

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of
Avondale College

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OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

In 2003 the Australian Government introduced the *Higher Education Support Act 2003* (HESA) to allow students in non self-accrediting higher education institutions to receive financial assistance for their students' tuition fees through the FEE-HELP program.

Non self-accrediting institutions (NSAIs) approved under the HESA for this purpose have become known as higher education providers, or HEPs. Although other institutions also provide higher education, the term 'HEP' is commonly used to denote only non self-accrediting higher education providers, and it is used in this sense in this Report. The HESA requires that HEPs in receipt of FEE-HELP funds must meet a range of quality and accountability requirements, including regular audit by a quality auditing body named in the Higher Education Provider Guidelines.

This Report of the audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) of Avondale College (the 'College') provides an overview, and then briefly details the Audit Panel's main findings, and its commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A brief introduction to Avondale College, including its mission, vision and principles, is given in Appendix A; the mission, objectives, vision and values of AUQA in Appendix B; membership of the Audit Panel in Appendix C; and abbreviations and technical terms used in this Report in Appendix D.

The Audit Process

AUQA bases its audits of non self-accrediting HEPs on each organisation's own objectives, together with the MCEETYA *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* (National Protocols, available at: <http://www.mceetya.edu.au/mceetya/>), the DEST (now DEEWR) Handbook for Quality Audits of Higher Education Providers and other relevant legal requirements or codes to which the organisation is committed. The programs or courses of NSAIs are accredited by state and territory accrediting agencies, so quality audits of HEPs do not include a detailed examination of the academic quality assurance processes for programs of study.

HEP audits under the HESA consider institutional actions and performance in relation to, firstly, the institution's objectives; and, secondly, a group of criteria collectively known as 'Quality Audit Factors' (QAFs). The four QAFs are set out in the handbook referred to above (and in the AUQA Audit Manual). Their primary purpose is to provide the HEPs with a framework for the review of certain aspects of institutional performance. In the report of its self review (the 'Performance Portfolio' or 'Portfolio'), Avondale College reported against each of the QAFs, in addition to carrying out an (O)ADRI (Intention, Approach, Deployment, Results, Strengths, Improvements) analysis. On 21 July, 2008 Avondale College presented its submission to AUQA, comprising a 79-page report against the individual QAF criteria, (together with a list of documentary evidence). The Audit Panel met in Melbourne on 7 August 2008 to consider these materials. The chapters in this Report use the four main topic headings provided by the QAFs. Within each chapter, all the criteria for that QAF are addressed, but usually in a holistic way rather than criterion by criterion.

Avondale College is located in Cooranbong, New South Wales, with a campus at Wahroonga in Sydney. The main Audit Visit at the Lake Macquarie Campus took place from 16–17 October 2008; the Audit Panel did not visit the Sydney Campus (Wahroonga), but a number of staff and students from this campus participated in the audit visit and met the Panel. In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 80

people during these audit visits, including the College Council, senior managers, staff, adjunct staff, students and external stakeholders. Sessions were also available for any member of the College community to meet the Audit Panel and one staff member took advantage of this opportunity.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 17 October 2008 and does not take into account any changes that may have occurred subsequently. It records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel, based on the documentation provided by the College, as well as information gained through interviews, discussion and observation. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the College's activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

The Report contains a summary of audit 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 the College, with evidence, they are termed 'affirmations'. AUQA indicates that some recommendations and affirmations have a high priority. It is acknowledged that recommendations in this Audit Report may have resource implications.

Quotations taken from the Portfolio and supporting materials are identified with page numbers (PF p).

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 Finding

Avondale College is situated in the town of Cooranbong 50 kilometres from Newcastle with a campus at Wahroonga in Sydney. The main campus is located in a growth corridor in the Lake Macquarie region. In considering the Avondale College's institutional and educational objectives, AUQA commends the College's holistic approach to education and the Panel acknowledges the respect and affection which students, staff and community hold for the "Avondale experience". Commendation is also given to Avondale College for its attention to the needs of individual students, the availability of alternative pathways and support for students, and low student staff ratios. Further the College is commended for the high quality of its marketing activities, the Library and the approach to staff development

Avondale College has set a large change agenda and many of the affirmations and recommendations in the following report support the pursuit of this agenda. This includes the development of research strengths and expertise within the institution and the aspiration of achieving the status of a University. The College has commenced the development of an integrated strategic planning model. While challenges are still evident in the full implementation of this model, such as in the need to more closely align the Strategic Plan and the Business Plan, and in the implementation of the Quality Management System across the College, the Panel broadly affirms the directions and actions the College is undertaking. Importantly, the College acknowledges the need to reconcile and balance an emerging research agenda with the tradition of quality teaching and learning, which underpins the Avondale experience. One by-product of a greater focus on research is the increased focus of Avondale College on building partnerships with individuals, companies and other higher education institutions (HEIs), both locally and internationally. The College is implementing a range of human resources activities. It has implemented performance review processes for all staff and this has included the pilot of a 360-degree feedback methodology in some areas. Staff development is resourced and coordinated centrally. Staff development will be a key driver in the College's future aspirations. Further challenges present themselves in the implementation of human resource and student service policies, in particular, the grievance and anti-bullying policies. In both cases it was not clear to the Panel, whether all staff are aware of their own individual responsibilities, and at a governance level, how these policies were implemented and monitored.

