

AUSTRALIAN  
UNIVERSITIES  
QUALITY AGENCY

**Report of an Audit of  
The University of Ballarat**

**November 2002**

AUQA Audit Report Number 7

ISBN: 1877090042

© 2002 Australian Universities Quality Agency

Level 10, 123 Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne, VIC 3000  
Ph 03 9639 1100  
Fax 03 9639 7177

[admin@auqa.edu.au](mailto:admin@auqa.edu.au)

[www.auqa.edu.au](http://www.auqa.edu.au)

The Australian Universities Quality Agency receives financial support  
from the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments of Australia

## CONTENTS

<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Overview of the Audit</b> .....	<b>5</b>
Background .....	5
The Audit Process .....	5
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>7</b>
Summary of Findings .....	7
Commendations .....	10
Recommendations .....	10
<b>1. Purpose, Direction-setting and Leadership</b> .....	<b>13</b>
1.1 Context .....	13
1.2 Governance .....	14
1.3 Strategic Direction and Planning .....	15
1.3.1 Strategic direction and planning at school/ section level .....	16
1.3.2 Performance monitoring against the SSI .....	17
1.3.3 External benchmarking .....	18
1.4 Quality Improvement Framework .....	18
1.5 Executive Information Management .....	19
1.6 Policy Development and Implementation .....	19
1.6.1 Administrative control of policy .....	20
1.6.2 Implementing policy .....	21
1.7 Professional Leadership .....	21
1.8 Leadership Development .....	21
<b>2. Learning and Teaching</b> .....	<b>23</b>
2.1 Management of Learning and Teaching .....	23
2.2 Objectives and Performance Indicators .....	24
2.2.1 Performance monitoring .....	25
2.3 Course Approval and Review .....	25
2.4 Student Evaluation of Teaching and Units .....	27
2.5 Centre for Learning and Teaching .....	28
2.6 Integration between Further and Higher Education .....	28
2.7 Off-Campus Activities in Conjunction with Local Partners .....	29
2.7.1 Contract management and review .....	30
2.7.2 Student entry criteria .....	30
2.7.3 Staffing .....	31
2.7.4 Resources and support for students .....	32
2.7.5 Moderation .....	32
2.7.6 Monitoring student progress .....	33
2.8 Teaching Arrangements with International Agents .....	33
2.8.1 Contract management .....	34
2.8.2 Advertising and promotion .....	34

2.8.3 Tutoring.....	35
2.8.4 Facilities and resources .....	35
2.8.5 Orientation for staff teaching off-shore .....	35
2.9 International Focus.....	36
2.10 Indigenous Education.....	36
<b>3. Research.....</b>	<b>38</b>
3.1 Objectives .....	38
3.2 Research Management.....	39
3.2.1 The Institute for Regional and Rural Research.....	40
3.2.2 Research Centres.....	40
3.2.3 Research management at school level .....	41
3.3 Achieving Objectives.....	42
3.4 Research Training .....	43
3.4.1 Supervision .....	44
3.4.2 Monitoring postgraduate research student progress .....	45
3.4.3 Resources and support of postgraduate students .....	47
<b>4. Serving the Community.....</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>5. Staff .....</b>	<b>50</b>
5.1 Staff Profile.....	50
5.2 Staff Workloads .....	50
5.3 Induction .....	52
5.4 Performance Review and Development.....	52
5.5 Staff Satisfaction.....	52
<b>6. Students.....</b>	<b>54</b>
6.1 Student Affairs Committee .....	54
6.2 Student Charter .....	54
<b>7. Resources and Infrastructure .....</b>	<b>55</b>
7.1 Library.....	55
7.2 Information Technology Services.....	56
APPENDIX A: A Brief Introduction of the University of Ballarat .....	57
APPENDIX B: The Objects of AUQA.....	58
APPENDIX C: The Audit Panel .....	59

**ABBREVIATIONS**

AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
CLT	Centre for Learning and Teaching
ESOS	Educational Services for Overseas Students
FTE	full-time equivalent
GDS	Graduate Destination Survey
HE	higher education
HOS	Head of School
IRRR	Institute of Regional and Rural Research
IS	Information Services
IT	information technology
ITS	Information Technology Services
KPI	key performance indicator
LAMP	Leadership and Management Program
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
RDHC	Research and Higher Degrees Committee
RPL	recognition of prior learning
SEPS	Student Evaluation of Postgraduate Supervision
SET	Student Evaluation of Teaching
SEU	Student Evaluation of Unit
SSI	Statement of Strategic Intent
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UB	University of Ballarat
VET	vocational education and training



## **OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT**

### **Background**

In 2001, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an audit panel to carry out an academic audit of the University of Ballarat (UB).

AUQA appreciated the openness and frankness with which UB approached the audit.

A brief introduction to UB is given in Appendix A. The objects of AUQA are shown in Appendix B. The membership of the audit panel is provided in Appendix C.

### **The Audit Process**

AUQA bases its audits on each organisation's own objectives, together with the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Protocols. The major aim of the audit is to consider and review the procedures an organisation has in place to monitor and achieve its objectives. This involves consideration of inputs, processes and outcomes.

UB submitted a Performance Portfolio and supporting documentation describing its strategic directions and the range of mechanisms it has in place to monitor the achievement of objectives, and assure and enhance quality across its core activities.

The AUQA panel met to consider these materials and subsequently asked for a considerable quantity of further information in order to clarify procedures, verify data and document outcomes. It became clear that international enrolments comprise a significant proportion of UB's higher education enrolments. These international enrolments are located both off-shore and on-shore through a variety of partnering arrangements. The panel decided that visits to UB's partners in Sydney and Melbourne and to selected off-shore partners were required.

On 7 June 2002, the Panel Chair and Audit Director visited UB for a Preparatory Visit. During that visit, preliminary clarification of issues and additional information was sought and arrangements for the offshore and onshore Audit Visit were finalised.

Prior to the Audit Visit to Ballarat, some panel members visited the University's operations in Hong Kong and Shenzhen, PRC on 2-3 July 2002. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Research) was present in those two places at the time of the visits. Some panel members also made visits to UB's partners in Melbourne (Melbourne Institute of Technology) and Sydney (International Institute of Business and Information Technology).

The main onshore Audit Visit took place on 22-24 July, 2002, with the panel assembling for a planning meeting on 21 July. The panel was based at the Mount Helen campus, Ballarat.

In all, the audit panel spoke with over 200 people during the Audit Visits, including the Chancellor and some external members of the University Council, the Vice-Chancellor and senior management, academic staff, general and technical staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students and representatives of relevant unions and of the external community. A session was set aside to allow any member of the University community to meet with the panel and one person took this opportunity.

The panel undertook a tour of the Camp Street Arts Precinct currently under development. Some panel members undertook tours of other areas of the Mount Helen campus.

This Report records the conclusions reached by AUQA based on the documentation provided by the University and the interviews, discussions and observations of the panel. While every attempt has been made to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of UB's activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every instance of quality assurance procedures, or of their effectiveness or shortcomings. This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit (22-24 July), and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently.

The Report contains a summary of findings, and lists of commendations and recommendations. The latter suggest possible improvements and in some cases endorse actions already being undertaken by the University, or identified by it in the Performance Portfolio as being necessary.

It is acknowledged that recommendations in AUQA Audit Reports may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for universities where financial and other resources are constrained. Accordingly, the Report does not prioritise these recommendations. AUQA recognises that it is UB's responsibility to respond as it sees fit.

The panel has structured this Report in a similar manner to the way in which UB structured its Performance Portfolio. However, the nature of the audit sampling process and the conclusions reached are such that some headings and content differ between the two documents.

## CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations and recommendations (in the same order as they appear in the Report). It should be noted that other favorable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

### Summary of Findings

UB's mission is "to use education, training, research and consultancies to promote the growth and wellbeing of the communities in our part of Australia". There is no doubt that the University is well regarded in its region, plays a significant education role in the community and is building strong links with business and industry.

This audit was conducted at a time when the changes in structure and senior personnel at UB are still relatively recent and when the effect of these changes is still being experienced by staff. The self-assessment undertaken by UB as part of the audit is the first time such an assessment has been undertaken in the Higher Education Division of the University. AUQA commends the frank approach taken by UB to its self-assessment.

The panel believes that UB has made, and will continue to make, important contributions to its local regions. However, UB's capacity to demonstrate that it has a robust and systematic means for determining that it is meeting its strategic objectives is somewhat constrained. It is this capacity that this Report addresses.

The University Statement of Strategic Intent (SSI) identifies six broad focus areas (Learning and Teaching/The Learning Environment; Information Technology: Development and Utilisation; Research, Consultancy and Partnership; An Enterprising Culture and Diversified Funding Base; the Working and Organisational Environment; and International Activities). For each focus area, a number of objectives are defined. Associated with each objective is a large number of strategies, actions and outcome indicators. It is recommended that the University's SSI be reconsidered and reshaped into a Statement with a clearer hierarchy of priorities, with timelines and milestones over the period of the Statement, and with identification how the University's budget will be distributed across the various priorities. The University can then require schools and other sections of the University to operationalise this Statement through their own planning processes.

Continuing refinement of institutional-level key performance indicators is also required and it is recommended that UB place emphasis on ensuring that the indicators are well defined and measurable. UB currently has a restricted ability to provide timely, accurate information on University performance in a wide range of areas. UB is well aware of this information gap and its significance and has taken some steps to address the problem.

UB's limited ability to collect systematic information is hampering its capability to monitor its performance with respect to teaching and learning and to use this data to guide its quality improvement efforts.

The panel was not convinced that a systematic process exists for Council to inform itself of the progress towards achieving goals (related to the quality of planning and reporting within the University), nor for Council to review the strategic directions of the University. Council reviewed and endorsed the University's strategic direction in December 2001, but such annual review does not appear to have been systematically built into the work cycle of the Council. AUQA commends the Council for initiating and conducting a self-evaluation of its performance in 2002 and for its use of the results to review its induction process for new Council members.

The students met by the panel, particularly undergraduate students, were highly satisfied with the courses and general support services available to them. Academic staff show a genuine concern for their students and students appear to have a high level of interaction with them. There is strong staff concern for the pastoral support of students. For bachelor degree students, Course Experience Questionnaire results show the overall satisfaction of UB students to be at least equivalent to the national average.

The procedures for the approval of new courses are operating effectively. Two mechanisms have been established for the review of established courses. Recommendations are made which may improve the effectiveness of these. University policy on the student evaluation of teaching and units has not been implemented and UB has noted that the University-wide approach to the assessment of teaching quality needs addressing. The audit panel strongly endorses this. There are examples of successes in integrating the TAFE and HE divisions, although UB has not yet capitalised on the substantial potential advantages available to it as a dual sector University. It is recommended that UB increase its efforts to develop further appropriate student pathways between TAFE and HE.

