programs through flexible delivery by the state offices. Clearly AFTRS will need to ensure that there is effective coordination of quality monitoring and related activities of the state offices. AFTRS has already identified this as an area for improvement.

Affirmation 6

AUQA affirms the efforts of AFTRS to coordinate the state offices and integrate their activities and accountabilities into central planning, and to strengthen the quality control measures operating at state level.

4 RESEARCH

Explicit attention to research at AFTRS has gained momentum only very recently. The Act requires AFTRS “to conduct and encourage research in connexion with the production of programs” as one of its eight functions (p3). Although the Act gives a specific research function to AFTRS, the mission statement of AFTRS, until 2004, did not explicitly mention research. Research was considered to be one of the strategies to promote innovation, excellence of production and sustainability for Australians in the film, television, radio and new media industries (Corporate Plans 2002-2003, 2003-2004, 2004-2005).

In 2004, when the AFTRS three-year Corporate Plan was developed for the planning period 2005–2008, the mission statement was revised to take into account the changing industry environment and the significant challenges confronting the School over the planning period. The new mission of AFTRS in the Corporate Plan (2005–2008) is:

To advance the success and sustainability of Australia’s screen and broadcast industries by developing the skills and knowledge of talented individuals and undertaking leading-edge research

The Panel found that, although staff are enthusiastic about undertaking research, AFTRS has not provided an adequate research framework within which this can occur. There is a need for a clearly focused philosophical position on the nature of the research which best fits AFTRS purpose, enables it to take a leadership role in the future development of the industry, and which provides opportunities for staff and students to engage in appropriate and manageable research. The Panel urges AFTRS to identify a select number of research strengths and focus on depth rather than breadth.

4.1 Approach to Research

Although the Act and the mission are specific about the research function of AFTRS, the six key objectives of the current Corporate Plan do not make the research direction explicit. However, one of the key objectives includes research as one of the strategies.

The key objective on industry integration states that:

AFTRS programs and activities will be integrated with industry, and will show leadership through support for screen and broadcast innovation and success.

While the objective is given in broad terms, the strategies to achieve industry integration include the following that specify the research direction:

With leading industry and educational partners, develop a range of joint activities to promote innovative learning and research.

Undertake research directed towards improving the sustainability and success of the screen and broadcast industries. (Corporate Plan 2005–2008 p10)

The support for the industries through industry relevant laboratory/test bed activities and application-oriented projects, the trialling of new production techniques, supporting the research requirements of DCITA, and preparing submissions for various government reviews and enquiries into the screen and broadcast industries, are considered as significant applied research functions by AFTRS.

The Panel notes the very positive steps AFTRS has taken to focus opportunities for research through the establishment of two centres and a specialised laboratory. These activities are clear indication of the capability of AFTRS in industry focused Research and Development (R&D).

AFTRS can feel confident in pursuing a focus on industry related R&D. The technical facilities available at AFTRS and the industry background of staff support well this type of research.

However, the current Research Plan is more like the general research plan of a university. It is very broad in its approach and does not reflect the specific research context for which AFTRS has the specialised resources and the expertise. Overall, the context for research and its interpretations are not aligned well in the Act, mission, objectives, strategies and Research Plan. AFTRS will need to fine-tune the Research Plan to address this misalignment and to embrace a strong R&D focus.

AFTRS needs to clarify its own leadership role in guiding the future development of the industries. Although some industry representatives do not see the role of AFTRS in this type of research, most staff point to the potential of AFTRS to underpin industry developments with applied research. AUQA supports this approach to research that will balance the current and future needs of the industry.

Recommendation 5

AUQA recommends that AFTRS develop a research framework which has a clear industry research and development focus.

4.2 Internal Structures

In an effort to develop a more formal approach to research, AFTRS has taken a number of steps. The Centre for Research and Screen Studies has been reconfigured to take on the role of planning and overseeing the School's research program. Two new functional areas, namely, the Centre for Screen Business and the Laboratory of Advanced Media Production, have been established with key research responsibilities.