Avondale College is presently grappling with a range of structural changes which will underpin the main strategic activities of the College in the next five years. These include the need to rationalise both faculties and program delivery to support the balance between the evolving teaching and learning and research agendas. The Panel recommends that Avondale College consider and further develop a range of supporting activities. It needs to consider the governance and management responsibilities between the College Council and the CEO and senior management, and to consider senior staff structures and gender in any future academic governance and academic staffing appointments. The Panel acknowledges that, while work has commenced in the area of benchmarking to continue to enhance quality, the College needs to further develop both internal and external benchmarking activity. Overall the Panel believes that the College satisfies the requirements as outlined in the QAFs and is making sound progress towards achieving its overall strategic objectives and its aspirations to become a University.

Commendations

1. AUQA commends Avondale College’s rationale for growth and the extensive consultation which has occurred in developing the College’s strategic directions.6

2. AUQA commends Avondale College for the development of the Lake Macquarie Campus which provides a positive environment for learning.7

3. AUQA commends Avondale College’s holistic approach to education and acknowledges the respect and affection to which students, staff and the community holds for the ‘Avondale experience’9

4. AUQA commends Avondale College for its attention to the needs of individual students.....10

5. AUQA commends Avondale College for low student staff ratios..11

6. AUQA commends Avondale College for beginning the development of a research culture.....12

7. AUQA commends Avondale College for seeking external partnerships in teaching and research.....13

8. AUQA commends Avondale College on the approach to staff development.....16

9. AUQA commends Avondale College’s development of the Diploma of General Studies as an alternative entry pathway and for support given to students.....17

10. AUQA commends Avondale College on the high regard held by staff and students for library services at the Lake Macquarie Campus.18

11. AUQA commends Avondale College for the high quality of marketing activity including online services and publications.18

Affirmations

1. AUQA affirms Avondale College’s recognition of the need to further develop its integrated strategic planning model.7

2. AUQA affirms the need for Avondale College to further develop the annual review of achievements, the key performance indicators and annual targets of the integrated Strategic Plan.7

3. AUQA affirms the intention of Avondale College to rationalise the number of faculties, courses and programs.11

4. AUQA affirms Avondale College’s proactive management of the tensions in seeking to develop a research culture which underpins teaching and learning.....12

5. AUQA affirms Avondale College’s implementation of 360-degree feedback processes with administrative and managerial staff and encourages the College to implement this process across the institution.17

Recommendations

1. As Avondale College develops in size and complexity AUQA recommends that consideration be given to the relationships between the role of the Council, the CEO and senior staff in terms of governance and management.....8
2. AUQA recommends that Avondale College review the terms of reference and activities of the Academic Board to ensure that there is clear responsibility for leadership in, and effective management of, academic policy.9
3. AUQA recommends that Avondale College seek to enhance the services available to off-campus students, including student support and social services.....10
4. AUQA recommends that Avondale College further adopt innovative practices to teaching and learning including the use of technologies.11
5. AUQA recommends that Avondale College further systematically develop its student evaluation survey processes to ensure both students and staff are provided with regular feedback on outcomes.....12
6. AUQA recommends that Avondale College, in consultation with staff, clarify its approaches to the development and enhancement of the research profile.13
7. AUQA recommends that the College undertake regular independent staff surveys.15
8. AUQA recommends that Avondale College makes gender balance an area for attention in all future senior appointments, committee membership, professional development activities and succession planning.15
9. AUQA recommends that Avondale College apply greater rigour in the implementation and monitoring of both the anti-bullying and harassment and grievance policies.16
10. AUQA recommends that Avondale College include in its future structure additional senior academic appointments to enhance teaching and research activities.....17
11. AUQA recommends that Avondale College formalise benchmarking activity across the institution and in line with the College’s aspirations, with other national and international Christian institutions, including universities.19
12. AUQA recommends that further work be undertaken to integrate the QMS and Avondale integrated strategic planning model including reporting within the College and further work be undertaken to deploy the QMS across all areas of Avondale College.....20

1. INSTITUTIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE

'Avondale College offers a quality education from a Christian perspective which seeks to develop the whole person, mentally, physically and emotionally.' Avondale College Mission, Vision and Values statements and statements of strategic priorities are contained in the Avondale College Strategic Plan 2008–2012 and can be found in Appendix A of this report.

1.1 *Institutional and Educational Objectives*

1.1.1 Aspirations and growth

Avondale College has developed a strategy for the future which involves substantial growth and the achievement of University status. The strategy includes an increase in research effort from a very low base, an increase in undergraduate and postgraduate (particularly higher degree) enrolment, the further development of external partnerships and the enhancement of quality assurance processes across the College. Avondale College realistically acknowledges that in order to achieve and sustain its research and growth ambitions, it must have the necessary resources. The College has developed a Business Plan which supports the Strategic Plan. While there is a need to more closely align these plans, the intention is that the underpinning resourcing for growth will be derived from a number of sources. For example, there has been a growth in interest in Avondale College from Christian schools, which has been sustained over a number of years, and while student numbers have not grown consistently year-by-year, the overall trend is upwards. Also, the local Lake Macquarie region has seen a growth in population, and it is anticipated that this growth will continue. Support for the development of a research profile within the College is to be established through the development and sale of land the College owns, where the former Aviation School was located. It is proposed that the gradual sale of sections of this land will enable the development of an Avondale College Endowment Fund, which will be used to resource and develop the College's research profile. This will include developing research skills of academic staff, and enable the College to recruit research talent to disseminate the research skills and expertise throughout the Avondale academic community. The College also acknowledges that the necessary resources are dependent on planned property developments, which while apparently realistic, involve an element of risk, but the need to develop future funding sources will continue.

Commendation 1

AUQA commends Avondale College's rationale for growth and the extensive consultation which has occurred in developing the College's strategic directions.

1.1.2 Strategic planning

In recent times the College has focused attention on developing and embedding strategic planning processes within the organisation. Recent strategic planning activity has involved an extensive consultation with all staff in the development of the Strategic Plan to gain consensus on the direction contained within the new plan.