It is recommended that the place of the Research Leadership and Management Plan in relation to the University's SSI be reconsidered in order to inform a more robust approach to research planning and the understanding of staff of research objectives. The Institute for Regional and Rural Research (IRRR) was established in 2001. It is intended to serve as a focus of the University's regional and rural research and is an umbrella structure under which four Research Centres have been established. It is too early to assess the effectiveness of IRRR, but it may indeed play an important part in providing a focus for UB's research efforts, which is necessary in a small university. It will be important for the University to measure whether IRRR is effective in achieving its stated objectives related to research enhancement and focus.

There is evidence of a consistent increase in many aspects of research performance at UB over the past five years. AUQA commends the 'Early Career Researcher' Development Program as a means of increasing research capacity. The panel suggests that UB attempt to set both institutional and school/section targets at a realistic level and define appropriate indicators that can demonstrate the extent of progress towards achievement of objectives. There would be considerable value to UB in establishing appropriate external benchmarks against similar regional universities.

UB has evidence of improving outcomes with respect to research training. A number of recommendations are made in relation to research training and the supervision and support of higher degree research students.

UB has developed some strong relations with the community. It is generally well-regarded in the local community and is seen as being an institution that is open and responsive to community interaction. AUQA commends UB for its ability to attract first generation university students and its recognition of the difficulties that these students' families may have in understanding the university system and environment. UB's commitment to its communities brings with it a tension between community need and the University's capacity to respond to these needs. The panel suggests that UB develop a framework for dealing with these tensions, both in relation to resources and to promotion of its role and responsibilities to the regional communities it serves.

A large number of staffing policies have recently been subject to review, including recruitment (reviewed 2001); induction (revised 2001); probation (revised policy approved 2001); performance review and development (extensively reviewed 2001); and academic promotion (reviewed 1999). UB has noted the relative lack of senior appointments, especially at Level E and has begun to address this issue. The panel encourages this and recommends the development of a targeted plan for increasing appointments at this level.

There is agreement amongst staff and management that staff workloads, particularly for academic staff, are generally high. The panel formed the view that the relatively high workloads are having an adverse effect on staff morale. Work is underway on the development of academic workload principles and procedures. The resolution of the workload issue is a difficult matter, and the panel encourages UB in its ongoing efforts.

The Library and Information Technology Services form one functional group at UB known as Information Services. All central administrative areas provide shared services to the TAFE and HE divisions. The Information Services area, in particular, has had to undertake a huge amount of work to make this functional. The Library's capacity to support postgraduate research is constrained. The panel formed the view that despite the challenges which it faces, the Library is well organised, user-friendly and working effectively, within the limits of its resources. Following the merger of institutions, UB

has now established a single IT network which should serve as a solid foundation for ongoing developments. Attention has also been paid to standardising hardware and software, which has brought efficiencies in terms of site licensing and the provision of training.

Note that the Commendations and Recommendations are not prioritised by the audit panel. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report.

### **Commendations**

1. AUQA commends UB for the frank approach it adopted to its self-assessment.
2. AUQA commends the Council for initiating and conducting a self-evaluation of its performance in 2002 and for its use of the results to review the induction process for new Council members.
3. AUQA commends UB for its development of a policy that provides for the input of relevant interest groups to policy development.
4. AUQA commends the 'Early Career Researcher' Development Program as a means of increasing the University's research capacity.
5. AUQA commends UB for its ability to attract first generation university students and its recognition of the difficulties that these students' families may have in understanding the university system and environment.
6. AUQA commends UB for its initiative in establishing the Ballarat Technology Park, and thereby creating opportunities for students to gain industry experience.

### **Recommendations**

1. That UB develop systematic processes for reporting to Council on achievements against the major directions for the University, and that Council annually consider and review as necessary the University's strategic directions.
2. That the University's SSI be reconsidered and reshaped into a Statement with a clearer, realistic hierarchy of priorities, with timelines and milestones over the period of the Statement, and with identification of how the University's budget will be distributed across the various priorities. UB can then require schools and other sections of the University to operationalise this Statement through their own planning processes.

3. That schools and sections establish SSI that are clearly consistent with the overarching UB SSI, and identify clear priorities and timelines.
4. That, in continuing its refinement of institutional-level key performance indicators, UB place emphasis on ensuring that the indicators are well defined and measurable.
5. That UB develop a strategy for establishing benchmarking relationships with appropriate Australian and international universities.
6. That, in light of the Council policy on policy development, a framework for the different ways in which staff, students and the community may be formally consulted in the policy development process be developed. This would build upon the consultative mechanisms already in place.
7. That UB develop a targeted plan for increasing the number of Level E appointments over the next three years. The relative lack of staff at this level, and the implications this has for professional leadership in some disciplines, have been noted by UB.
8. That UB consider ways in which the Academic Board could play a role in improving the intra-University communication and discussion of broad educational issues (both internal and external).
9. That the Academic Handbook be revised and updated as soon as possible, and that a mechanism be put in place to ensure its contents are reviewed and revised annually.
10. That Academic Board and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Research) ensure that schools comply with the policy requiring the annual preparation and presentation of course reports.
11. That once the proposed changes to the five-yearly course review process have been further considered by Academic Board, and agreement has been reached, the Board ensures that they are implemented.
12. That UB proceed without delay with its planned review of the methods of assessment of teaching quality.
13. That UB increase its efforts to develop further appropriate student pathways between TAFE and HE within an appropriate policy framework.
14. That UB ensure that it has full control of the entry of students to its on-shore off-campus programs.
15. That UB implement an effective mechanism for systematically assessing the teaching being carried out in its courses by staff of local partner organisations.

16. That UB ensure sufficient resources, including library resources, are available to students studying off-campus.
17. That UB, through its Academic Board, develop moderation protocols for use in arrangements where UB courses are being delivered off-campus by external partners and ensure these protocols are appropriately applied.
18. That the comparative progress of students in different cohorts (whether on-campus, off-campus or off-shore) be routinely monitored so as to ensure the equivalence of UB's teaching with that of its partners.
19. That the promotional material for UB degrees clearly state the different course structures in the different locations.
20. That the place of the Research Leadership and Management Plan in relation to the University's SSI be reconsidered in order to inform a more robust approach to research planning and the understanding of staff of research objectives.
21. That consideration be given to increasing the representation of the higher education schools on the Research Committee and Research Higher Degrees Committee, as a means of achieving the objective of enhancing the effectiveness of the development and implementation of research planning and policy.
22. That the review process for research centres be more precisely specified, and that consideration be given to including significant external input.
23. That the significant extra workload of academic staff acting as Research, Higher Degrees and Ethics Co-ordinator be taken into consideration in workload allocation.
24. That UB make more publicly known and enforce the criteria for eligibility to become a postgraduate research student supervisor and that all new Associate and Principal supervisors be required to undertake appropriate training before being admitted to the Register.
25. That UB ensure that "The Code of Good Practice: Research Degree Supervision" be reviewed regularly and actively promoted to postgraduate students and supervisors.
26. That UB ensure that its policy requiring regular reports on the progress of postgraduate students is implemented and that consideration be given to elaborating a mutual expectations document that can serve as the basis of a discussion between student and supervisor(s) at commencement.

## 1. PURPOSE, DIRECTION-SETTING AND LEADERSHIP

### 1.1 Context

UB's mission is "to use education, training, research and consultancies to promote the growth and wellbeing of the communities in our part of Australia". There is no doubt that the University is well regarded in its region, plays a significant education role in the community and is building strong links with business and industry.

The University of Ballarat is a relatively new institution, although it has its origins in the establishment of the School of Mines in Ballarat in 1870. Established by the University of Ballarat Act (1993), it commenced operations in January 1993. The Act was amended in 1997 to provide for the merging of the University with two further technical and further education institutes. This combined institution began operations on 1 January 1998 (for further information, see Appendix A).

The current Vice-Chancellor was appointed in January 2001. At the end of 2000 Council commissioned a review of the management structure, following which Council put in place a structure of two Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic and Research; and Vocational and Further Education) and two Pro Vice-Chancellors (Finance and Development; and Administrative and Academic Support). These positions were filled in 2001.

The panel recognises that this audit was conducted at a time when the changes in structure and senior personnel at UB are still relatively recent and when the effect of these changes is still being experienced by staff. The self-assessment undertaken by UB as part of the audit is the first time such an assessment has been undertaken in the Higher Education Division of the University. The Performance Portfolio concludes the discussion of each topic with the University's self-assessment of its strengths as well as identified opportunities for improvement. The panel endorses many of the University's own conclusions and some of these are specifically referred to or elaborated on in this Report.

#### **Commendation 1**

#### **AUQA commends UB for the frank approach it adopted to its self-assessment.**

The panel acknowledges that time is needed to proceed with addressing these areas. Further, it recognises that in some instances UB is still in the process of developing its processes, systems and directions. It is critical that, where they are

currently absent, systematic processes are put in place to ensure that UB has a sound basis for managing and improving its activities.

The panel believes that UB has made, and will continue to make, important contributions to its local regions. However, UB's capacity to demonstrate that it has a robust and systematic means for determining that it is meeting its strategic objectives is somewhat constrained. It is this capacity that this Report addresses. Without considerable progress in its quality processes, it will be difficult for UB to ensure that its objectives are being met systematically and to ensure that improvement efforts are appropriately targeted.

## 1.2 Governance

The governing body of the University is its Council, chaired by the Chancellor. The Portfolio outlines the structure and responsibility of Council, and notes that it has "established a clear vision and goals for the University and has ensured that planning and plan implementation is consonant with those goals". This is an explicit statement of the strategic and visionary role of Council, and its interest in being assured that the effort of the University is directed towards the achievement of agreed goals. This approach provides an excellent basis for guiding Council in its work, and for distinguishing governance from management responsibilities and activities.

The panel was not convinced, however, that a systematic process exists for Council to inform itself of the progress towards achieving goals (this relates to the quality of planning and reporting within the University; see below), nor for Council to review the strategic directions of the University. Council reviewed and endorsed the University's strategic direction in December 2001, but such annual review does not appear to have been systematically built into the work cycle of the Council.

### **Recommendation 1**

**That UB develop systematic processes for reporting to Council on achievements against the major directions for the University, and that Council annually consider and review as necessary the University's strategic directions.**

The Council has been pro-active in assessing its own performance. During April 2002 the Chancellor authorised a self-assessment of the performance of Council. Its members were invited to complete a questionnaire about their perception of Council's performance across its range of responsibilities. Participation was voluntary and there was a fifty per cent response rate. Some relatively new

Council members were reluctant to complete the survey due to their limited experience of Council practice. Whilst this restricts the conclusions that can be drawn from the survey, it is a positive and useful initiative and one that the University intends to repeat.

In response to the survey, UB intends to review the induction process for new Council members and is considering establishing a mentoring system whereby experienced Council members work individually with new members. The panel supports the intention to strengthen the induction program for new Council members and believes that an effective induction program is particularly important for the student representatives on Council.

### **Commendation 2**

**AUQA commends the Council for initiating and conducting a self-evaluation of its performance in 2002 and for its use of the results to review the induction process for new Council members.**

## **1.3 Strategic Direction and Planning**

Following the most recent institutional mergers the Council devised Strategic Focus Areas in 1998 that were then used as the basis for the development of a University Statement of Strategic Intent (SSI) (for background on the history of UB, see Appendix A).

