

# AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of  
Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

August 2006

AUQA Audit Report Number 46

ISBN 1 877090 60 3

© Australian Universities Quality Agency 2006

Level 10, 123 Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne, VIC 3000  
Ph 03 9664 1000  
Fax 03 9639 7377

[admin@auqa.edu.au](mailto:admin@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>OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background .....	1
The Audit Process .....	1
<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction to Findings.....	3
Commendations.....	5
Affirmations .....	5
Recommendations .....	5
<b>1 ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW AND QUALITY ASSURANCE .....</b>	<b>7</b>
1.1 Institutional Environment .....	7
1.1.1 Mission .....	7
1.1.2 Partnerships .....	8
1.2 Governance and Management.....	9
1.2.1 Direction.....	9
1.2.2 Council and Council Committees.....	10
1.2.3 Academic Committee and Subcommittees.....	10
1.2.4 Senior Management Group.....	11
1.3 The Quality Assurance System.....	11
1.3.1 Quality Measures.....	11
1.3.2 Reviews .....	12
1.4 Planning .....	12
1.4.1 Policy Planning and Secretariat Division (PPS).....	12
1.4.2 Risk Management.....	13
<b>2 TEACHING AND LEARNING.....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Both-Ways Learning .....	14
2.2 Course Development, Accreditation and Review .....	15
2.2.1 Council and Academic Committee.....	15
2.2.2 Curriculum Relevance .....	16
2.2.3 Course-Related Committees.....	16
2.3 Assessment and Moderation .....	17
2.3.1 Assessment .....	17
2.3.2 Moderation .....	17
2.3.3 Course Monitoring Committees .....	17
2.4 Teaching Practice.....	18
2.4.1 Teaching Modes .....	18
2.4.2 Teaching and Learning Development Committee.....	19
2.5 Graduate Attributes .....	19
2.6 Articulation .....	20
<b>3 COMMUNITY AND ACCESS.....</b>	<b>21</b>
3.1 Remote Area Operations.....	21
3.1.1 Remote Area Operations Unit .....	21
3.1.2 Community Consultation.....	22
3.2 General Community Relations.....	23

<b>4 RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP .....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1 Research Structures .....	24
4.2 Research Culture .....	25
4.3 Indigenous Research .....	26
4.4 Postgraduate Courses .....	26
<b>5 SUPPORT SERVICES .....</b>	<b>27</b>
5.1 Staff Support .....	27
5.1.1 Human Resources Unit .....	27
5.1.2 New Staff .....	27
5.1.3 Workloads .....	28
5.1.4 Planning .....	28
5.2 Staff Progression .....	28
5.3 Student Systems .....	29
5.3.1 Student Recruitment .....	29
5.3.2 Student Support .....	30
5.3.3 Travel .....	30
5.3.4 Student Complaints and Grievances .....	31
5.4 Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Service (ITAS) .....	31
<b>6 RESOURCES AND FACILITIES .....</b>	<b>33</b>
6.1 Finance .....	33
6.2 Facilities .....	33
6.3 Library .....	34
6.4 Information & Communications Technology (ICT) .....	35
6.5 SPARC .....	35
<b>APPENDIX A: BATCHELOR INSTITUTE OF INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>APPENDIX B: AUQA’S MISSION, OBJECTIVES, VALUES AND VISION .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS .....</b>	<b>41</b>

## OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

### *Background*

In 2005 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE).

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

### *The Audit Process*

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

On 27 March 2006 BIITE presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) to AUQA, including a range of Supplementary Materials. The Audit Panel met on 21 April to consider these materials.

The Audit Panel Chair and Executive Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to BIITE on 8 and 9 May. Two groups of students were interviewed during the Preparatory Visit, because the main Audit Visit had been arranged for BIITE's major planning week when staff would be more readily available for interview but fewer students would be on the main campus at Batchelor.

The Audit Visit took place over 23 to 29 June 2006. On 23 June, the Executive Director interviewed staff and students on the Alice Springs campus of BIITE, toured that campus, and visited the site for the Desert Peoples' Centre. On 24 June, the Executive Director visited a small community to the west of Alice Springs. The whole Audit Panel visited the Batchelor campus from 25 to 29 June.