At the time of the Audit Visit, the Centre for Research and Screen Studies was working on a major collaborative project exploring Australian Television 2016 with three industry partners, two universities and many other participants from the industry sector. It also had a small number of publications and has identified potential projects, exploring issues such as workforce management, local content and audience behaviour.

The Centre for Screen Business, with the key objective to develop metrics and tools that will be of assistance to the industry, has a research program on practical ideas and methodologies from research disciplines related to the screen content industries. The Centre has research partnerships with universities and industries and has published some White Papers.

The Laboratory of Advanced Media Production (LAMP) runs prototyping workshops and project development in partnership with industry with a view to stimulating Australian digital content creation and innovative cross platform productions. In 2005–2006, it conducted five workshops in different parts of Australia. LAMP has established itself as an emerging media development incubator with over 30 projects developed to prototype stage and a number in pilot development. It has formed strong partnerships with other organisations.

The Panel noted that, with the restructuring of the Centre for Research and Screen Studies and the establishment of the Centre for Screen Business and the LAMP, AFTRS is making an effort to give a new sense of purpose and focus to its research activities. The functioning of these internal

structures and functional areas indicate that these have the potential to take forward the research program of AFTRS.

4.3 *Revisiting Research Plans*

The Panel noted that staff have involvement in various activities such as:

- Consultancy
- Scholarship/preparation for teaching
- Personal research
- Research for productions
- Research and development
- Student academic research (MA Honours; MA by research)
- Laboratory/test bed activities

Using these strengths, AFTRS must develop a new research plan which reflects the research and development nature of the school. The consequent implementation strategies will clarify for staff and students the expectations of their involvement in research and will assist management in allocating resources.

The Panel observed that the Academic Board should be more pro-active in setting the research focus and directions of AFTRS. The current Research Committee has been established to advise the Academic Board on the research proposals. While establishment of this committee is an important initiative, its terms of reference should be broadened so it can set research directions, monitor industry opportunities and manage the research effort.

Recommendation 6

AUQA recommends that the Academic Board through its Research Committee take a pro-active role in establishing the research focus and directions of AFTRS.

4.4 *Research Supervision*

The Portfolio states that the structure and methodology of teaching at the School, as well as the background of the teaching staff as industry professionals, do not foster a research program structured as in a typical university setting. The Panel acknowledges that the industry focus of AFTRS is very appropriate to its mission. However, the proposed plan to develop student research will be dependent on developing a clear overall philosophical framework and on ensuring that the School has the appropriate staff, resources, and infrastructure to support student research.

AFTRS will need to ensure that staff research contributes to the industry. Research supervision will need to reflect the capabilities of the staff through their experience as researchers. Further, staff would need to allocate adequate time on their own research to enhance research supervision which also has implications for workload. There are further resource implications relating to adequate support for research students in terms of library and research funds. In other words, AFTRS needs to reconceptualise research and put appropriate systems in place to support student research if it wishes to take that path.

Recommendation 7

AUQA recommends that AFTRS develop a comprehensive research implementation plan addressing the issues of staffing, infrastructure and support systems, prior to expanding its student research.

5 INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT

AFTRS' engagement with the industry is derived from the purpose for which it has been established and the Act spells out the functions of the School in the context of supporting 'production of programs' establishing the significance of industry engagement for AFTRS. The Corporate Plan 2005–2008 reflects this significance and it has a key objective, namely, industry integration which recognises that industry relevance is critical to the success of AFTRS.

There is a strong and clear alignment in the Act and mission, objectives and strategies of the AFTRS Corporate Plan regarding industry engagement. AFTRS is very successful in its mission to support the industry and it continues to maintain, deepen and expand its relationship and engagement with the industry. The industry has high regard for the education and training offered by AFTRS. There are also areas where AFTRS can take a stronger leadership role.

Industry engagement is a distinguishing characteristic of AFTRS and cuts across all its activities. Therefore, reference to industry interaction can be found in various parts of this Report. However, information that is essential to provide the context for the audit conclusions of this section are given in relevant places.