The most recent version of the SSI, for the period 2002-2004, was approved by Council in March 2002. This identifies six broad focus areas (Learning and Teaching/The Learning Environment; Information Technology: Development and Utilisation; Research, Consultancy and Partnership; An Enterprising Culture and Diversified Funding Base; the Working and Organisational Environment; and International Activities). One area given little prominence in the SSI is UB's high level aspirations for the relationship between the TAFE and HE divisions of the University. Some work has begun in this area, but as will be discussed in greater detail in section 2.6, it is the panel's view that UB has not yet capitalised on the substantial potential advantages available to it as a dual sector University.

For each focus area, a number of objectives are defined. Associated with each objective is a large number of strategies, actions and outcome indicators. There is also an indication of which senior manager's portfolio each strategy falls within. The strategies and actions generally are well linked to the relevant objective, but given their large number the panel considers that it would be difficult to use the SSI to identify which are UB's priorities, or how the University's budget would be distributed across the various priorities. Some reworking is required to reduce

the number of strategies and actions to a manageable number and assign to them meaningful priorities.

The relationship between the SSI and other University-level plans such as the Teaching and Learning Plan 2000-2004 and the Research Leadership and Management Plan 1999-2004 is unclear. Both these plans contain further lists of specific objectives, some of which overlap with SSI objectives and some of which are particular to the individual plans. The panel formed the view that these plans have effectively been rendered obsolete by the SSI. Few staff are aware of their existence. In developing their SSI, schools appear to take account of the general thrust of these plans but do not relate their own operations specifically to the objectives in these plans. This is understandable given their considerable number.

### **Recommendation 2**

**That the University's SSI be reconsidered and reshaped into a Statement with a clearer hierarchy of priorities, with timelines and milestones over the period of the Statement, and with identification of how the University's budget will be distributed across the various priorities. UB can then require schools and other sections of the University to operationalise this Statement through their own planning processes.**

An issue for all small regional universities, including UB, is that they cannot offer the range of courses of larger metropolitan universities. This requires careful planning as well as interaction with the community to identify the appropriate uses of resources. Some suggestions that may assist in this regard are given later in this Report.

#### **1.3.1 Strategic direction and planning at school/ section level**

Schools and sections are required to prepare their own statements of strategic intent, against a *pro forma*, to flow from, complement and support the University SSI. Schools have understandably used the broad six focus areas as their starting point, developing from these their own objectives and strategies.

Although it was not the University's intention that these SSI be operational plans, they are fulfilling this function. Most of the schools' and sections' SSI appeared to be helpful documents, with some of them indicating priorities, costings and funding sources for actions. However, the majority of the SSI have most of the items rated 'high priority'. This is unrealistic and it is evident that further prioritising and focus is required. Without more specific prioritisation and timelines, the SSI loses currency as an active and effective management tool.

Simplification of the SSI at school and section level would enhance uptake by staff.

### **Recommendation 3**

**That schools and sections establish SSI that are clearly consistent with the overarching UB SSI, and identify clear priorities and timelines.**

#### **1.3.2 Performance monitoring against the SSI**

For each focus area in the SSI, a number of high-level and relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) are listed. A separate document, adopted by Council in May 2002, contains the respective 2002 and 2004 targets for each of these indicators. The document states that it is “intended to provide staff and stakeholders with comparative data of past success, the information needed for improvement and a realistic appreciation of how well the organisation is moving towards its goals”. As it stands at present, this document is unable to fulfill this aim.

Some targets have been very clearly identified, whether numeric or as rolling percentage increases or decreases on 2001 figures (although the 2001 figures are not given). A large number of others, however, are yet to be established (even for 2002). Some are poorly defined qualitative indicators such as “effective strategy for the identification and level of IT engagement is in place”. UB’s Portfolio notes that work is continuing to refine the KPIs, and the panel encourages this work to proceed.

### **Recommendation 4**

**That, in continuing its refinement of institutional-level key performance indicators, UB place emphasis on ensuring that the indicators are well defined and measurable.**

In addition to these high-level KPIs, each action within the SSI has a corresponding outcome indicator. These are largely qualitative indicators that are activity based rather than outcome based; for instance, where the intended action is “to review the operation and effectiveness of the SET and SEU surveys” the indicator is “review completed”. Some KPIs lack definition – for example, adopting “the number of research active staff” as an indicator when the University has yet to define what ‘research’ and ‘research active’ mean (see also section 1.3).

Schools and sections are required to report annually on the achievements made against their SSI. These reports present highlights of achievement and do not report systematically against the objectives or targets outlined in their SSI. UB

acknowledges that this reporting process requires tightening and AUQA concurs with this view. Without such reports, it will not be possible for the University to know how well it is progressing towards its objectives nor to identify priorities for future action.

### **1.3.3 External benchmarking**

Aside from monitoring of CEQ and GDS results, UB makes very little use at present of external points of reference in monitoring its performance. An exception to this is the Library's participation in the National Resource Sharing Work Group benchmarking project, which assessed a number of different aspects of library service. UB would benefit from undertaking systematic external benchmarking with appropriate partners as a means of monitoring its performance toward its objectives.

The Council KPI document (see section 1.3.2) notes that the target for weighted research publications per FTE academic staff is to be "equal to or better than a selected cohort of regional Universities", but there is no indication of which institutions would be considered appropriate benchmarks. UB acknowledges that it is in a "formative stage of a considered approach to the use of external benchmarks". Fostering relationships with appropriate national and international universities with a view to participating in mutually beneficial benchmarking projects would assist UB to proceed towards its vision to be a regional university of international standing.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**That UB develop a strategy for establishing benchmarking relationships with appropriate Australian and international universities.**

## **1.4 Quality Improvement Framework**

UB has recently adopted a Quality Improvement Framework which was developed with reference to the Australian Business Excellence Framework, the Malcolm Baldrige Education Criteria for Performance Excellence and the McKinnon Walker Benchmarks. The self-assessment in advance of the AUQA audit was considered to be UB's first step in implementing the Framework.

From discussions with staff, the newness of the Framework was evident to the panel as very few staff were aware of its existence or the use to which the model could be put in their work area.

## 1.5 Executive Information Management

UB currently has a restricted ability to provide timely, accurate information on University performance in a wide range of areas. The panel encountered this in the course of the audit, with inaccurate and conflicting information provided to it in a number of instances.

There are some significant gaps in the information currently available to the University. Examples include no central record of the number of students making academic grievances or appeals, no longitudinal data on graduates, and no access to accurate information on school-level professional development programs and staff participation in them. There also appears to be a lack of single audited data sets for key performance drivers, such as the number of academic staff by school.

UB is well aware of this information gap and its significance and has taken some steps to address the problem. A data warehouse project, commenced in late 2001, aims to establish an accessible, relevant, functional and comprehensive executive management system. This project is still in its early phases, with some scoping of other data warehouses having been undertaken and a staff member appointed and trained to assist with data management. Some initial user consultation has been undertaken, and further consultation is planned.

UB is also currently developing an in-house student management and administration system (the APTUS system), which is intended to replace the number of different systems currently in use with one system that can cater for both TAFE and HE. A recent internal audit report (March 2002) noted that the project is well placed to achieve the scheduled project objectives and deliverables, albeit within an extended timeframe and extended budget. It is intended that internal audit will continue to monitor the project.

To ensure the success of the data warehouse and APTUS system, it will be important to ensure that primary users are fully consulted on their requirements, for instance the School Administrative Officers who play an important role in data management at school level (see below).

## 1.6 Policy Development and Implementation

In May 2000, Council approved a policy on the development of policies. This policy makes provision for members of the University community likely to be affected by any proposed policy to be consulted and have the opportunity to make comment on the policy prior to it being enacted and implemented.

**Commendation 3**

**AUQA commends UB for its development of a policy that provides for the input of relevant interest groups to policy development.**

The panel explored the process for staff and student involvement in policy development. A large number of policy documents are circulated to staff while in draft form via an email distribution list. This method relies on voluntary responses and although staff feel welcome to comment, they often do not do so because other work takes immediate priority. The approach being taken seems to suit the UB community at present, but does not capture staff opinion as systematically as possible, which may ultimately prove detrimental in staff understanding of, and willingness to work within, the parameters of UB policies.

**Recommendation 6**

**That, in light of the Council policy on policy development, a framework for the different ways in which staff, students and the community may be formally consulted in the policy development process be developed. This would build upon the consultative mechanisms already in place.**

The panel noted that several of UB's policy statements (for instance, the Student Charter, see section 6.2) are lengthy and highly detailed documents. As policies come up for review, attempts should be made to simplify them in the interests of increasing the ease with which they may be used by staff and students.

Each school has a School Administrative Officer (with oversight of all school administration) and these staff play an important role as a channel for information between central University administration and staff in the schools. The School Administrative Officers have recognised the mutual benefit in the sharing of information and regularly meet to discuss matters of common interest. UB should consider ways in which it could use this forum in its consultative processes and for information sharing relating to revised policy.

**1.6.1 Administrative control of policy**

Associated with the Council policy mentioned above, a procedure for the authorisation of policies has been written, a template for policies developed, and a policy website created. This approach should allow UB to have better control over policy documentation, although as its self-assessment identified, further work is required to achieve comprehensive application across the University of the approved guidelines in policy and procedure development. This was evident

to the panel, as many of the policy documents supplied to it lacked essential information such as date, source, review date and so on. AUQA commends the work that has begun to implement the guidelines and encourages further work in this area.

### **1.6.2 Implementing policy**

The panel became aware of instances of a lack of awareness at school or section level of University policy. UB has a restricted ability to monitor effectively the activities of the schools and hence their implementation of policy. Specific instances of this, and recommendations for addressing them, are noted in subsequent sections of this Report.

## **1.7 Professional Leadership**

UB has identified that it needs to “attract appropriate Level D/E staff to areas of strategic importance to the University (SSI, Objective 8). The academic staffing profile in the HE division has relatively few appointments at Level D and E, compared to the national average. Approximately 70 per cent of the total academic staff in the HE division hold appointments at Level B or C. This profile is influenced by history and location, and although the University has begun to address this issue, the panel believes that UB needs to increase further the strength of its professional leadership to assist it in achieving its strategic objectives in research, teaching and regional and international community engagement. The development of a plan for the coming years may be of assistance.

### **Recommendation 7**

**That UB develop a targeted plan for increasing the number of Level E appointments over the next three years. The relative lack of staff at this level, and the implications this has for professional leadership in some disciplines, have been noted by UB.**

## **1.8 Leadership Development**

The development of generic leadership skills and attitudes has been a feature of UB’s staff development program in the past. Two Leadership and Management Programs (LAMP) were run from 1996-1998. One program was aimed at existing leaders, while the other was for those who had been identified as potential future leaders. LAMP was highly appreciated by participants. However, no formal programs have been conducted since this time. Some of those staff

now holding positions such as Head of School took up their positions after 1998, and hence have not received any training to specifically prepare them for the role.