The Avondale Strategic Plan 2008–2012 '...is conceived as an integrated model consisting of key strategic priorities, four functional plans and six enabling plans' (PF p4). Functional plans are in the areas of: Learning and Teaching Plan, Research Plan, Partnerships Plan and Spiritual Plan. The enabling plans are: Facilities Plan, Business Plan, Faculty Plan, Staff Development Plan,

Student Services Plan and the Marketing and Recruitment Plan. These plans are at different stages of development and at various stages in the establishment of performance indicators and accountabilities. Although the College has focused attention on an integrated strategic planning framework, there is as yet little evidence of integration. The Research Plan is given a strong focus, as are the research ambitions of the College. Senior staff and Council believe that this integrated strategic planning model demonstrates the shift by the College from a teaching only institution, to an institution with an integrated teaching and research focus. The achievement of the Strategic Plan and associated plans are to be monitored annually and more frequently reported on to Council. The Portfolio also acknowledges the intent from the recent Council self-appraisal that 'Avondale intends to provide a stronger emphasis on strategic planning at Council Meetings.' (PF p12) More development work needs to be undertaken in providing advice to Council on strategic planning.

Affirmation 1

AUQA affirms Avondale College's recognition of the need to further develop its integrated strategic planning model.

Further development and alignment of the Strategic Plan and the Business Plan is needed, along with the further development of key performance indicators. Strategic planning at faculty level is currently underway and it is intended that this level of planning will also align with the College Strategic Plan.

The Panel was provided with a copy of the first annual review of the Strategic Plan, under the new reporting framework. The Panel acknowledges that this is a new process for the College and would anticipate that a more sophisticated and consistent reporting framework will be developed over further reporting cycles. This would include the use of robust performance indicators and standardised approaches to reporting. The Quality Management System (QMS) and associated processes are still in an early stage of development and are not yet at a stage where they are integrated into the strategic planning model.

Affirmation 2

AUQA affirms the need for Avondale College to further develop the annual review of achievements, the key performance indicators and annual targets of the integrated Strategic Plan.

1.2 *Campus Development*

The Panel visited the Lake Macquarie Campus of the College. The College also has a Sydney Campus situated in Wahroonga at the Seventh-day Adventist Hospital. The College was established in a rural setting in 1897, and has an array of buildings and support facilities which reflect both the historical context from which the College has developed, with the maintenance of the College's first school house and other significant buildings, alongside the library, faculties and more recent sporting facilities. Also situated nearby is the Sanitarium factory which employs many students and supports the College in other ways. Other amenities include Chapels for quiet reflection and use by the Avondale community. The College is managing ongoing campus development in such a way as to blend older facilities with new developments to further enhance the student experience.

Commendation 2

AUQA commends Avondale College for the development of the Lake Macquarie Campus which provides a positive environment for learning.

1.3 Institutional Governance

1.3.1 Governance

The College has an active Council which works closely with the senior management of the College. The College has been established under a company structure by the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church of the South Pacific region and the SDA church is a shareholder of the company. A subset of Council are members of the company, forming a minority of seven of the 18 members of the Board. In recent times the College has focussed on revising the College Constitution to reflect best practice in governance.

Council members are supportive of Avondale's strategic vision to ensure that Avondale is a quality institution demonstrating 'excellence in Christian tertiary education seeking to find and establish its place in the higher education sector'. Council believe the College mission is to be an inclusive institution confined to disciplines in which it has the expertise to engage with staff involved in scholarship and research. Council believe this vision has given the College a strong focus and has galvanised staff and Council towards common goals.

Consistent with its plans for significant development – in student numbers, research and infrastructure – consideration will need to be given to the relationship between governance and management, in particular, the relative responsibilities of the Council, the CEO and senior staff. As might be expected in an institution of its size, the Council has to date had a relatively hands-on-role. As the College develops, it is likely that Council will focus more on strategic planning, external relations, review and accountability.

Recommendation 1

As Avondale College develops in size and complexity AUQA recommends that consideration be given to the relationships between the role of the Council, the CEO and senior staff in terms of governance and management.

1.4 Academic Board

In the Portfolio the College advised that 'Council delegates to Academic Board the management of academic programs including determination of academic policy and approval of the structure and content of courses.' (PF p12). However the Panel notes that the College Constitution, in its present form, appears to give a more restrictive role to the Academic Board, referring to its role in '...administering and implementing the academic policies, programs and other academic business of the College' (Avondale College Constitution, p25). Further, at the audit visit the Panel gained the impression that academic staff did not view the Academic Board as the focus of academic policy development and leadership within the College. For example, in discussing the process of the rationalisation of courses and faculties, Academic Board members and other staff tended to describe the Board more as a forum for discussion rather than for policy-making. Consequently the Panel recommends that the College review the terms of reference and activities of the Academic Board, with a view to ensuring that both in policy, and in practice, the Board has a clear role in determining academic policy, and providing academic leadership, while providing for an appropriate level of accountability to Council.

Recommendation 2

AUQA recommends that Avondale College review the terms of reference and activities of the Academic Board to ensure that there is clear responsibility for leadership in, and effective management of, academic policy.

1.5 *The Avondale experience*

The College is held in high regard by students and other stakeholders, and many spoke of the positive and transforming nature of their time at the College. The 'Avondale experience' was described variously, but focuses on providing a holistic approach to education within a Christian environment. This experience is not just about obtaining a qualification but about providing a safe place for students to grow emotionally and spiritually. Typically, this involves students, particularly at the undergraduate level, spending some, or all, of their term time living on campus and participating in social clubs, drama groups and sporting activities. There are also strong links with the local community, through sport and the SDA Church. The Panel acknowledges the long-standing reputation of the College in the Lake Macquarie community and received numerous comments from stakeholders of their high regard for the College and its students and for Avondale graduates.