5.1 *Involving the Industry*

AFTRS has developed strong and multifaceted links with the screen and broadcast industries on many levels. Involvement of the industry is seen to be at all levels, from governance to program delivery. Members of the Council have significant involvement with, and/or experience in, the screen and broadcast industries. The current members represent a broad range of experience with other cultural organisations, and in high-level positions in film, TV, radio and Indigenous broadcasting.

The Panel noted that AFTRS involves current industry practitioners at all levels of the development and delivery of its education and training programs. AFTRS has Industry Advisory Groups for Radio, and Film, TV and Digital Media. Part of the process for planning new courses and programs involves consultation with the relevant Industry Advisory Group.

The National Industry Training Programs offered by the state offices serve as effective links to industry. The state offices work closely with local industry, guilds, associations and government departments and this helps AFTRS to keep in touch with the industries throughout the country. The state offices also contribute to decisions on training needs, plan ways to meet them, and put staff members in touch with a wide network of industry experts.

Industry links and networking opportunities are further strengthened through the activities of the AFTRS Network, the School's alumni association. The Network has 530 members and organises regular events to facilitate sharing of knowledge and experience among members.

The interest of all sectors of the industry in contributing to AFTRS' various activities is evidence that the work of the School is well regarded. This is important in maintaining the reputation of the School as a provider of current and relevant training and education, and as a source of continuing expertise.

The School has the respect of the industry for its responsiveness to its needs and demands. Changes to the curriculum to suit the changing industry environment, the establishment of the Centre for Screen Business to impart business skills to students, the creation of LAMP as a functional area for laboratory/test bed activities for the industry, and the development of the

National Industry Training Program, are indications that the School is responding to needs identified through its constant engagement with the industry.

Commendation 4

AUQA commends AFTRS for successfully addressing its mission with respect to industry engagement in education and training.

5.2 *Industry Impact on Staff and Students*

Most staff positions include industry experience as one of the selection criteria. Industry professionals are often used as members of interview panels for new staff members, particularly for teaching positions. Teaching positions and many support positions are offered as three-year contracts, with the possibility of a three-year extension, to ensure that industry experience remains current. Staff members are encouraged to continue with their professional activities to complement their teaching. The Panel was advised that AFTRS staff contribute to the industry through participation in the activities of media industries and through representation on boards and committees. Staff members participate in and provide advice to industry conferences. In addition to the full-time teaching staff who all have significant industry experience, AFTRS makes extensive use of guest lecturers in delivering both award programs and industry training programs.

The student selection process includes an interview with a panel comprising AFTRS staff members and at least one representative of the relevant discipline currently working in the industry. The industry is very favourable about the quality of AFTRS graduates although it is not uncritical about some aspects of the School. The Panel noted the regard the industries had for the quality of training offered by AFTRS and found the screen and broadcast industries to be very willing to employ AFTRS graduates. A survey of AFTRS students from 1973 to 2002, on employment patterns, presents a very positive picture of the employability of the AFTRS graduates. Each year, radio graduates report high levels of employment in the industry within a short time of graduation. Given that students of AFTRS already have previous work experience in media, the favourable employment data are not surprising.

The Panel noted that the support received from industry in terms of financial support in cash and in-kind in the form of scholarships and sponsorships was significant.

Commendation 5

AUQA commends AFTRS for its success in attracting industry support, including industry-funded scholarships, guest lecturers, in-kind support, and high level of employment of its graduates.

6 INDIGENOUS FOCUS

AFTRS states that it seeks, through education and training, to provide an avenue for Indigenous Australians to express themselves, in their own way, through control from behind the camera.

From the late 1970s through to the mid-1980s, AFTRS organised radio workshops for Aboriginal community groups and organisations in response to the requests it received. During 1994 AFTRS established its Indigenous Program Initiative (IPI) which aims to identify and nurture talented practitioners. Achievements have been good. Building on the successful practices of IPI the new Indigenous Development Strategy has been developed. Strategies identified appear to have the potential to strengthen the Indigenous focus of AFTRS.

6.1 *Indigenous Program Initiative*

The Indigenous Program Initiative is designed to identify and encourage Indigenous people with exceptional talent, provide advice and assistance, and manage projects including the fee subsidy and merit-based scholarship programs, especially in the key creative initiator roles of producer, director and screenwriter. AFTRS states that, in keeping with its advanced education status, support is only provided on a merit basis.