The Administrative and Academic Support Portfolio has identified the need to “expand internal strategies for nurturing potential leaders”. It is intended that a needs analysis will be conducted following the roll-out of the Performance Review and Development Program for academic staff that is currently underway. The recently appointed Manager, Performance and Development will have a major responsibility in developing and implementing an appropriate program and the panel supports the need for the reinstatement of a leadership development program.

In constructing this program, it will be important to consider the ongoing development needs of those currently in leadership positions, not just the needs of staff new to such responsibilities.

## 2. LEARNING AND TEACHING

The students met by the panel, particularly undergraduate students, were highly satisfied with the courses and general support services available to them. Academic staff show a genuine concern for their students and students appear to have a high level of interaction with them. There is strong staff concern for the pastoral support of students.

For bachelor degree students, CEQ results show the overall satisfaction of UB students to be at least equivalent to the national average.

### 2.1 Management of Learning and Teaching

The management structures for learning and teaching at UB have recently been revised, with Academic Board establishing two new standing committees. The new Teaching and Learning Committee was formed in January 2002 and has responsibility for developing and recommending UB-wide teaching and learning policy. The existing Curriculum Committee (Higher Education) now has revised terms of reference that give it responsibility for implementing and monitoring policy related to learning and teaching. It is too soon to form a view about the effectiveness of operation of these committees.

Academic Board is the peak academic body of the HE division. The agenda for its meetings, from the sample the panel saw, are made up largely of receiving minutes from its various standing committees while broader policy and educational issues receive relatively little consideration in Board meetings. The Board's various standing committees appear to be the primary locus for discussion and debate of academic matters. The panel was informed by UB that Academic Board does not initiate debate on broad policy and educational issues but sees itself as a reviewer of matters that come to it. Aside from the discussion already noted to occur in Academic Board standing committees, it was not clear to the panel where University-wide discussions of broad educational issues (both internal and external) take place in the University structure. In view of UB's intention (signaled in the Performance Portfolio) of the need to build better communication processes between the different layers and locations within the University, Academic Board may have a role to play.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That UB consider ways in which the Academic Board could play a role in improving the intra-University communication and discussion of broad educational issues (both internal and external).**

Academic policies are collected for staff in the Academic Handbook, and although having a consolidated reference point for academic policies has been found helpful by staff, the most recent version of the Handbook was produced in 1997 and is in urgent need of updating. Producing the Handbook as an electronic document only, available via the intranet, would assist in ensuring staff have access to current information.

### **Recommendation 9**

**That the Academic Handbook be revised and updated as soon as possible, and that a mechanism be put in place to ensure its contents are reviewed and revised annually.**

## **2.2 Objectives and Performance Indicators**

The teaching and learning environment is identified as one of the six focus areas in the SSI, and UB has further enunciated four objectives for this area, as follows:

- “Provide skilled professionals, para-professionals and tradespeople to meet the workforce needs of business, industry and the communities of our region;
- Provide courses that foster generic skill, knowledge and values;
- Provide educational and other support structures for students; and
- Foster excellence in teaching by providing appropriate professional development; and by recognising and rewarding excellence” (SSI, pp 3-7).

The Teaching and Learning Plan 2000-2004 contains an additional six goals and ten objectives, some of which are a further elaboration of the SSI objectives.

Performance indicators identified for the learning and teaching area include level of student satisfaction; student progression and completion rates; regionality of student cohort; and the rate of employment and uptake of further study of graduates. These are appropriate measures and, for most, clear targets for 2002 and 2004 have been identified. For some other indicators, such as “fitness of course” (which has been taken from the McKinnon, Walker and Davis benchmarks), it is less obvious what the indicator refers to at UB and how it intends to measure its achievement.

In its Performance Portfolio, UB comments on its first-year attrition rate. A relatively high proportion of UB’s commencing students are the first generation of their family to participate in tertiary education (accounting for 63 per cent of commencing students in 2000) and this may be a factor contributing to first year

failure. In response to this, a Student Learning Support Officer was appointed in April 2002 and work has begun on the development of a strategy for addressing the situation which is scheduled to be implemented early in 2003. The work of the Student Learning Support Officer should supplement well the mentoring and support programs offered by some schools.

### **2.2.1 Performance monitoring**

As noted in section 1.5 above, UB's limited ability to collect systematic information is hampering its capability to monitor its performance and to use this data to guide its quality improvement efforts. Trend data from internal student surveys of teaching, learning and support services is not kept. Qualitative data from the CEQ is no longer analysed by UB, although it is available for schools to analyse if they should wish to do so. University policy on the student evaluation of teaching and units has not been implemented and will be discussed later (section 2.4).

Without this and similar data UB is not able to monitor effectively its performance in teaching and learning. In this respect UB is at the very early stages of quality assurance and to meet its objectives needs to give high priority to the systematic collection and analysis of this feedback. It is, therefore too early to expect feedback mechanisms for using this information to be in place, but once information is collected UB will need to consider the processes needed to make good use of it.

## **2.3 Course Approval and Review**

The procedures for the approval of new courses are operating effectively. Guidelines have been developed for the presentation of course proposals, which include the rationale and objectives for the course, its structure and assessment, outlines for constituent units and resourcing requirements (including staffing).

A course proposal is considered first by the School Courses Committee and, if approved, forwarded to the University's Curriculum Committee which makes a formal recommendation to Academic Board.

UB has noted in its Portfolio that course rules currently vary across schools and has signaled its intention to develop common rules for as many courses as possible as this would be fairer and easier for students studying in more than one academic area. The panel agrees with this view, although it recognises that common rules will not always be applicable.

Two mechanisms have been established for the review of established courses. The first is a course report that is supposed to be compiled annually and provided to the School's Courses Committee. These reports are intended to provide a summary of the performance of a course in the preceding year (using agreed indicators), highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of the course and serving as the basis of its continuous improvement. The policy requires that once School Courses Committees have considered the reports, they are to be forwarded to Curriculum Committee by no later than April the following year.

This course report is an important means for the school to ensure that its courses remain relevant to UB's strategic aim "to meet the workforce needs of business, industry and the communities of our region". From the small sample of courses selected by the panel, it was evident that the annual course reports have not been compiled consistently for all courses.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**That Academic Board and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Research) ensure that schools comply with the policy requiring the annual preparation and presentation of course reports.**

The second mechanism is the policy requiring the review of each course every five years. This review is seen as the culmination, aggregation and expansion of the previous four years of annual reports. The parameters for the review are that it should compare course outcomes with other similar courses elsewhere; evaluate the design, delivery, articulation agreements and assessment strategies of the course; incorporate consultation with clients and make recommendations for the future of the course. The review is conducted by the relevant School Courses Committee, and a written report submitted to the Curriculum Committee.

The panel was given one example of a very comprehensive course review, which addressed the full scope of the matters required by the Curriculum Committee. However, it is apparent that not all courses have been reviewed every five years as required by UB policy.

UB notes in its Performance Portfolio that a weakness of this current process is that it is internally driven, with no external peer review beyond the level of the school. Consideration is being given by UB to strengthening it by making Curriculum Committee responsible for the appointment of course review panels, which would be required to include some members with expertise in the discipline but who were external to UB. AUQA concurs with this view, particularly given the apparently inconsistent approach currently being taken to the preparation of annual course reports.

The panel noted that the schedule used by Academic Board to track the date at which courses were last reviewed and will next be reviewed was incomplete. At the panel's request, a more up-to-date course review schedule was provided but it was also incomplete. As the process of the course reviews is reconsidered, attention will need to be paid to ensuring that Academic Board, through Curriculum Committee, has a mechanism to identify which course reviews are to be conducted.

#### **Recommendation 11**

**That once the proposed changes to the five-yearly course review process have been further considered by Academic Board, and agreement has been reached, the Board ensures that they are implemented.**

### **2.4 Student Evaluation of Teaching and Units**

UB has two tools for obtaining student feedback on teaching and units, the Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) and Student Evaluation of Units (SEU). The use of these instruments is not mandated and UB's Performance Portfolio identified that they are regularly used only by two of the eight schools and that less than 10-15 per cent of units offered in any given year are evaluated with these tools. Some schools have devised their own evaluation instruments that are used in place of SET and SEU.

UB notes in its Portfolio that the University-wide approach to the assessment of teaching quality needs addressing and AUQA strongly endorses this. UB plans to review the content of the current SET and SEU survey instruments and other methods of assessing teaching and unit quality. The panel encourages this work.

Once agreement has been reached on the new instruments, UB envisages that their use would become mandatory across all schools. The panel supports this approach as a means of assisting UB to assure the quality of all its courses.

Consideration should be given to studying the approaches being taken by other universities, which may serve as helpful models in the construction of a robust evaluation system.

#### **Recommendation 12**

**That UB proceed without delay with its planned review of the methods of assessment of teaching quality.**

Once the new policy and evaluation instruments have been agreed, it will be important for UB to ensure they are effectively implemented across the University.

## **2.5 Centre for Learning and Teaching**

As noted above, one of UB's objectives with respect to teaching and learning is to "foster excellence in teaching by providing appropriate professional development; and by recognising and rewarding excellence" (SSI, Objective 4).

In the panel's view, one of the resources for the University has for supporting this objective is the Centre for Learning and Teaching (CLT). CLT provides services to staff in both TAFE and HE divisions, working either individually with staff or with schools. The Centre is to have a central role in the development and implementation of the Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Awards. The Centre has a relatively low profile within UB at present and UB may benefit from increasing the visibility of the Centre for the achievement of the University's teaching and learning objectives.

Since 1994, 60 higher education staff have successfully completed the Graduate Certificate of Education (Tertiary Teaching) conducted by the CLT in conjunction with the School of Education. Currently, 16 staff are enrolled in the Graduate Certificate of Education (Professional Development). This is commendable and reflects on the commitment with which UB has approached the professional development of academic staff for their teaching role.

## **2.6 Integration between Further and Higher Education**

The University's SSI identifies that one means of achieving the objective of providing courses that foster generic skills, knowledge and values is "to develop and implement appropriate student pathways (VET to HE and HE to VET)".

The most direct example of TAFE and HE integration is the recently formed Arts Academy, which brings together the former HE and TAFE schools. UB noted in its Portfolio that well-developed pathways from TAFE courses into HE degrees exist. In exploring this issue, the panel requested and was shown two examples of formal articulation and credit transfer agreements from two different schools. The information available to students on pathways was of a very general nature. There appear to be few examples of TAFE and HE courses being developed in collaboration in order to maximise articulation. UB currently has no overriding

policy with respect to credit transfer or recognition of prior learning. The panel suggests that UB would benefit from this institutional perspective.

All central administrative areas provide shared services to both the TAFE and HE divisions of the University. In the panel's view, the CLT could play a significant role in facilitating academic linkages between TAFE and HE. It is ideally placed to do so, as it provides services to both divisions and is able to more easily adopt a University-wide perspective. At present, this is not an area of activity signaled in its SSI.