The Avondale experience is further demonstrated through small class sizes (an overall student to staff ratio of 13:1, with most class sizes less than 20) with a majority of face-to-face teaching and hence often strong relationships between students and staff, leading to enduring links with staff and the College, well after students have graduated. Parents, staff, alumni and current students believe attendance at the College develops a maturity in individuals and a greater sense and understanding of personal values

The challenge for the College in aspiring to a future growth agenda, will be to maintain the essential characteristics of the Avondale experience given the acknowledged need to rationalise the number of programs being taught, and to manage this experience given the projected increase in the number of students. This focus on maintaining balance between growth and changes in student engagement and the student experience is, for example, currently being challenged by the fact that a growing number of students are now living off-campus with less contact with on-campus activity.

Commendation 3

AUQA commends Avondale College's holistic approach to education and acknowledges the respect and affection to which students, staff and the community holds for the 'Avondale experience'.

2 ACHIEVING EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHING, LEARNING AND OTHER CORE FUNCTIONS

2.1 *Teaching and Learning*

2.1.1 Student experience

In general, students believe themselves to be well served by the academic community, and student staff ratios are presently well below those of the majority of higher education institutions. Students are impressed by the access to staff, and the willingness of staff to discuss issues as they arise. Students consistently rate the College highly in feedback surveys. Students are generally comfortable in engaging with staff in their various courses, and again this is encouraged by small class sizes, the availability of individualised counselling and support services to work with students with academic learning difficulties. The Panel noted that demand for counselling is growing. Students with a disability are also provided for and supported.

Commendation 4

AUQA commends Avondale College for its attention to the needs of individual students.

Services to off-campus students are, as acknowledged by the College, more problematic. Off-campus students are invited to participate in the same activities as on-campus students but the pressures on off-campus students are usually greater in terms of family, and the need to work to support themselves while studying. Travel time and cost is also a factor. It is clearly a challenge for the College to ensure that the educational and social opportunities provided to off-campus students are similar to those available to on-campus students.

Recommendation 3

AUQA recommends that Avondale College seek to enhance the services available to off-campus students, including student support and social services.

2.1.2 Rationalisation of faculties, courses and programs

The College has consulted and agreed on a future direction for the College which involves significant changes to its teaching, learning and research agenda. The College has identified that to implement the strategies it needs to consider a rationalisation of faculties and the consolidation and integration of key research areas. Presently the College is offering a large number of programs and units in relation to the size of the institution.

The Panel believes that rationalisation of both courses and faculties need to be given an immediate priority by the College in order to begin to achieve the changes advocated in the Strategic Plan. The Panel notes the need to manage these review processes, taking account of staff expectations and anxiety regarding these possible changes. The Panel also notes that the College expects that successful management of these processes will lead to more efficient use of current resources, though it will also need significantly more resources.

Affirmation 3

AUQA affirms the intention of Avondale College to rationalise the number of faculties, courses and programs.

The Panel acknowledges the low student-staff ratios of the majority of programs in the College. It noted that this was one of the key components of the Avondale experience – small class sizes and a high level of face-to-face contact between staff and students – and that this is somewhat offset by the large number of units each staff member teaches. There are inherent conflicts between this method of delivery and the aspiration of the College to move to establish and build a research focus within existing College activities. The College needs to consider how the human resources of teaching staff are being used and whether the teaching of a large number of small classes is effective and viable.

Commendation 5

AUQA commends Avondale College for low student staff ratios..

Further, the College needs to consider what other modes of delivery can be used in common core programs to alleviate the need to provide a large number of courses to a small number of students. The Panel is also of the belief that in the future, the development and application of innovative approaches to teaching and learning will include adopting best practice approaches in the use of technologies in program delivery.

Recommendation 4

AUQA recommends that Avondale College further adopt innovative practices to teaching and learning including the use of technologies.

2.1.3 Student evaluation and feedback

From interviews, it became apparent that not all staff are receiving feedback on their teaching. All staff are aware that student feedback surveys are occurring on a regular basis, but not all staff know what happens with this survey data, or how this data is affecting the development of the teaching and learning agenda of the College. Further, it appeared that little or no feedback was being given to students on the outcomes of their commentary.

The College needs to further develop student feedback models to ensure that the information gleaned from these data collections is fed back to all staff regularly, as a component of individual staff professional development activity. Further, the College needs to consider, and develop mechanisms to ensure, that the results of student feedback surveys are presented back to students in an appropriate form. The College also needs to ensure that the information from these surveys is input into the development of future teaching and learning plans and student service activities, in a regular and systematised manner.

The Panel was also advised that in some cases individual teaching staff develop their own 'stand-alone' surveys for students. The full impact of this activity was not clear but it did highlight that the College needs to adopt a coordinated and systematic approach to student survey mechanisms, noting that it is possible to over-survey.

Recommendation 5

AUQA recommends that Avondale College further systematically develop its student evaluation survey processes to ensure both students and staff are provided with regular feedback on outcomes.

2.2 *Scholarship and Creative Activity*

2.2.1 Commitment to freedom of academic enquiry

The College stresses its commitment to the freedom of academic inquiry and has recently established a policy in this regard which is being disseminated across the College. It appears to the Panel that the policy is not dissimilar to such statements in many other higher education institutions. It will be important that this policy continues to be promoted and monitored. Staff commented on the fact that they have never felt any inhibitions in their research or other approaches to academic enquiry. Staff believe that they are able to give students choice in their academic pursuits, while maintaining a Christian ethos. In general, staff believe that their teaching is enhanced by their life experience, faith and commitment to Christian service. Students interviewed by the Panel invariably referred to these qualities as part of the attraction of Avondale as a place to study. Further, the Panel noted that over 35 per cent of currently enrolled students are from non-SDA backgrounds.