In addition to the support provided by the IPI through its committed Manager, AFTRS also has an arrangement whereby students can be referred to the Indigenous unit at Macquarie University for more specialist support. This will need to be addressed in the new school location.

While the efforts of IPI to support Indigenous students in their role behind the camera are progressing well, embedding Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum has not gained momentum. IPI has facilitated the development and delivery of curriculum units dealing with protocols for relationships with Indigenous communities for screen and radio production. But embedding Indigenous perspectives has not extended beyond these specific units. Developing an awareness of, and appreciation for, the Indigenous culture, knowledge and protocols among the campus community needs attention. As a higher education provider, AFTRS must also reflect on embedding Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum.

Recommendation 8

In the light of the long-standing commitment demonstrated by AFTRS towards the development of an Indigenous voice in film and broadcast, AUQA recommends that AFTRS examine the need and the opportunity to embed Indigenous perspectives into the programs across the curriculum.

6.2 *Recruitment of Indigenous Students*

AFTRS advertises through community-based organisations as well as film television and media departments of universities to attract talented Indigenous students. Partnerships with organisations such as the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association has also facilitated in the recruitment strategy. Advertisements in the AFTRS website, advertisements through targeted Indigenous media, press releases and email campaigns are other efforts used by AFTRS to reach out to Indigenous students. In spite of the recognition that recruitment issues need attention, the general trend in media is such that AFTRS has difficulty in recruiting Indigenous students to its full-time programs. Individuals identified as having potential are encouraged to undertake bridging programs to increase their chances of gaining a place in the program.

AFTRS may like to reflect on its strategies to identify potential Indigenous candidates, making the process more open and transparent. Current processes rely heavily on the committed efforts of

one individual; to ensure continuity and diversity. AFTRS may need to strengthen the participation of more staff members.

6.3 Support to Indigenous Students

AFTRS provides financial support to Indigenous students as needed including discounted fees, travel and childcare. Since 1995, IPI has offered and coordinated fourteen Career Development Scholarships, the last in 2002 when the Commonwealth stopped the program. Currently, it has two main scholarships, namely, the Myer One Year Indigenous Scholarship and the Macquarie Bank Indigenous Professional Development Program.

In 2006, the Myer One Year Indigenous Scholarship was awarded as a Fellowship where the Fellow is expected to contribute to the Indigenous knowledge base within AFTRS through seminars, presentations and collaboration in mentoring and production.

Under the Professional Development Program, individual programs are developed for highly talented individuals in consultation with heads of department. Financial support is provided through short course fees and travel and accommodation assistance. In 2005, the Macquarie Bank supported the Macquarie Bank Indigenous Professional Development Program where five talented individuals were given the opportunity of working closely with AFTRS heads of department to devise a series of specifically selected advanced short courses in their area of specialisation. This successful program was expanded in 2006 with nine participants.

Specific training is delivered to communities or groups who approach AFTRS provided the training falls within AFTRS' charter. The one-day workshops organised in 2006 for Bush-TV, a Queensland-based new media company, is an example.

Commendation 6

AUQA commends AFTRS for its long-standing support for Indigenous education that is matched with external funds, strongly supported by the Council, and by successive directors of AFTRS.

6.4 Indigenous Development Strategy

The Indigenous Development Strategy (IDS), developed in 2006, is structured on the successful existing support measures of the IPI. The Strategy seeks to address the priority needs identified for AFTRS' contribution to screen and broadcast training for Indigenous Australians. They are:

- support for the National Indigenous Broadcasting Service
- securing opportunities in all industry roles for Indigenous Australians within mainstream commercial and national broadcast media
- effective expansion of AFTRS success to date and integration of Indigenous training within the broader activities of the School.

The specific strategies and projects identified in the IDS are focused on these priority areas. AFTRS has made available some resources in order to roll out the projects. The impact of IDS should be seen in a few years.

7 STUDENT SERVICES, SUPPORT AND FACILITIES

The Corporate and Student Services Branch (CSS) provides student services and support. The Technology and Infrastructure Branch looks after the major production facilities and technology related issues.