### **Recommendation 13**

**That UB increase its efforts to develop further appropriate student pathways between TAFE and HE within an appropriate policy framework.**

## **2.7 Off-Campus Activities in Conjunction with Local Partners**

One of UB's objectives with respect to its international focus area is to "enrich the University by increasing the enrolments of overseas students, on-shore (both on-campus and elsewhere) and off-shore, and the participation of staff and students in international exchange" (SSI, Objective 18).

UB currently has approximately 90 on-campus international students and has signaled that increasing this number will be a priority in coming years (although there are a number of different published targets for this activity within UB's documents).

With respect to increasing the enrolments of on-shore off-campus international students, UB has contractual agreements with the Melbourne Institute of Technology and the International Institute of Business and Information Technology (Sydney). In 2001, there were 94.6 and 184.5 EFTSU enrolled in the two locations, respectively. Enrolments have grown rapidly since the beginning of these operations in 1999.

In summary, the model being used for both operations is that the partner recruits the students on UB's behalf. The students are enrolled as UB students and are taught UB-developed course material by academic staff employed by the partner organisation. Assessment tasks are determined and moderated by UB staff. Courses are offered at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. A sub-group of the AUQA audit panel made a day-long visit to each partner organisation to interview partner representatives, teaching staff and students.

UB has a commitment that the teaching and assessment standards of all its off-campus activities (both on-shore and off-shore) will be equivalent to its programs delivered on-campus. The panel's investigations were focused on the extent to which the deployment of the various contractual agreements was able to ensure that this was the case.

In March 2002, UB commissioned an internal review of its international student operations. In relation to the two on-shore activities, this review highlighted a number of areas of concern to UB. The review made a number of specific recommendations in relation to each operation. Progress has been made in addressing the recommendations made in the March 2002 report. This has largely been achieved through the co-ordination of the International Office, which is commended for the manner in which it has responded to the matters raised by this review.

The panel was assured that all activities are now fully compliant with the requirements of the Educational Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 and with the provisions of the National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students.

### **2.7.1 Contract management and review**

The activities with the Melbourne and Sydney partners are governed by contracts with four year terms.

These contracts lack sufficient detail of the mutual expectations of the two parties. UB is aware of the need to increase their specificity and is working to address this issue. Few of the contracts currently include a review clause, through which UB can periodically ensure that the terms and conditions of the contract are being met. The panel was informed that this will be included in all future contracts and progressively built into existing contracts as they renewed. The panel encourages UB in this work.

Despite the lack of detail in the formal agreement, in both instances there is effective communication between UB and the partner. UB staff have in recent times increased the frequency with which they visit both sites and this is viewed positively by all parties.

### **2.7.2 Student entry criteria**

Contracts with both partners empower them to make provisional offers to students on UB's behalf and based on UB's pre-set entry criteria. In practice, one of the partners is making offers to students directly, only referring non-standard cases to

UB. UB's Performance Portfolio has noted that the University "will need to ensure that the administration of international student services is sufficiently centralised to have total control over offers, admissions and student progress". The panel agrees. At a minimum, UB should sample the direct offers being made in its name to ensure that its entry criteria are being upheld.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**That UB ensure that it has full control of the entry of students to its on-shore off-campus programs.**

Applications for credit transfer or RPL are, appropriately, considered by UB staff. The partner organisations assist students in ensuring that they have assembled the appropriate documentation, before forwarding applications to UB for consideration and this assists in the timely processing of applications.

### **2.7.3 Staffing**

#### **Appointment**

In both locations, the majority of teaching staff are appointed on casual contracts. The contract notes that UB must be satisfied of the appropriateness of the qualifications of teaching staff prior to their appointment and effective ways of achieving this have been implemented.

#### **Appraisal**

Students told the panel of their satisfaction with the quality of the teaching they receive and reported that they have good access to teaching staff outside class hours (via email and telephone).

For the School of Information Technology and Mathematical Sciences courses at both sites, student satisfaction with teaching is formally evaluated with a survey developed and used by that School at UB. The survey asks students to evaluate both unit content and the effectiveness of the teacher. It is administered by both partners at the conclusion of each unit. However, there is no systematic approach to the analysis of the results and no expectations of which UB staff will consider the evaluation results.

Since UB has signaled that the use of a revised SET and SEU will become mandatory (section 2.4), some discussion will be required with the partners to ensure that an effective system is put in place for the routine administration of the SEU. With respect to the evaluation of teaching, some formal re-negotiation of the contracts with the partners may be required. The panel recognises that the teaching staff of the partners are not UB employees, but nonetheless their effectiveness as teachers is a matter of prime concern to UB, and the University

must ensure that the terms of its contracts with partners enables it to monitor teacher performance.

**Recommendation 15**

**That UB implement an effective mechanism for systematically assessing the teaching being carried out in its courses by staff of local partner organisations.**

**2.7.4 Resources and support for students**

In both locations the facilities and resources available to students appear adequate and students reported satisfaction with them.

Students make little use of UB library on-line and instead prefer to use the local resources of State or city libraries. Some students with friends enrolled in other local universities sometimes request them to borrow materials on their behalf. The Sydney partner is contractually obliged to arrange for students to have borrowing rights from “an appropriate tertiary library within Sydney” but no standing arrangement for borrowing rights has ever been in place. Attempts have been made to assist individual students to secure borrowing rights in the past, but the system used was cumbersome and has lapsed as no students have requested access.

**Recommendation 16**

**That UB ensure sufficient resources, including library resources, are available to students studying off-campus.**

As noted in the 2002 internal review mentioned above, there has been a tendency for the offices of each partner to be referred to as a campus of the University. The review recommended that this practice be discontinued and UB Council has recently resolved that only sites under direct UB control and at which UB staff are employed will be entitled to be referred to as campuses of the University. The panel noted that, at the time of its visit, signage at the Melbourne Institute of Technology site was yet to be altered to reflect this new policy.

**2.7.5 Moderation**

One of the two schools associated with the partners has devised a moderation policy that is applied to all courses. It requires a sample of five student assignments, or a sample of 10 per cent of assignments, whichever is the greater. The policy requires that the sample must include the highest and lowest assigned marks, with the remainder around the 50 per cent mark. The panel questions

whether this sample size is sufficient to ensure appropriate moderation and equivalency of standards with those course taught on-campus.

The policy has been devised in the absence of any generic UB policy or guideline on appropriate moderation procedures. Such a statement would be of assistance to schools in establishing relationships with external partners and should be included as a schedule to any contractual agreements.

#### **Recommendation 17**

**That UB, through its Academic Board, develop moderation protocols for use in arrangements where UB courses are being delivered off-campus by external partners and ensure these protocols are appropriately applied.**

### **2.7.6 Monitoring student progress**

One of the schools is monitoring the comparative progress of students in the same courses in the Mt Helen, Melbourne and Sydney cohorts, which allows staff to be confident that students are performing to a level generally equivalent. This is not happening across all schools that have arrangements for course delivery off-campus and off-shore.

#### **Recommendation 18**

**That the comparative progress of students in different cohorts (whether on-campus, off-campus or off-shore) be routinely monitored so as to ensure the equivalence of UB's teaching with that of its partners.**

## **2.8 Teaching Arrangements with International Agents**

UB has contractual agreements for teaching arrangements with six off-shore partner organisations at both undergraduate and postgraduate level. In some locations, the model employed is similar to that outlined above, using locally employed teaching staff and moderation. None of these locations was visited by the panel but it is suggested that UB considers the recommendations in section 2.7 in this context also.

A sub-group of the panel visited the agents in two off-shore locations, Shenzhen and Hong Kong, in both of which teaching is undertaken by UB academic staff in block mode. Course content and design are the responsibility of UB, with the agent providing facilities and administrative support. Teaching is sometimes supplemented by local tutors. Assessment tasks are set and marked by UB staff.

This model is sound and gives UB a high level of control over the standard of teaching and assessment. The students interviewed valued being taught by the same staff that are teaching at UB's Mt Helen campus.

### **2.8.1 Contract management**

As noted above (section 2.7.1), there is a need for further detail to be written into the contracts UB has with its educational partners.

The contract with one off-shore agent does include provision for an annual review of the extent to which the terms of the contract are being met. The first such review is to be conducted in November 2002, and the International Office and senior staff in the relevant school are currently developing a review process.

There is good, frequent communication between the two agents and UB. At a management level, both agents have good links with relevant Heads of School and with the Director of the International Office. Administrative staff link with relevant staff within the schools. Problems or potential problems are readily resolved. With respect to student admissions, the agents are responsible for recruiting and interviewing potential students and are empowered to make provisional offers, but these offers must then be referred to UB for approval.

In both instances all the necessary local approvals and registrations are obtained and maintained by the agents.

### **2.8.2 Advertising and promotion**

UB has good control over the advertising done on its behalf. Advertising materials carrying the UB name or logo must first be approved by the UB International Office. In Shenzhen, advertising is not written in English, and on these occasions, a Mandarin-speaking member of staff of UB is asked to approve the advertisements.

One of the programs offered by both agents is the MBA. There is a discrepancy between the course structure as presented in UB's own International Handbook and that being offered in one of the off-shore locations and one of the on-shore off-campus locations. This is misleading to students and should be rectified.

#### **Recommendation 19**

**That the promotional material for UB degrees clearly state the different course structures in the different locations.**

### **2.8.3 Tutoring**

As noted above, the block mode teaching is sometimes supplemented by local tutoring. For the Shenzhen MBA the tutors are integral to the course, providing 15 hours of tuition using the UB prepared unit outlines prior to the arrival of the lecturer for the block teaching. The tutors are experienced in the subject matter and offer students academic assistance, personal mentoring and English language support where necessary (all tutors are bilingual). This ensures that the students are well-prepared prior to the arrival of the UB staff member and can fully capitalise on their time with them. The Hong Kong MBA, in contrast, does not use any local tutors. The panel was informed that the reason for this difference is that there is less need for the Hong Kong students to have English language assistance and because of smaller class sizes.

The academic exchange between students and tutors is a particular strength of the Shenzhen program and consideration should be given to extending this to Hong Kong and any other similar programs.

### **2.8.4 Facilities and resources**

The facilities provided in both locations are suitable to support the teaching being provided. Technical equipment in classrooms is at least equivalent to that which would be found in typical Australian classrooms.

Each agent maintains a small library which is useful to students but in both cases is insufficient in itself to provide all resources required. In both locations, students access other local libraries and some students access the UB library on-line and find appropriate resources available.

Some students are required to undertake a considerable amount of group work as part of their course, and the panel suggests that appropriate working space should be provided.

### **2.8.5 Orientation for staff teaching off-shore**

The School of Business has developed a handbook for staff lecturing off-shore. This is being added to as experience grows and is found to be a very helpful preparation. Also, staff can and do talk to more experienced colleagues within the school prior to their departure.

One of the strategies in the international focus section of the SSI is “to increase staff and student awareness of international views and perspectives”. The opportunity for staff to become involved in off-shore teaching is one way of

increasing this awareness. UB does not offer an orientation program for staff new to off-shore teaching. Such a program, perhaps drawing on the considerable experience of staff in the Schools of Business and Nursing, would be one way of maximising the benefits of this activity for both staff and students. Consideration should be given to making such a program mandatory for staff new to off-shore teaching.