2.2.2 Development of a research culture

The College has made a commitment to build a sustainable research culture. This is a challenging task for the College, which has traditionally focused on teaching and learning as the main academic activity of the College. This new direction is being embraced by staff and stakeholders of the College.

Commendation 6

AUQA commends Avondale College for beginning the development of a research culture.

In order to manage this balance between quality teaching and learning and an emerging research agenda, the College has developed a Teaching and Learning and Research Nexus statement which broadly outlines that research and scholarly activity must underpin the quality of teaching and learning. The College is mindful of the challenge of not losing or subjugating the quality of teaching and learning to the research agenda. It recognises that some staff will not wish to embrace the developing research agenda, and that other staff will need to be resourced in order to obtain the correct skills to support their research aspirations. Staff workloads also need to be considered. The College has defined the three main research areas or strengths as: Health, Education and Society and Culture and, from a small base, is developing research niches within these areas. Further, the College has defined its future research strategy around these core areas, and is in the process of restructuring its seven academic faculties into a reduced number of key faculties and research activity areas.

Affirmation 4

AUQA affirms Avondale College's proactive management of the tensions in seeking to develop a research culture which underpins teaching and learning.

There was a certain energy and excitement amongst many staff regarding the College's commitment to the development of a research profile and an assertion that this is reinvigorating academic activity. However as might be expected, not all staff are comfortable with an increased emphasis on research. Some fear that resources might be diverted from teaching and other activities, while some seek more clarity on the proposed relationship between teaching, scholarship and research. The Council and senior management of the College are aware of these issues and have been careful to consider the balance between teaching, learning, scholarship and research in discussions on the future strategic directions of the College.

It was evident that much work still needs to be undertaken by the College in both articulating and implementing this agenda. For example, some staff believe that they are now to take on research activities in addition to a full teaching load; others staff believe that their skill is in the area of teaching only and that this skill might not be well regarded in the College's new strategic orientation.

Recommendation 6

AUQA recommends that Avondale College, in consultation with staff, clarify its approaches to the development and enhancement of the research profile.

To further enhance this exploration of the relationship between teaching, learning and research, the Panel advises that the College also needs to discuss and develop with staff the notions of research and scholarship, as defined in the National Protocols, and their relationship to teaching.

2.2.3 Broadening role of Avondale College in the higher education sector

The Council and staff of the College are currently actively engaged in seeking out and establishing external relationships with other higher education institutions both, locally and internationally. In discussions with staff regarding the future research agenda of the College, including projected increasing higher degree enrolments, the Panel was impressed with the number of current examples of partnerships with a range of higher education institutions, companies, Christian schools in the Lake Macquarie area, and community groups. Academics from the College are involved on faculty advisory committees, moderation panels, accreditation panels and other activities with other institutions. There are also examples of conjoint appointments, sessional teaching, and benchmarking and articulation arrangements. The College has also begun to pursue and develop industry-funded research opportunities and has established a small portfolio of externally-funded research activity.

Commendation 7

AUQA commends Avondale College for seeking external partnerships in teaching and research.

The Panel noted that the College intends to further develop its role in the higher education sector and acknowledges that the College sees external linkages as part of this process, with examples already evident of how these partnerships are contributing to its teaching, research and quality assurance activities.

The Panel also noted that the College's faculty advisory committees are well supported by academics from other higher education institutions. Likewise, a number of Avondale academic staff are involved in similar activities in other institutions. This developing framework for the

transfer of knowledge will greatly assist the College in, for example, developing its research and higher degree agenda.

3 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES, DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT TEACHING AND LEARNING AND OTHER CORE ACTIVITIES

3.1 *Organisational Structures and Decision Making*

3.1.1 Staff survey

In 2007 in the wake of the closure of the College's Aviation School, the emerging change agenda and in recognition of low staff morale, the College undertook a staff survey to independently ascertain the concerns of staff. The results of this survey provided a basis upon which senior staff could both gauge and address staff concerns and consider improvements in leadership and communication across the College. This resulted in the development of a strategic planning process, which was highly consultative, and which involved all staff in the College, as well as Council and external stakeholders. From this consultation process emerged a clear mandate for a forward agenda for the College which all staff are aware of and broadly support.

The Panel acknowledges the College's initiative in undertaking an independent review of staff attitudes and concerns and believes that, given the large scope of the change agenda, and limited timelines to achieve many of the strategic objectives, it would greatly assist in the management of these change processes if such independent staff surveys continue to be conducted regularly.

Recommendation 7

AUQA recommends that the College undertake regular independent staff surveys.

3.1.2 Gender representation

The Panel noted that approximately 60% of students are female and approximately half the staff are male and half female. In contrast the Panel noted the paucity of female representation in the senior levels of the College, both at management and committee level. The Panel also acknowledged the recent move by the College Council, via a revision to the Constitution, to increase female representation on the Council.

As the College moves towards the development of a stronger research culture, coupled with an established concentration on the quality of teaching and learning, the College needs to consider creating the opportunities for a stronger representation of women in senior positions. This would include mentoring and succession planning, so that women are participating in senior management opportunities, including committee chair and decision-making processes. The College has a 'Women in Research program which is highly dependent on one senior member of staff. As the College grows, and the research agenda of the College develops, further work will need to be undertaken by the College to provide systematised processes to ensure women are represented in the emerging research profile, particularly in non traditional fields.

Recommendation 8

AUQA recommends that Avondale College makes gender balance an area for attention in all future senior appointments, committee membership, professional development activities and succession planning.