At the time of the Audit Visit, AFTRS had satisfactory arrangements for support facilities and associated services to its students. Relocation to the new campus will require AFTRS to explore how some of these services will be supported. The new student information management system is expected to streamline the data management. The library services and technical facilities are commendable.

7.1 *Student Services*

The Student Services Office of the CSS manages processes associated with course and student data. It is responsible for managing student admission, enrolment, graduation and other related activities. It also handles student orientation, student welfare and financial support related issues. The type of student support provided by this unit is more administrative in nature. Regarding course management, this unit is responsible for the publication of all syllabus documents and associated procedural matters.

The very favourable teacher-student ratio for the one-to-one mentoring approach has resulted in an informal means of ensuring the wellbeing of students. For the welfare and support of students with particular problems, AFTRS has a formal agreement with Macquarie University. However, when AFTRS relocates to the inner city campus it has to explore a suitable arrangement to support student welfare.

AFTRS is in the initial stages of introducing a new student information management system. When implemented fully, this system will streamline application and enrolment processes as well as enhance other data management processes. As with any new data management system, attention has to be paid to data security and quality control; staff training will need further attention.

Affirmation 7

AUQA affirms AFTRS' implementation of the integrated student information management system and urges AFTRS to pay attention to data security, quality control and staff training.

7.2 *Student Feedback*

AFTRS collects evaluative feedback from both award course and short course students. Students in award courses participate in annual feedback sessions organised by the Dean of Studies and comment on their experience in group interview sessions. Comments are collated and provided to each of the relevant departments and to the Academic Board. Short course students complete standard evaluation forms at the conclusion of each course. In general the student feedback has been very favourable and the Panel was informed of instances where the constructive feedback from students has resulted in improvements in institutional practices.

The level of student satisfaction with AFTRS award programs is assessed each year using a Graduate Exit Survey. The Panel noted that teaching methods, course content and industry relevance factors consistently rate very highly.

7.3 Library

The library is a good resource centre with a large collection of media materials. It houses all student film and video productions made at AFTRS since its inception. The library's catalogue is available on the web with provisions to view, renew and place holds on items.

The Panel noted that the library staff are experienced professionals who offer comprehensive support to the students. The library staff are proactive in ensuring that the library meets the needs of the AFTRS programs. Students consistently provide favourable feedback about the support and services they receive from the library.

The library is open to the public and it is used extensively by media industry professionals and tertiary media studies students. The quality of the collection of the library attracts external users.

Commendation 7

AUQA commends AFTRS for the quality of its library, collection and services in support of the needs of the students and staff of AFTRS.

The move to the inner city campus may lead to more pressure on the library from members of the public, industry, and local education institutions. The library is aware of this. The library staff are also well informed of the role the library has to play when AFTRS defines its research direction and moves forward its research program.

7.4 Facilities and Technology

The School has excellent, state-of-the-art equipment and a technology base appropriate to an organisation that sees itself as training graduates for the media industry of the 21st century. Much of the equipment is available for loan to students and the loan system received favourable comments. The ratio of available equipment and technology to student is excellent. The technical infrastructure is ably supported by a team of technicians who are fully integrated into the learning and teaching programs of the School.

Commendation 8

AUQA commends AFTRS for the quality of the technical facilities made available to AFTRS' students in support of their advanced education and training, and for the responsiveness of the technical staff.

The Corporate Plan 2005–2008 had identified IT infrastructure upgrades as one of the strategic areas for attention. The internal audit report on infrastructure and technology has highlighted areas that need improvement, including inventory control for equipment used by students and the Panel was assured that AFTRS was addressing those issues.

8 COMMUNICATION AND NEW SCHOOL PROJECT

Fostering good internal as well as external communications is vital for the success of an institution like AFTRS that relies heavily on the expertise of its small group of staff and industry links. Reflecting this importance, the Corporate Plans of AFTRS include key objectives that are relevant to communication. The Corporate Plan 2001–2005 included the objective, *Promote and develop the reputation and reach of the AFTRS as a leading film, television and radio school at both national and international levels.* The current Corporate Plan (2005–2008) is also specific about communicating its position and states that *AFTRS will successfully communicate its position, values and activities to all its stakeholders and will be engaged in a creative dialogue with them.* AFTRS is successful in the realisation of this objective.