In all, the Audit Panel spoke with about 160 people during the audit visits, including staff, students and members of BIITE's various communities. Sessions were also available at the Audit Visit to the Batchelor campus for any member of the Institute's community to meet the Audit Panel and one person took advantage of this opportunity.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 29 June 2006 and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. It records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by BIITE, as well as information gained through interviews, discussion and observation. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of BIITE's activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

This Report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A commendation refers to the achievement of a stated goal, or to some plan or activity that has led to, or appears likely to lead to, the achievement of a stated goal, and which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. A recommendation refers to an area in need of attention, whether in respect of approach, deployment or results, which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. Where such matters

have already been identified by BIITE, with evidence, they are termed 'affirmations'. It is acknowledged that recommendations in AUQA audit reports may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for the institution being audited. Accordingly, these recommendations are not prioritised, and it is the responsibility of BIITE to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

## CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. It should be noted that other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

### *Introduction to Findings*

BIITE is not the smallest institution audited by AUQA to date, but has the smallest number of enrolled higher education students.

Many institutions of higher education (HE) are multi-campus, many are mixed mode, some are dual sector, some have a high proportion of students from equity groups or remote areas or non-English-speaking backgrounds, but BIITE is the only institution that has all these characteristics. In addition, its location in the Northern Territory causes difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. This makes it a very complex institution and poses unique challenges for governance and management. Furthermore, the Institute has been through a difficult period of dissension and confusion over direction. While all is not yet 'solved', there appears now to be largely a sense of shared purpose in a culturally safe and supportive environment, characterised by optimism and hopes for the future.

BIITE's strengths include

- high level of commitment by Council and staff
- the belief of staff in BIITE's unique vision of providing education for Indigenous students in a culturally supportive environment, which is highly appreciated by students, past and present
- relation to remote communities in the Northern Territory and across northern Australia
- increasing visibility as a national institution

Issues for attention include

- development of the both-ways philosophy and its practical implementation
- the role of research
- performance management
- staff retention
- implications of a changing student population, including greater variety of study modes

### *National Position*

BIITE has a vital national position as the only higher educational institution solely for Indigenous students. Both the Northern Territory and Federal Governments recognise this and are helpful in their support of Batchelor. It is essential that, in managing the accountability arrangements for BIITE, both governments continue to have regard to the special circumstances it faces. Its outreach to remote communities is inherently expensive in terms of cost per student ultimately enrolled. Having said that, it is incumbent on Batchelor to operate as effectively as possible. Some of AUQA's recommendations relate to increasing retention, decreasing costs, and making more effective use of information gathered.

### *Both-Ways*

Some years ago, BIITE adopted the 'both-ways' philosophy of learning, teaching and researching. Briefly, this involves valuing both cultures (Indigenous and Western), and allowing each to learn from and be enlightened by the other. BIITE has continually struggled to enunciate this philosophy in a way that would enable staff to use it to inform their teaching and research. That no fixed position has ever

been reached on this may be an inevitable consequence of changing ideas and contexts. However, this variability is a liability for BIITE when it has stated that the both-ways approach is its defining characteristic. The concept is being revisited this year, and AUQA urges BIITE to approach it creatively.

#### *Remote Communities*

BIITE's unique focus has been on reaching and offering education to students in remote Indigenous communities, mainly in the Northern Territory but also across into Western Australia and Queensland. Many in these communities have no experience of education, and may not be able to move away from home for extended periods. In order to meet the prime educational requirements of the habitants of these communities in a way that makes the education accessible, BIITE has concentrated on vocational and enabling courses, and has stressed the need for personal and individual contact between an identified academic staff member and the student.

This model has continued as BIITE is now taking an increasing number of HE students, and over half of those are interstate. While 'distant' from Batchelor, these students are not in locations that would normally be designated as 'remote'. Furthermore, attendance at the campus workshops, and the overall retention figures suggest that the focused and 'hand-holding' model is not working as well as it should. BIITE has just completed a major community consultation, which has identified a number of issues of concern to communities and a range of desires that the communities would like BIITE to meet. It will be important for BIITE to maintain the momentum of resumed collaboration with communities.