3.1.3 Anti-bullying and Harassment and Grievance policy implementation

The College has undertaken much work in implementing both the anti-bullying and harassment and grievance policies and many training sessions have been held, but the Panel received inconsistent information as to whether all staff had attended anti-bullying training sessions. The Panel believes the College needs to continue to monitor the implementation of the anti-bullying policy to ensure all staff and students are aware of their rights and responsibilities.

Secondly, while the College has both a staff and student grievance policy, it is not clear to all staff what their responsibilities for reporting are, nor was it clear to the Panel how information on grievance is collated and tracked centrally over time, particularly to monitor trends and issues that the College may need to address in the future. While the College reported that there have been only a small number of staff and student grievances over the last few years, the College is working on a process whereby all grievances are systematically collated by the Registrar. Once this process has been implemented, the College will be able to readily monitor both staff and student grievances, and consider themes which may emerge, that need to be addressed by the College.

Recommendation 9

AUQA recommends that Avondale College apply greater rigour in the implementation and monitoring of both the anti-bullying and harassment and grievance policies.

3.2 Academic and Administrative Staff

3.2.1 Staff development

Staff all commented positively on access to staff development. In recent times a staff development policy has been formalised and staff development is being managed centrally in order to obtain the best use of limited resources and investment in staff. Many academic staff have taken sabbatical leave and all have access to professional development support, in line with individual performance management plans. The Panel commends the College for its commitment to staff development, including the allocation of resources. With the strategies foreshadowed in the strategic plans of the College, there will be a focus on targeted professional development activity, and this may be a challenge in terms of future resourcing. This is something the College will need to monitor and consider further as it moves towards achieving its strategic objectives, particularly its research agenda.

Commendation 8

AUQA commends Avondale College on the approach to staff development.

3.2.2 Performance management

The majority of staff interviewed, both academic and administrative, are aware of and are regular participants in, either the College's Performance Review Planning and Professional Development Policy, or the Performance Review for Clerical and Administrative Employees. Some staff interviewed had recently been involved in 360-degree feedback activities and reported favourably on the experience. The Panel considers that this staff development activity is a valuable addition to the performance management processes of the College, particularly in the light of its energetic change agenda.

Affirmation 5

AUQA affirms Avondale College's implementation of 360-degree feedback processes with administrative and managerial staff and encourages the College to implement this process across the institution.

3.2.3 Academic career structures

The College presently has a relatively flat academic structure, but as it grows it will need to offer career pathways to both attract and retain academics, and to provide academic leadership. Senior academics will be needed for the development of future teaching and research activities including the integration of research and scholarship into teaching and learning, and the mentoring of new and early career staff. The Panel noted that the College recently developed a new Academic Staff Promotion policy, with a career structure that includes levels equivalent to Professor and Associate Professor. The Panel recommends that the College enhance academic leadership and its career structure by appointing appropriate persons to these levels. It will be important that these positions be considered as champions of teaching, learning and research and as leaders in strategic planning and quality assurance.

Recommendation 10

AUQA recommends that Avondale College include in its future structure additional senior academic appointments to enhance teaching and research activities.

3.3 Support for student learning**3.3.1 Alternative pathways**

Avondale College's main pathway for alternative entry into the College is by the Diploma of General Studies. The College has moved to '...a system where the onus is on the student to provide evidence that they can succeed in higher education' (PF p19). Students are assessed at enrolment and according to the University Admission Index (UAI), or other score, they will do the first four subjects of the Diploma of General Studies and/or, depending on aptitude, one or more degree subjects. Students are monitored carefully, with reference to the level of thinking skills and how they write, and this information is used to compare and track students over the life of the diploma. The support and monitoring for the program is very individual and many students have completed their undergraduate programs from this initial entry point. For example, over 30 students completing undergraduate degrees at the College this year commenced their enrolment at Avondale College in the Diploma of General Studies. Students who had completed their undergraduate degree from this entry point were justifiably proud of their achievements.

Commendation 9

AUQA commends Avondale College's development of the Diploma of General Studies as an alternative entry pathway and for support given to students.

3.3.2 Library services

Throughout the audit visit, the Panel received many positive comments about the Library at Lake Macquarie Campus, the quality of library materials and the services provided by library staff, including the acquisition of new materials and assistance with inter-library loans. The

Panel noted that a number of staff of the College donate materials to the Library. Further, in 2007 the College implemented a 10% allocation of student fee income to the provision of library services, and the Library manages its own budget.

Commendation 10

AUQA commends Avondale College on the high regard held by staff and students for library services at the Lake Macquarie Campus.

3.3.3 Marketing

The Panel commends the work of the Marketing area of the College in representing the College to the Community. The College has an excellent new website and is using a range of electronic media to engage prospective students and other stakeholders in targeted areas. The website is attractive, has energy and provides a wealth of information on what it is like to study at Avondale, including a series of short clips on student life. The College handbooks are up-to-date, informative and easy to use. Each year the College also prepares an attractive publication for homecoming and graduation, which has photos of all in the Avondale community including staff and students.

Commendation 11

AUQA commends Avondale College for the high quality of marketing activity including online services and publications.

3.4 *The student administration system*

In the same week as the Panel's audit visit, the College was also in the final stages of the implementation of Callista. This system will assist the College through establishing online computer records and services for students, all of which in the past had been undertaken manually. Once this system is fully implemented, it is believed that many of the College's manual student administration processes can be eliminated, and many of the current differences in processes between faculties and departments will be eliminated. It is intended that the full implementation of Callista will allow for the standardisation of many academic processes across the College. From early work that has been done on the system through the implementation process, it is believed that efficiencies can be gained through the elimination of duplication and overlapping process and a streamlining of activities. In scoping the implementation of Callista, staff in the College advised that, one of the 'learnings' from the implementation has been a greater insight within the College of how the College is organised and committees are linked. The Panel encourages the College to use the opportunity of the challenges in the implementation of Callista to continue to pursue greater consistency and standardisation of processes across the College. The Panel also notes that some realignment of staffing may occur as a result of the implementation of the system, and faculties may be given more responsibility for the inputting and validation of data.