AFTRS has embarked on two major initiatives that have significant bearing on its positioning as a leading media school. One is the attention to communication strategies to establish its position with stakeholders. The other is its forthcoming move to an inner city campus, closer to industries. These two initiatives have the potential to make a major impact on the positioning of AFTRS and plans and procedures to maximise the benefits are progressing well.

8.1 *Communication Strategies*

To improve communications with stakeholders, AFTRS has introduced many changes in recent years. Functional areas that have major communications responsibilities such as publicity, recruitment campaigns, events management, sponsorship, the website, publications and design, and sales and distribution, were brought under one umbrella. Early in 2006, this cluster was further combined with Continuing Professional Education to form the current Marketing and Development Branch.

8.2 *Image and Communication Project*

In 2005, to focus its image and articulate it to the industry and other stakeholders, AFTRS commissioned the Image and Communications Project. By collecting the views of approximately 200 students, staff and observers, the project identified five core values that are shared by all stakeholder groups and recommended that those core values, namely, professionalism, highest standards, creativity, dedication, and ambition, be used as the basis for communicating the image of AFTRS. In the same year, the Council endorsed the School slogan ‘Transforming Futures’. On the basis of its interviews with industry and government representatives, the Panel endorses the conclusion of the project that AFTRS has been successful in communicating its leading position as a media school to relevant stakeholders.

Commendation 9

AUQA commends AFTRS for its focus on communicating to its external community its positioning and branding as a leading media school.

Although internal communications have not posed any major problems, there is a lot of informality in the communication flows within AFTRS and some reported concerns about silo effects. As AFTRS expands its operations and takes up new roles, and as it undergoes changes, it is important to establish clear and systematic internal communication lines. AFTRS’ has to pay attention to strengthening the internal communication flows.

8.3 *StrategyMix and Website Development*

StrategyMix is yet another development to strengthen communication strategies. AFTRS has identified a lack of coordination in the collection and maintenance of contact data of its

stakeholders—students and industry links—between its various units. Teaching departments, the Student Services Office, and the state offices seem to have different ways of organising the data and this has resulted in data replication and inaccuracies in marketing communication. To address this problem, AFTRS has chosen StrategyMix software as a marketing communication system. The Panel was advised that this strategy will also facilitate the consolidation of existing databases into one single source, accessible to multiple users. This will also assist communications with alumni.

AFTRS website is undergoing a major redevelopment to better serve the needs of potential students. The redevelopment is expected to enhance the online environment to support the School's priorities in flexible learning, industry development, interactive media, marketing and branding.

8.4 *New School Project*

At the time of the audit, AFTRS was well advanced with its planning for the relocation to an inner city campus. The actual shift is scheduled for early 2008. Since 1988, AFTRS has occupied its current North Ryde premises which were built in the era of analogue media. AFTRS states that the design and layout of the current building emphasises separation between departments at a time when collaboration and convergence have become key to effective content production and teaching. Its location away from the inner city is also proving to be a limiting factor for its industry links. The Panel found a great deal of enthusiasm and support for the relocation project. There was a strong sense from both industry and staff that it is the right decision. AFTRS sees this change in geography as not just physical but focal in relation to the School's strategy for more effective teaching and enhanced engagement with industry. The Panel formed the view that the decision of AFTRS to relocate to the inner city campus would result in more effective teaching and enhanced engagement with industry.

The relocation project has placed great pressure on staff time. Staff who met the Panel indicated how this time commitment has affected their other priorities. AFTRS has been aware that the relocation might result in the possible loss of corporate knowledge if many staff members choose not to relocate. Surveys were conducted to analyse the staff feeling and reaction, and the level of risk involved in the relocation. Discussions on various mitigation strategies are ongoing.