## **2.9 International Focus**

The prime objective of the International Focus area in the University's SSI is that "the University will raise the international profile of its students, its learning and teaching and its research and consultancy".

UB's emphasis on increasing the number of off-campus and off-shore students does not contribute to raising the international nature of the on-campus learning environment. UB's on-campus international enrolments have declined over recent years, and the University recognises that concerted effort will be required to raise this number to a level it considers acceptable.

There is an intention to introduce an international perspective in all courses and Heads of School are responsible for this. Some schools have successfully introduced units with an international focus, but this is currently evident only in some of UB's course offerings. UB's self-review has identified that the course review procedure could, more rigorously than at present, attend to the necessity to include international elements in the curriculum.

## **2.10 Indigenous Education**

UB has a commitment to identifying and meeting the needs of indigenous students and communities. Council adopted a Statement of Reconciliation in May 1999, which has become University policy. The Statement notes that "the University will make its best efforts to ensure that the Indigenous people, especially those who are members of the University and its community are assisted to overcome such injustices and oppression as they may suffer on the basis of their race or status as Indigenous people, and to achieve their reasonable aspirations for themselves and their communities, both as Australia's Indigenous inhabitants and as citizens of Australia". UB has formed the Aboriginal Education Management Committee to seek views and comments on a range of issues pertinent to indigenous people. The place of this Committee in the structure of the University was under review at the time of the panel's visit.

UB has a relatively small number of indigenous students. The Aboriginal Education Centre offers support to these students. The Centre is currently developing a range of courses in Aboriginal studies.

The Aboriginal Education Centre co-ordinates The Indigenous Youth Development Program, a joint initiative of UB and the Ballarat and District Aboriginal Co-operative which has been operating annually since 1996. This Program introduces approximately 50 Year 10-12 indigenous students throughout Victoria to university life. UB currently has three students enrolled who were past participants of the Program. The panel considers that a formal review of the program may be timely, to better understand the factors that lead some students to enroll or not to enroll in further study.

### 3. RESEARCH

#### 3.1 Objectives

Research, consultancy and partnership is one the six focus areas identified in the SSI, with the overriding objective being that “the University will increase significantly the level of applied and basic research and the application of knowledge through consultancy and partnership”.

Specific objectives are to:

- “Enhance the University’s research capability;
- Increase grants, tenders and consultancies;
- Increase the funding of research, particularly through attracting additional funds from the private sector, government and other sources;
- Contribute through consultancies and partnership to the educational, social, economic and cultural leadership and well being of our communities” (SSI pp 9-13).

A number of performance indicators have been identified that relate to only some of these objectives, including:

- quantum of research funds;
- number and value of competitive grants;
- weighted research publications per FTE academic staff;
- research higher degree completions per FTE academic staff;
- number and proportion of research active academic staff.

Some indicators are well defined and UB-wide targets have been set. For others, UB is yet to define them. For instance, the University’s Research Committee is yet to adopt a formal definition of ‘research’ or ‘research active’ with the absence of an accepted definition of the latter creating some problems in evaluating research performance at school level.

Further objectives are included in the Research Leadership and Management Plan 1999-2004. As in the teaching and learning area, this Plan has a large number of objectives and strategies, but with no indication of timelines or accountabilities or of how they relate to SSI objectives. Performance indicators are listed but are often poorly defined. The Plan notes that targets, timelines and milestones are to be developed as part of the implementation strategy for the plan. On investigation, the panel was informed that these targets are to be those of the UB SSI. These are not sufficiently detailed to map the many objectives of the Plan. The usefulness of the Plan is not evident, particularly since many academic staff are unaware of its existence. As noted in section 1.3, the panel formed the view that the plan has effectively been replaced by the SSI.

**Recommendation 20**

**That the place of the Research Leadership and Management Plan in relation to the University's SSI be reconsidered in order to inform a more robust approach to research planning and the understanding of staff of research objectives.**

In terms of external reference points, the Research Leadership and Management Plan notes that each area of research and research training will be expected to benchmark performance against international standards: “while it is not a specific strategy, it is implicit throughout the plan that research performance in this University will be judged both on its own merits and in comparison with research performance nationally and internationally” (Research Leadership and Management Plan, p14). As yet, there is little formal benchmarking in research against national or international standards being undertaken. As noted above (section 1.3.3), UB is in the early stages of establishing external benchmarking relationships and, with respect to its research, as in other areas, it would benefit from this approach.

**3.2 Research Management**

The Research Committee and the Research and Higher Degrees Committee (RHDC) are standing committees of Academic Board and are supported by the Research and Graduate Studies Office.

The Research Committee advises Academic Board on policy and procedures related to research and research training, and is responsible for monitoring the implementation of such policies across UB.

The RHDC advises Academic Board on a number of matters including the admission and enrolment of applicants to research higher degrees, the appointment of supervisors, student progress and the awarding of degrees.

The constitutions of the Research Committee and RHDC do not allow for automatic representation from all HE schools and this is potentially hampering the ability of these bodies to maintain an appropriate oversight of the activities across the schools. Involvement of the Research, Higher Degrees and Ethics Coordinators in each school, who are responsible for functions of considerable significance to the research and research training activities occurring at school level (see section 3.2.3), might be appropriate means of achieving greater school representation. It might also assist UB in achieving its objective of “enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the development and implementation of

research planning and policy” (SSI, Objective 7). In making this comment, the panel does note that minutes of the RHDC are provided to all higher education Heads of Schools and to Research Committee members; and that RHDC and Research Committee minutes are provided to Academic Board.

### **Recommendation 21**

**That consideration be given to increasing the representation of the higher education schools on the Research Committee and Research Higher Degrees Committee, as a means of achieving the objective of enhancing the effectiveness of the development and implementation of research planning and policy.**

#### **3.2.1 The Institute for Regional and Rural Research**

The Institute for Regional and Rural Research (IRRR) was established in 2001. It is intended to serve as a focus of the University’s regional and rural research and is an umbrella structure under which four Research Centres have been established (see below).

The IRRR is headed by a Director and governed by an Advisory Board. Although the Board’s membership states it should “represent the interests of various industry sectors and communities in the development of research plans” the terms of reference do not compel external membership. In practice, external persons are currently on the Board, and, given the aims of the Board, the terms of reference should be amended to ensure this is always the case.

It is too early to assess the effectiveness of IRRR, but it may indeed play an important part in providing a focus for UB’s research efforts, which is necessary in a small university. It will be important for the University to measure whether IRRR is effective in achieving its stated objectives related to research enhancement and focus.

#### **3.2.2 Research Centres**

Academic Board approved the policy on University Research Centres in 1999 and created three formally recognised structures within which research might take place: the ‘research cluster’; ‘research group’ and ‘research centre’. For each, the policy identifies the general level of activity and lists some broad performance indicators that would be expected. The policy does not indicate the process to be followed for staff’s activities to be recognised as a cluster or group, nor what benefits such recognition may bring.

For research centres, however, a formal recognition process is outlined and the selection criteria against which applications will be judged are provided. The panel sampled the establishment submissions for two centres and found them to be comprehensive documents.

Since June 2001, four research centres have been formally recognised. Most centres are located within an HE school, although one spans three schools. It is too early to draw any conclusions about the effectiveness of the centres, but staff who are involved in them are deriving some benefit from their association with a centre. The panel notes that the relationship between the centres and schools will need to be carefully managed. Where centres span more than one school, there is potential for difficulties to arise if the expectations regarding 'ownership' of the outcomes of the research are not clearly established at the outset.

The policy makes provision for the review of research centres. The decision to continue or close a centre is to be made by Council, acting on the advice of the Vice-Chancellor who will take account of the views of Academic Board. Although not specified in the policy, reviews are intended to be conducted annually, with the first to take place in 2002.

UB would benefit from more precisely identifying the process to be followed in the formal review of research centres. Considerable advantage could be gained from involving external members on the review panel. Such reviews conducted on a three or five yearly cycle (and with appropriate follow-up), in addition to IRRR requiring annual written reports from the centres, should prove an effective means of monitoring performance.

#### **Recommendation 22**

**That the review process for research centres be more precisely specified, and that consideration be given to including significant external input.**

### **3.2.3 Research management at school level**

Each HE school has a research committee chaired by the School Research, Higher Degrees and Ethics Co-ordinator (an academic staff member). The Research, Higher Degrees and Ethics Co-ordinators maintain oversight of all research matters in the school and provide advice on these matters to the Head of School. This is a significant additional responsibility. In some schools, the role has been split, with one staff member solely responsible for higher degree students. Not all Co-ordinators receive workload relief in recognition of these additional duties.

**Recommendation 23**

**That the significant extra workload of academic staff acting as Research, Higher Degrees and Ethics Co-ordinator be taken into consideration in workload allocation.**

UB advises all HE schools to have a research committee and they all do so. Until recently, there has been no requirement for these committees to report to the University Research Committee. Now that this reporting line has been established, it should allow the central committee to more effectively monitor the implementation of policy with respect to research. Such centralisation is important to monitor the contributions of schools, centres and IRRR and for ensuring that structural arrangements for research management are appropriate as research performance continues to increase.

**3.3 Achieving Objectives**

The four research objectives of the SSI are noted in section 3.1. There is evidence of a consistent increase in many aspects of research performance at UB over the past five years. This is particularly noteworthy considering the background of the University. Achievements towards specific objectives are addressed below.

With respect to enhancing the University's research capability, there is good evidence of progress towards this objective. The percentage of academic staff whose highest academic qualification is a doctorate has increased from 21 per cent in 1995 to 35 per cent in 2001. The variation between the schools is marked, with some schools without any staff holding doctoral qualifications, while in other schools the figure is 60 per cent. Research publications per FTE academic staff show increases on 1996 figures in some schools.

Two notable UB initiatives have been introduced to assist with the achievement of this objective. The first is an 'Early Career Researcher' Development Program which ran for the first time in semester 1, 2002. Twelve staff were involved in the pilot program. The program involves a series of weekly two-hour workshops led by experienced UB researchers covering a wide range of relevant topics. The program has been well received by participants, with a particular strength being the opportunity to form networks with colleagues from other schools. The panel encourages the program's continuance and further development.

**Commendation 4**

**AUQA commends the 'Early Career Researcher' Development Program as a means of increasing the University's research capacity.**

The second initiative is a centrally-funded Visiting Research Fellow Scheme, which provides schools with grants-in-aid to bring renowned researchers to the University. In 2000 and 2001, a total of 10 Fellows were supported with an average grant of approximately \$5,500.