4 MAINTAINING A COMMITMENT TO QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

4.1 *Review and Evaluation*

4.1.1 Benchmarking

While there is some evidence of benchmarking activity in areas of the College, this evidence is inconsistent. Staff working in research areas benchmark activity in certain disciplines, as does the Library. Involving staff on state accreditation committees, and having external faculty advisory committees, are also seen as informal approaches to benchmarking.

The College has acknowledged that further work needs to be undertaken in this area. Within the College, faculties have benchmarked against each other, while some staff are involved in moderation activities and advisory panels at other universities and academic staff from elsewhere participate on Avondale committees. While all these activities have evolved over the years, the College now recognises the need to be more systematic. The Panel acknowledges that initial work has been undertaken with Moore College and a Memorandum of Understanding signed between the two providers. The College is also presently negotiating with the Australian College of Physical Education. These agreements reflect the broad study choices of the students attending the College, many of whom study either physical education or theology. In line with its strategic objectives, the College is presently further considering the range of higher education institutions with which to benchmark, before beginning to consider what types of benchmarking projects to become involved with.

Recommendation 11

AUQA recommends that Avondale College formalise benchmarking activity across the institution and in line with the College's aspirations, with other national and international Christian institutions, including universities.

Prospective benchmarking partners include the SDA network worldwide, and similar Christian institutions, including universities. The College is presently also considering the option of establishing a benchmarking group similar to the Australian Technology Network to further build links. The Panel believes that over the next few years it will be important to the College's aspirations that formal and strategic benchmarking agreements, and projects, are developed and undertaken to further develop best practice approaches to Christian tertiary education.

4.1.2 Quality Management System

The College's QMS has evolved from a prior iteration. Revised over the last year into the QMS, the QMS is supported by a Quality Committee of Academic Board. The College acknowledges that the QMS is a work-in-progress and that one of the issues which is beginning to be addressed through the quality management system, is the variability of quality and processes across faculties. Late in 2007 the College undertook an extensive review of all College operations which resulted in an action plan. The Action Plan is based on a self-assessment and is detailed; progress on this plan is monitored by the Quality Committee. It will be important for the College to continue to monitor the progress of this action plan to ensure that the actions are completed and continuous improvements are being achieved. Progress against the Quality Action Plan and the various plans in the strategic planning model, will need to be maintained and reporting and

monitoring processes further developed. The spread of responsibility for the achievement of both planning and quality actions will need to be streamlined and prioritised to ensure that progress continues.

Knowledge of the QMS and what quality assurance actually means in practical terms varied throughout the College. Staff could describe quality in terms of practical applications, such as moderation, involvement in state based accreditation, the self review undertaken in 2007 and the Quality Committee. As well, all staff are aware of the College Strategic Plan. Senior staff are more aware of the impact that quality assurance processes are having on the College, particularly in preparation for the AUQA audit. This includes reviews of administrative functions and activities, which it is believed have given rise to a greater transparency in processes; and reviews of the role of the Constitution and of Council, resulting in tighter linkages between the Strategic Plan, governance and Business Plans of the College. Further, the use of feedback information at various levels has played a role in the improvement of many academic and administrative processes within the College. Benchmarking is also considered as a component of quality assurance albeit one, as already mentioned, needing more attention.

The new more cohesive QMS is evolving and is slowly being deployed across the College. Further, work now needs to be undertaken to ensure that the system which has been developed, is supported by and involves all staff. As the College develops the Avondale Strategic Plan, associated enabling plans, key performance indicators and reporting, it will need to resolve how the QMS is integrated into the Avondale strategic planning model.

Recommendation 12

AUQA recommends that further work be undertaken to integrate the QMS and Avondale integrated strategic planning model including reporting within the College and further work be undertaken to deploy the QMS across all areas of Avondale College.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: AVONDALE COLLEGE

Avondale College is a private, not-for-profit Higher Education Provider (HEP) of tertiary education in a Christian context. Avondale College is incorporated as an autonomous public company limited by guarantee, and has been assessed as compliant with the National Governance Protocols for Higher Education Providers. Avondale education emphasises the balanced development of the whole person, including the intellectual, social, physical, aesthetic, and spiritual dimensions of the self. Its education is centred in ethical values, and seeks to inspire students with a vision of global and community service to make the world a better place.

The demand for values-based education of the kind offered at Avondale is demonstrated by enrolment growth of over 40% since 2004. At the March 2008 census, Avondale had 1273 students (1103 full-time equivalents). Students come from all states and territories of Australia and from overseas, with the highest proportion coming from New South Wales. International enrolment varies between 8% and 12%. Approximately 42% of undergraduate students are accommodated on-campus, experiencing the interchange of ideas and group activities which are the strengths of residential campuses. Approximately 51% of undergraduate students hold Commonwealth Supported Places in teaching and nursing, and most other domestic students are eligible for FEE-HELP.

Established in 1897, Avondale offers 43 degree programs from bachelor to PhD level in Arts, Humanities, Business, Education, Nursing, Sciences and Theology. Avondale is registered as a higher education institution by the New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSWDET). It has two campuses, the Lake Macquarie Campus in Cooranbong and the Sydney Campus in the grounds of the Sydney Adventist Hospital in Wahroonga.