Planning for the move is in an advanced stage well coordinated by a project team. AFTRS established a New School Project Team in 2005 to manage the relocation consultations and planning process within AFTRS. Headed by the Head of Technology and Infrastructure, the Project Team has coordinated consultation with staff and students, and meetings with each department and functional unit on their requirements. The Panel found that the project team has been successful in its consultations with the campus community and that has resulted in major support to the relocation project. The School has called on external experts to assist with management of different phases of operation for the move.

Commendation 10

AUQA commends the planning for the relocation to the new campus, the level of involvement of staff, the use of external specialists at appropriate times, the planning for human resources contingencies, and the attention to business continuity issues.

APPENDIX A: AUSTRALIAN FILM TELEVISION AND RADIO SCHOOL

History and Location

The Australian Film Television and Radio School (AFTRS) began in 1973 as part of the Commonwealth government's strategy to promote the development of Australian cultural activity, including the expansion of training in the arts and the media. Since that time there has been an outstanding growth in the production and distribution of Australian films, television programs, radio broadcasting and, most recently, digital media.

AFTRS provides full-time and flexible programs of postgraduate film, television, digital media and radio courses and a national short course program in all areas of film and broadcast production. Although film and television full-time training now has postgraduate status, a relevant undergraduate degree is not a prerequisite. Industry experience is always a significant consideration.

AFTRS is a federal statutory authority established by the *Australian Film, Television and Radio School Act 1973*. It is governed by a Council, responsible to the Australian Parliament through the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. AFTRS has strong links with the film and broadcast industries. Members of the AFTRS governing Council and teaching staff comprise industry professionals.

Since 1988, AFTRS has been located at purpose-built premises at North Ryde, Sydney (adjacent to the site of Macquarie University) and has state offices or representatives in most capital cities in Australia. A new purpose-designed facility is being built for AFTRS at the Entertainment Quarter at Moore Park. The aim of the relocation of the School is to bring the AFTRS community closer to the professional hub of the industry in Sydney. It is anticipated that the School will relocate early in 2008.

Academic Profile

AFTRS courses offer qualifications at postgraduate levels in cinematography, directing, editing, documentary, screenwriting, digital media, visual effects and computer animation, digital interactivity, producing, costume design, production design, television, screen composition, location sound recording and sound design, and radio. Courses are offered at Graduate Certificate, Graduate Diploma, Master of Arts and Master of Arts (Honours) levels. Average intakes into each discipline are four students a year. The Centre for Research and Screen Studies initiates and coordinates the research activities of the School, as well as teaching and managing screen studies courses of AFTRS.

Key Statistics (YEAR most recently finalised)

Postgraduate Student Enrolments:		115
Student Load (EFTSL)		115
Professional development short course students		3045
Interstate offices		5
Total Staff FTE (not including casual staff):	Academic:	58.44
	General:	84.62
	Total:	143.06
Total Operating Revenues (July 05 – June 06):		\$22,052,000
Total Operating Expenses (July 05 – June 06):		\$21,437,000

APPENDIX B: AUQA'S MISSION, OBJECTIVES, VISION AND VALUES

Mission

AUQA is the principal national quality assurance agency in higher education with the responsibility of providing public assurance of the quality of Australia's universities and other institutions of higher education, and assisting in enhancing the academic quality of these institutions.

Objectives

AUQA is established to be the principal national quality assurance agency in higher education, with responsibility for quality audits of higher education institutions and accreditation authorities, reporting on performance and outcomes, assisting in quality enhancement, advising on quality assurance; and liaising internationally with quality agencies in other jurisdictions, for the benefit of Australian higher education.

Specifically, the objectives of AUQA are as follows:

1. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of:
 - the quality of the academic activities, including attainment of standards of performance and outcomes of Australian universities and other higher education institutions;
 - the quality assurance arrangements intended to maintain and elevate that quality;
 - compliance with criteria set out in the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes;and monitor, review, analyse and provide public reports on the quality of outcomes in Australian universities and higher education institutions.
2. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of the quality assurance processes, procedures, and outcomes of State, Territory and Commonwealth higher education accreditation authorities including their impact on the quality of higher education programs; and monitor, review, analyse and report on the outcomes of those audits.
3. Publicly report periodically on matters relating to quality assurance, including the relative standards and outcomes of the Australian higher education system and its institutions, its processes and its international standing, and the impact of the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes on Australian Higher Education, using information available to AUQA from its audits and other activities carried out under these Objectives, and from other sources.
4. Develop partnerships with other quality agencies in relation to matters directly relating to quality assurance and audit, to facilitate efficient cross-border quality assurance processes and the international transfer of knowledge about those processes.