In terms of the objectives of increasing the number of grants, tenders and consultancies and of increasing the funding of research (SSI Objective 8 and 9), the number of research grants per FTE academic staff has shown a steady increase since 1995. The dollar value of consultancies has been increasing since 1999, with just over \$1.6m earned in external consultancies in 2001. Research income has grown annually. The total value of internal research grants for 2002 was \$73,500, an increase on the 2000 figure of \$34,180. The 2002 figure does not include \$240,000 which has been awarded annually since mid 2001 to the research centres. For the past five years, the number of internal grants awarded has increased, from eight grants in 1998 to 21 in 2001.

The final objective “to contribute through consultancies and partnership to the educational, social, economic and cultural leadership and well being of our communities” does not have performance indicators associated with it, although increased consultancy earnings noted above indicates activity in this area.

The panel notes these positive trends in research outcomes and encourages UB in its efforts. The University should attempt to set both institutional and school/section targets at a realistic level and define appropriate indicators that can demonstrate the extent of progress towards achievement of objectives. As noted above, there would be considerable value to UB in establishing appropriate external benchmarks against similar regional universities.

### **3.4 Research Training**

The RHDC has oversight of research degree students. The RHDC advises the Chair of Academic Board, who has delegated responsibility for higher degree candidature matters such as enrolment and confirmation of candidature, approval of topics and supervisory arrangements, changes of candidature from masters to doctoral programs, monitoring student progress, granting leave from study, and the approval of examiners and course completions. The Dean, Graduate Studies advises and recommends to the Board on all matters related to research higher degree candidature.

Currently, the Chair of Academic Board also holds the position of Dean, Graduate Studies. This arrangement appears to work well at present and is a manageable task, although this may not always be the case should the number of graduate

students increase substantially. UB should ensure that there is no conflict between the two positions being held by the one person. The panel noted that the terms of reference of the RHDC have no *ex officio* place for the Dean, Graduate Studies.

As noted above, each School has a Research, Higher Degrees and Ethics Co-ordinator who maintains an oversight of research training at school level.

### 3.4.1 Supervision

Research students are required to have one Principal Supervisor and one or more Associate Supervisors.

A Register of Supervisors has been in operation since 1997 and is maintained by the Research Office. The policy requires those wishing to act as either Principal or Associate Supervisor to apply for admission to the Register, with applications to be endorsed by the School Research, Higher Degrees and Ethics Co-ordinator and the Head of School. There are no published criteria for admission to the Register. The application form asks for details of the applicant's academic qualifications, research interests and supervisory experience. Approval of applications is at the discretion of the Dean of Graduate Studies. The panel was informed that a PhD is the required qualification for the supervision of doctoral candidates. While the concept of the Register is commendable, its utility would be improved if the criteria for admission to it were more widely known. Ongoing monitoring and management of the Register is required to ensure that the University has control over the quality and qualifications of supervisors.

Supervisory duties appear to be concentrated on relatively few staff in some schools, leading to high supervisory loads for some staff members (see section 5.2) and the load carried by some relatively junior staff is also high and requires careful monitoring at school level.

There is no requirement for supervisors to undertake formal training. This would be one way of assisting UB to ensure supervisors are aware of UB policy with respect to research degree students and of their role and responsibilities.

#### **Recommendation 24**

**That UB make more publicly known the criteria for eligibility to become a postgraduate research student supervisor and that all new Associate and Principal supervisors be required to undertake appropriate training before being admitted to the Register.**

“The Code of Good Practice: Research Degree Supervision” includes some helpful information on the relative roles of the University, school, supervisor and student. It is attached to the application form for admission to the Register. One omission from the Code is guidelines for the roles or responsibilities of Associate Supervisors. Since Associate Supervisors will sometimes be drawn from outside UB, some formal definition of the duties expected of Associates may prove helpful (including their role in regular formal monitoring of student progress; see section 3.4.2). The most recent version of the Code was produced in 1997, and it should be updated regularly to ensure that it reflects accurately current University policy. Few postgraduate students met by the panel were aware of the existence of the Code and it should be promulgated to students. The Code could usefully serve as the basis for a clear understanding between individual students and supervisors of their mutual expectations.

### **Recommendation 25**

**That UB ensure that “The Code of Good Practice: Research Degree Supervision” be reviewed regularly and actively promoted to postgraduate students and supervisors.**

A Student Evaluation of Postgraduate Supervision (SEPS) survey was trialed for the first time in semester 2, 2001. It is a comprehensive survey asking for feedback from students on their level of satisfaction with all aspects of the postgraduate experience. There is considerable confusion amongst supervisors about the place of SEPS and what information, if any, supervisors will receive on the results. Some staff are under the impression that SEPS is intended to be a replacement to the regular monitoring reports (see below), although this is not UB’s intention. UB should clarify the place of the SEPS with respect to the regular student progress reports.

#### **3.4.2 Monitoring postgraduate research student progress**

The Code of Practice suggests that supervisors should “establish at the beginning of candidature the basis on which contact [with the student] will be made to ensure that a reasonable timetable is set to permit the degree to be completed in the appropriate time”. The panel supports this, while noting that this is but one of many details of the candidacy that it is best for students and supervisors to discuss at the outset. Consideration should be given to formalising these into a checklist that could be used by supervisors and students as a basis for discussion. Such ‘mutual expectations’ documents are in use in many other universities and UB may find that these serve as helpful models.

University policy requires that research students and principal supervisors must complete a written progress report annually, which is signed off by the School

Research, Higher Degree and Ethics Co-ordinator and Head of School and forwarded to the Research Office.

This is an important formal mechanism for UB to maintain some oversight of the progress of its research students, but it is not currently being consistently applied across all Schools. This is partly because of the confusion created by the introduction of SEPS (see above).

### **Recommendation 26**

**That UB ensure that its policy requiring regular reports on the progress of postgraduate students is implemented and that consideration be given to elaborating a mutual expectations document that can serve as the basis of a discussion between student and supervisor(s) at commencement.**

There is no formal role for Associate Supervisor(s) in the annual reporting process, although a Principal Supervisors may consult with the Associate Supervisor(s) before completing the report if he/she wishes. The Code of Practice suggests that Associate Supervisor(s) should “maintain a level of communication with the student and the Principal Supervisor to allow adequate supervision wherever necessary” (Code of Practice, 1.4). Requiring comment from the Associate Supervisor(s) on the annual written progress report would be one means of formalising this expectation and would assist in ensuring the Associate Supervisor is able to provide more effective continuity of supervision.

The panel was informed that, in addition to the written report an annual interview is held between research students and the school Research, Higher Degrees and Ethics Co-ordinator and Head of School, and that a written report of this interview is submitted to the Research Office. As the number of postgraduate students increases, it may be impractical for UB to sustain both monitoring processes and some rationalisation may be required.

In November 2000 UB commissioned an external review of the factors that were impeding the progress of a small number of postgraduate students whom the University had identified as being at risk. This proactive approach to identifying potential problem areas is commended. The review identified a number of factors, some of which were student-specific and some of which related to more general University issues, such as the need for supervision workshops. The initiative should be an ongoing feature and be more clearly linked to the consistent use of the present evaluation and reporting instruments.

UB has evidence of improving outcomes in research training. For instance, PhD completions have increased from a zero base in 1995 to 11 in 2001.

### **3.4.3 Resources and support of postgraduate students**

Postgraduate students are generally satisfied with the level of resources available to them at school level and centrally through, for example, the Graduate Centre, although the panel noted that there is no UB-wide postgraduate handbook. Students met by the panel are also appreciative of the support offered by staff.

The Library's capacity to support postgraduate research is constrained. This is addressed in section 7 of this Report.

#### 4. SERVICING THE COMMUNITY

UB's vision is "to be a regional University of international standing, highly regarded in the communities we serve", and its commitment to the region has taken a number of different forms of expression. UB has developed some strong relations with the community.

Approximately 70 per cent of UB's domestic commencing students are drawn from within the University's catchment area of the Central Highlands and Wimmera regions. Approximately 60 per cent of these students are the first in their families to attend university. In response to this, student services has produced a guide for parents, and a number of information leaflets for first year students intended to ease their transition to university life.

##### **Commendation 5**

**AUQA commends UB for its ability to attract first generation university students and its recognition of the difficulties that these students' families may have in understanding the university system and environment.**

UB is not highly active in keeping its alumni informed and interested in its activities, an exception to this being the production biannually of 'The Flag' magazine. The panel notes that UB is currently reviewing its relations with this group, and supports this initiative, since gaining support of alumni for new developments can be very beneficial.

The panel formed the impression that UB is generally well-regarded in the local community and is seen as being an institution that is open and responsive to community interaction. UB is a major employer in the area and is recognised by community members as an asset in developing the educational focus of Ballarat as a centre for education and learning. The City of Ballarat has proclaimed itself to be a "learning city" and has a program of co-operative promotion and development with the major education and learning institutions in the vicinity. The involvement of the University in this initiative is positive and useful.

UB's promotional efforts target the University's role as a regional institution. It appears that the University has effective links with the local media and receives good exposure, although UB does not systematically monitor this coverage. In addition to the examples of community involvement given in the Performance Portfolio, the panel sought and was given several more good examples of major co-operative engagement with the community.

One is the major capital project currently underway is the development of the Camp Street Arts Precinct in central Ballarat. The project is jointly funded by the Commonwealth and State governments, the City of Ballarat and UB. This venture is seen by UB and the City of Ballarat as a means of demonstrating collaboration between “town and gown” and providing UB with a stronger presence in the city. It would be useful if UB were to develop a basis for evaluating the project’s success when the arrangements have been operating for a reasonable period (perhaps two years).

Another is the Ballarat Technology Park, situated on the Mt Helen campus, a project which has been developed in conjunction with the City of Ballarat. It includes IBM Global Services and the State Revenue Office as major clients. The Greenhill Enterprise Centre located within the Park is an incubator for small information technology companies. It is highly regarded by the major industry partner in the Park and has provided opportunities for a range of start-up ventures including some that have involved UB’s postgraduate students.

#### **Commendation 6**

**AUQA commends UB for its initiative in establishing the Ballarat Technology Park, and thereby creating opportunities for students to gain industry experience.**

The HE schools have established links with various communities and the panel was provided with examples of these. As a result of its self-assessment, UB has identified that it could benefit from developing a method of registering the level of engagement of schools and individual staff with the region and its communities. The panel supports this view.

UB’s strong commitment to its communities brings with it a tension between community need and the University’s capacity to respond to these needs. For instance, the offering of the Bachelor of Nursing program at both the Horsham and Mt Helen campuses is a positive response to the Horsham community. On the other hand, offering this course at both campuses is straining the resources of the School of Nursing. The panel suggests that UB develop a framework for dealing with these tensions, both in relation to resources and to promotion of its role and responsibilities to the regional communities it serves.

## 5. STAFF

UB's primary objective in this area is to "be a stimulating, supportive and safe environment for staff with a commitment to service and an emphasis on continuous improvement" (SSI, Focus Area 5).

A large number of staffing policies have recently been subject to review, including recruitment (reviewed 2001); induction (revised 2001); probation (revised policy approved 2001); performance review and development (extensively reviewed 2001); and academic promotion (reviewed 1999).

### 5.1 Staff Profile

In 1997, UB undertook a significant re-positioning resulting in a reduction of staff numbers in the order of 10 per cent.