Avondale has 86 FTE academic staff and 95 FTE general staff. Avondale's staff qualifications have received 5-star ratings in *The Good Universities Guide (GUG)* each year since 2004. Fifty-two per cent of full-time and fractional full-time academic staff in higher education have doctoral qualifications, and a further 12% are engaged in doctoral research.

Avondale's small size gives it flexibility to change, facilitates student-staff interaction and pastoral care, and contributes to a cohesive academic and social community. These factors underlie Avondale's consistently high Course Experience Questionnaire ratings for quality of teaching, good generic skills and student satisfaction.

Avondale graduates make a significant contribution to the national priority professions of teaching and nursing, and are employed in a wide range of other public and private organisations. Many Avondale graduates have progressed to master and doctoral degrees in Australian and overseas universities, and a number hold academic positions in Australian and international universities.

Avondale College – Statements of Strategic Intent

1. Vision

Avondale aspires to be a university recognised for excellence in Christian tertiary education; acknowledged for its distinctive contribution to scholarly activity in teaching, research and community service; and esteemed for its focus on ethical values, the development of the whole person, and quality of student life.

2. Mission Statement

The mission of Avondale College is:

To deliver quality education characterised by:

- excellence in scholarship, teaching and research;
- commitment to free inquiry and academic and professional integrity;
- integration of intellectual, professional, spiritual and personal values;
- development of the whole person

in the context of Seventh-day Adventist world view, values, faith and lifestyle.

To conduct research and research training in targeted areas and to enhance the research-teaching nexus.

To equip students for service to society and church.

To develop graduates with high ethical standards; inquiring, disciplined minds; a sense of individual worth; respect for others; an appreciation of diversity; and a commitment to faith, integrity, and justice.

3. Values

Avondale College is committed to the following values:

Spiritual development in students and staff

Avondale College places a high priority on the spiritual development and nurture of both students and staff in order to assist graduates and staff to develop and maintain a personal Christian experience and to share that experience with others.

Life balance

Avondale College education seeks the balanced development of the whole person, including the intellectual, social, physical, spiritual and aesthetic dimensions of the being. Avondale College also encourages a healthy balance between work, personal development, and family and social life.

A supportive ethos

Avondale College aims to establish and maintain a supportive learning environment that encourages challenge and risk-taking as dynamic elements that contribute to a quality education.

Collegiality

Avondale College seeks to function as an integrated community in which a sense of individual worth is balanced by respect for others, an appreciation of diversity, and informed evaluation of ideas, viewpoints, values and conduct. Interpersonal and teamwork skills are also essential components of a collegial environment.

Integrity

Avondale College values integrity in its own operations and it seeks to develop skilled graduates who will act with integrity and ethical principles in their future personal and professional lives.

Social and environmental responsibility

Avondale College is committed to the ideals of service, social justice, the welfare of society and responsible environmental stewardship.

Leadership and collaboration

Avondale College believes in challenging students to reach their highest potential in their academic pursuits, their practical experiences, and in their community service. It is expected that, as future community leaders, graduates will contribute to the well-being of society, work collaboratively with other professionals, and actively lead the Church and society into the future.

Work-to-study opportunities

Avondale College values the provision of earning opportunities for student workers in a rural location where little casual work is available. Avondale College also values the training of students in the importance of a responsible work ethic.

Avondale's Strategic Priorities

Avondale seeks to function as an Australian Christian University, and to this end has identified the following key strategic priorities:

- Priority 1.** Enhance the delivery of high quality education in a Christian context from a Seventh-day Adventist perspective.
- Priority 2.** Increase research performance in targeted areas and foster the research-teaching nexus.
- Priority 3.** Extend mutually beneficial partnerships with selected universities, industry, professional bodies and the Seventh-day Adventist Church Community.
- Priority 4.** Facilitate the development of the whole person, including the spiritual dimension.
- Priority 5.** Instil in students and staff a commitment to services, equity, diversity and social justice.
- Priority 6.** Achieve consistent enrolment growth across all academic programs.
- Priority 7.** Enhance financial sustainability by increasing revenue from diverse sources.
- Priority 8.** Raise staffing levels in proportion to enrolment and revenue growth.
- Priority 9.** Enhance staff development and community.
- Priority 10.** Foster a culture of continuous improvement.

Avondale College

Key Statistics (2008 unless otherwise stated)

Total Higher Education Student Enrolments: headcount @ 31 August 2008	1,294
Staff numbers FTE	
Academic	86
General	70
Total Operating Revenues (year end June 2007)	\$24,228m
Total Operating Expenses (year end June 2007)	\$24,206m

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

In its external relations, 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.

APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL

Dr John Grant, Consultant (Chair)

Rev Dr Charles Sherlock, Consultant, Executive Officer, Board of Ministry, Anglican Diocese of Bendigo
(to September 2008)

Rev Dr Mark Harding, Dean, Australian College of Theology
(from October 2008)

Ms Karen Treloar, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency

APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

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

AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
DEEWR.....	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, formerly DEST
EFTSL.....	equivalent full-time student load
FEE-HELP	FEE-HELP is a loan given to eligible fee-paying students to help pay part or all of their tuition fees.
HEI.....	Higher Education Institution
HEP(s).....	Higher Education Provider(s)
HESA	<i>Higher Education Support Act 2003</i>
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NSAI(s)	non self-accrediting institution(s)
OADRI	Objective-Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement
PF p	Performance Portfolio page reference
Portfolio.....	Performance Portfolio: Self-Review Report
QAFs.....	Quality Audit Factors
QMS	Quality Management System
SDA	Seventh-day Adventist
SAI(s).....	self-accrediting institution(s)
UAI	University Admission Index