Vision

To consolidate AUQA's position as the leading reference point for quality assurance in higher education in and for Australia. Specifically:

- AUQA's judgements will be widely recognised as objective, accurate and useful, based on its effective procedures, including auditor training and thorough investigation.
- AUQA's work will be recognised by institutions and accrediting agencies as adding value to their activities, through the emphasis on autonomy, diversity and self-review.
- Through AUQA's work, there will be an improvement in public knowledge of the relative academic standards of Australian higher education and an increase in public confidence in Australian higher education.
- Through AUQA's work with other quality assurance agencies, the international quality assurance requirements for Australian higher education institutions will be coherent and rigorous, avoiding duplication and inconsistency.
- AUQA's advice will be sought on quality assurance in higher education, through mechanisms including consulting, training and publications.
- AUQA will be recognised among its international peers as a leading quality assurance agency, collaborating with other agencies and providing leadership by example.

Values

AUQA will be:

- *Rigorous*: AUQA carries out all its audits as rigorously and thoroughly as possible.
- *Supportive*: AUQA recognises institutional autonomy in setting objectives and implementing processes to achieve them, and acts to facilitate and support this.
- *Flexible*: AUQA operates flexibly, in order to acknowledge and reinforce institutional diversity, and is responsive to institution and agency characteristics and needs.
- *Cooperative*: AUQA recognises that the achievement of quality in any organisation depends on a commitment to quality within the organisation itself, and so operates as unobtrusively as is consistent with effectiveness and rigour.
- *Collaborative*: as a quality assurance agency, AUQA works collaboratively with the accrediting agencies (in addition to its audit role with respect to these agencies).
- *Transparent*: AUQA's audit procedures, and its own quality assurance system, are open to public scrutiny.
- *Economical*: AUQA operates cost-effectively and keeps as low as possible the demands it places on institutions and agencies.
- *Open*: AUQA reports publicly and clearly on its findings in relation to institutions, agencies and the sector.

* AUQA's Mission and Objectives were revised in March 2007, as recommended by MCEETYA. AUQA's Vision and Values have been modified accordingly.

APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL

Professor Cedric Hall, Deputy Dean, College of Education, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand

Dr Anne L Martin, Consultant, Australia

Dr Antony Stella, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Australia

Professor Robyn Quin, Executive Dean, Faculty of Education and Arts, Pro Vice Chancellor, Teaching & Learning, Edith Cowan University, Australia (Panel Chair)

Professor Barbara van Ernst, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Learning and Teaching), Swinburne University of Technology, Australia

APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

The following abbreviations and definitions are used in this Report. As necessary, they are explained in context.

Act	<i>Australian Film, Television and Radio School Act 1973</i>
AFTRS	Australian Film Television and Radio School
AFTRS Act.....	<i>Australian Film, Television and Radio School Act 1973</i>
AMF	AFTRS Management Forum
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CRICOS	Commonwealth Register of Institutions and Courses for Overseas Students
CSS.....	Corporate and Student Services Branch
DCITA.....	Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts
DEST	Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training
EFTSL	equivalent full-time student load
FARM.....	Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee
FTE.....	Full-time equivalent
HEP	Higher Education Provider
IDS	Indigenous Development Strategy
IPI.....	Indigenous Program Initiative
IT	Information Technology
KPIs.....	key performance indicators
LAMP.....	Laboratory of Advanced Media Production
LTP.....	Learning and Teaching Plan
MA	Master of Arts
MCEETYA.....	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MYCR	Mid-Year Curriculum Reviews
PGCC	Postgraduate Courses Committee
Portfolio.....	Performance Portfolio
R&D	Research and Development
RPL.....	Recognition of Prior Learning