Academic staff figures for 2002 show that UB employs approximately 228 full-time equivalent (FTE) academic staff. Of this number, approximately 63 FTE are employed casually. The number of casual FTE staff as a proportion of total FTE academic staff has been increasing over recent years, from around 5 per cent of total FTE in 1996 to an estimated 27 per cent in 2002. UB employs approximately 378 FTE general staff.

As noted in section 1.7, the majority of academic staff are in Level B or C positions and UB has noted the relative lack of senior appointments, especially at Level E. It recognises the implications this has for discipline leadership within the schools and will be attempting to increase the number of appointments at this level, a move strongly endorsed by the panel.

### 5.2 Staff Workloads

There is agreement amongst staff and management that staff workloads, particularly for academic staff, are generally high. From its own discussions with staff, the panel formed the view that the relatively high workloads are having an adverse effect on staff morale. The findings of a recent survey of people management practices initiated by the Victorian Office of Public Employment ("People Matter") reported that UB staff who responded rated individual and workplace morale lower than staff of other public sector organisations. That study did not allow for any conclusions to be drawn about the causes of such a finding.

From samples taken by the panel, the amount of teaching conducted by staff is relatively high. As noted above, the supervisory duties appear to be concentrated on relatively few staff in some schools, leading to high supervisory loads for some staff members.

The current Enterprise Bargaining Agreement included an undertaking to establish a joint UB/NTEU working party to examine further academic workload principles and procedures. Work has begun on this, with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic and Research) and a senior member of staff services preparing a discussion paper on academic workloads. This paper is to be considered by a consultative committee comprising representatives of Heads of School, academic staff and NTEU, and it will then be released to all academic staff for comment.

In developing the discussion paper, a small working party of UB and NTEU representatives has gathered information from some schools about the approaches currently being taken to workload allocation and a study has been made of the workload models in other universities.

One of the reasons for the relatively high workloads of staff may be the relatively large number of units being offered. Indicative figures provided to the panel suggest that in 2002, UB offered 126 courses and 846 units, a significant proportion of which had less than 10 enrolments. One of the quandaries of a small regional university is in balancing as wide a range of courses as possible for its community versus the resources made available to it, and underlying that, the concern for the quality of the offerings.

Another factor contributing to increases in academic staff workload is likely to be the increasing proportion of casual academic appointments, since these staff are unable to assist with the bulk of the ongoing administrative and committee work required.

The panel notes that in some schools new staff receive teaching abatement as part of their orientation, while this is not happening in other schools.

The resolution of the workload issue is a difficult matter, and the panel encourages UB in its efforts, particularly as it strives to establish new research structures and achieve its objectives of growing research activity and postgraduate student enrolments.

### **5.3 Induction**

The staff induction process has undergone a number of reviews recently. At the end of 2001, the decision was taken to introduce a compulsory induction program for all new staff. For the first six months of 2002, 14 academic and 20 general staff have attended. The program for academic staff comprises a series of five sessions. The panel met staff who had participated and it is found to be helpful.

### **5.4 Performance Review and Development**

UB's approach to staff appraisal and development was extensively reviewed in 2001 and a new Performance Review and Development Program has been established. It will be progressively implemented, initially for academic staff in 2002 and then general staff in 2003. The new policy applies to all staff employed for more than one year on a full-time or part-time contract (either ongoing or fixed term). As recognised by UB, the effective implementation of this policy is centrally important to the University's ability to maximise the effectiveness of staff.

To date, the management of professional development has been devolved to schools and units and there has been little or no systematic collection and aggregation of data centrally (beyond information on the number of academic staff attending conferences). UB recognises that this is hindering its ability to effectively achieve a number of high level objectives and the Administrative and Academic Support Portfolio has committed itself to increasing the level of central co-ordination of staff development programs. A Manager, Performance and Development has recently been appointed who is to take major responsibility for this work.

The current need for the re-establishment of a leadership development program is noted in section 1.8.

### **5.5 Staff Satisfaction**

UB has not yet established a systematic approach to gathering and evaluating staff satisfaction data and has identified this in its Portfolio as an opportunity for improvement. The panel supports this intention.

A sample of approximately 200 UB staff were part of a larger sample of over 10,000 public sector workers involved in a recent survey of people management practices conducted by the Victorian Office of Public Employment. The results of

this survey were reported to UB in March 2002, and while it was conducted by an external organisation and was not specifically tailored to the UB environment, the results may nevertheless be of considerable value to the University as it looks to develop ways of using staff satisfaction data to inform its continuous improvement activities.

## **6. STUDENTS**

Many of the issues related to students and student support are addressed elsewhere in this Report. This section addresses areas not already referred to.

### **6.1 Student Affairs Committee**

In 2001, the Vice-Chancellor established a new Student Affairs Committee involving both HE and TAFE students. It supersedes the former Student Affairs Committee established in 1995 that involved only HE students and was constituted as a standing committee of Academic Board.

The new committee is advisory to the Vice-Chancellor and meetings are held at least twice per semester. Students representing the Student Association, Postgraduate Student Association and international students are involved and are required to report back to their various constituencies. In addition, the minutes of meetings are available on the University website, although this requires much more regular updating, as only the draft terms of reference and minutes from two 2001 meetings were available from the site at the time of the Audit Visit.

Aside from the formal Student Affairs Committee, the Student Association has a good working relationship with UB senior management.

### **6.2 Student Charter**

A Student Charter was developed in 2001, in the first instance for on-campus undergraduate students. It is a lengthy document outlining the expectations UB has of these students and vice versa in a number of areas including academic programs, services and facilities, health and safety and so on. The Charter is referenced in the Handbook and available in full from the University's website. However, no students met by the panel (including officers of the student association), and few staff, are aware of it. The Student Charter is a rather cumbersome and detailed policy statement that is inappropriate for the stated purpose. There is a risk at UB of policy over-statement which generates poor usage and understanding.

## 7. RESOURCES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

In relation to resources and infrastructure, the audit panel particularly focused its attention on the provision of library and information technology services in their roles supporting the academic enterprise.

The Library and Information Technology Services form one functional group at UB known as Information Services (IS). Its SSI, produced in January 2002, identifies a relatively small and manageable number of strategic foci for each service. As noted in section 2.6, all central administrative areas provide shared services to both TAFE and HE divisions. The IS area, in particular, has had to undertake a huge amount of work to make this functional.

For the purposes of this Report, each component of IS will be commented on separately.

### 7.1 Library

The Library has recognised that it will not be possible for it to build its collection to the depth required to support research across the range of probable research activity at UB, and has committed itself to providing staff and students with pathways to access information, rather than attempting to build comprehensive collections. This strategy is evident in the most recent published figures from the Council of Australian University Libraries. In 2000, UB ranked 36 of 39 university libraries in terms of acquisitions expenditure per population member (ie total number of staff and students), while the percentage of library budget expenditure on information resources (serial and non-serial items) ranked 13 of the 39.

Other significant challenges for the Library are providing resources to support the large number of units on offer and its capacity to support students in the regional campuses and those studying off-campus (both on- and off-shore). Increased reliance will be placed on building the access to electronic resources in an attempt to combat both challenges. In 2001, approximately 48 per cent of the Library budget was spent on acquisitions, with about 16 per cent of total budget spent on electronic materials.

Students find the staff and services provided by the Library to be of a high standard although the relatively small collection does cause some difficulties at times of heavy demand. The Library's policy of suspending borrowing privileges for students with overdue items exacerbates this problem, since there is little

incentive for students to return materials quickly, particularly towards the end of the semester.

The Library is yet to develop formal mechanisms for assessing user satisfaction, and this has been identified as an area for future development.

The panel formed the view that despite the challenges which it faces, the Library is well organised, user-friendly and working effectively, within the limits of its resources.

## **7.2 Information Technology Services**

The development and utilisation of information technology forms one of the six focus areas of the SSI, with specific objectives being to “provide IT and communication infrastructure that supports teaching, learning, research and administration” and “provide staff and students with training and support to maximise utilisation of IT” (SSI Objectives 5 and 6).

Information Technology Services (ITS) is responsible for the delivery and maintenance of information technology infrastructure, on-line services, management information systems, volume and specialised printery and audiovisual multimedia services across all campuses.

The Information Technology and Communication Committee is a cross-University reference group currently advising on the development of an IT and Communication Plan. As part of the development of this plan, a client workshop was conducted to determine the requirements of users and their perceptions of the current services being provided. This revealed a significant gap between user expectations and perceptions, and has led to the identification of a number of areas which will assume high priority.

Following the merger of institutions, UB has now established a single network which should serve as a solid foundation for ongoing developments. Attention has also been paid to standardising hardware and software, which has brought efficiencies in terms of site licensing and the provision of training.

## **APPENDIX A: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE UNIVERSITY OF BALLARAT**

The University of Ballarat is a relatively new institution, although it has its origins in the establishment of the School of Mines in Ballarat in 1870. Established by the University of Ballarat Act (1993), it commenced operations in January 1993. The Act was amended in 1997 to provide for the merging of the University with two further technical and further education institutes, the School of Mines and Industries (Ballarat) and the Wimmera Institute of TAFE. This combined institution began operations on 1 January 1998, with campuses at Ballarat city (SMB and Arts Precinct), Mt Helen (Ballarat), Ararat, Stawell and Horsham.

The Central Highlands and Wimmera regions provide the primary regional catchment area for the University, although significant numbers of students come from the Barwon region. Major regional towns include Horsham and Stawell in the Wimmera, and Ballarat and Ararat in the Central Highlands.

Through its TAFE and HE divisions, UB offers a range of certificate, diploma, advanced diploma, undergraduate, postgraduate and higher degree studies. The majority of higher education courses are delivered at the Mt Helen campus. Visual and performing arts courses are delivered at the Camp Street Arts Precinct and at the SMB campus, and the Nursing program is delivered at Mt Helen and Horsham campus.

The higher education division of the University is structured into seven schools and an Arts Academy. The schools are: School of Behavioural and Social Sciences and Humanities, School of Business, School of Education, School of Human Movement and Sport Sciences, School of Information Technology and Mathematical Sciences, School of Nursing and School of Science and Engineering. The Arts Academy is the product of a recent merger combining the former HE and TAFE schools.

Significant capital works have been completed, and several major projects are presently underway, including completion of the Camp Street Arts Precinct, in central Ballarat. The IBM Global Services IT Centre and the State Revenue Office are situated in the University's Technology Park, which is a focus for IT in the region. The Greenhill Enterprise Centre, also located in the Technology Park, is an IT incubator providing a nurturing environment for start-up IT businesses.

**APPENDIX B: THE OBJECTS OF AUQA**

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

## **APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL**

Professor Roger Field, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Lincoln University

Professor Gus Guthrie, Consultant, Emeritus Professor, University of Technology,  
Sydney (Panel Chair)

Ms Robyn Harris, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Melbourne

Ms Jan Lowe, Deputy Director, Office of Regional Development, South Australia

Professor Hilary Winchester, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Flinders University