#### *University Title*

BIITE's close relationship with remote communities became fractured over the last few years as BIITE began actively to position itself to achieve the designation of 'university'. Other work then had a lower priority, and in particular the community outreach suffered. The new direction, and a proposal to adopt some Indigenous cultural standards from elsewhere, also caused some dissent and friction among staff. Council was alerted to the situation, took a more managerial role, commissioned a major external review (by Gregor Ramsey), commissioned a second implementation review (by Des Sempé) and appointed a new Director and other senior staff. The atmosphere is now much more positive, and community engagement is growing.

#### *Research*

Another goal, which is related to the desire for university title, is about emphasis on research and scholarship. It will be necessary for BIITE to be very discerning and selective, concentrating on only a few areas of research, and not requiring all staff to be research-active.

#### *Systems*

BIITE is a small institution (about 500 target EFTSLs in higher education (HE) and 1000 Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) student load), and some things can run without the extensive systems needed for a larger organisation. AUQA is very careful in the Report not to recommend the unnecessary introduction of documented systems. In fact, BIITE already has more structure than one would expect of a small institution (for example in the number of committees) and decentralises functions even though there are only two schools. AUQA suggests that BIITE might reconsider its structures with the aim of reducing work and increasing effect.

#### *Courses*

BIITE is heavily committed to using external comparators in its course development and monitoring, and this Report recommends strengthening the relevant procedures.

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

**Commendations**

1. AUQA commends BIITE on the establishment of a risk register and reporting schedule.....13
2. AUQA commends BIITE for its thorough course development and accreditation processes and their application.....17
3. AUQA commends BIITE for its robust assessment moderation procedures.....17
4. AUQA commends BIITE for the thorough and valuable community consultation carried out this year.....23
5. AUQA commends BIITE for its extensive and positive relations with its various stakeholder communities.....23
6. AUQA commends BIITE for identifying and rectifying problems with the implementation of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme. ....32
7. AUQA commends BIITE for its commitment to the development of the Library collection and for ensuring public access to library resources. ....35
8. AUQA commends BIITE's Information and Communications Technology Section, in particular for the provision and support of computer laboratories in remote communities, and for working with the academics on e-learning.....35

**Affirmations**

1. AUQA affirms BIITE's decision to revisit the accreditation process for the Master in Indigenous Knowledges.....16
2. AUQA affirms BIITE's intention to introduce a one-stop shop for student admissions and enrolments and to introduce an orientation/induction for students on their first arrival at a Batchelor campus.....30

**Recommendations**

1. AUQA recommends that BIITE review its strategic goal in relation to university status. ....10
2. AUQA recommends that BIITE monitor the progress of its graduates to evaluate the effectiveness of its educational activities.....12
3. AUQA recommends that BIITE carry out further investigation and development on expressing how 'both-ways' may best work for BIITE over the coming years, including its relation to BIITE's values, research, curriculum and teaching.....15
4. AUQA recommends that BIITE ensure that all its Course Monitoring Committees include input from external academics. ....18

5.	AUQA recommends that BIITE investigate the possibility of resuming the practice of having some sample work marked by external academics. ....	18
6.	AUQA recommends that BIITE investigate the possibility of developing (or adapting) more distance education materials, with the aim of increasing student retention and decreasing travel costs.....	19
7.	AUQA recommends that BIITE strengthen the links between Remote Area Operations staff and the rest of the Institute so that relevant information is captured systematically and flows to those who are able to collate and use it.....	22
8.	AUQA recommends that BIITE devise a process for evaluating the benefits and risks of research partnerships.....	25
9.	AUQA recommends that BIITE review its goal of research with a view to establishing a manageably small number of research pockets that support BIITE's other goals, and then plan strategically around these strengths.....	25
10.	AUQA recommends that BIITE make staff induction materials available online, and supervisors to be required to ensure that new staff access it within the first two weeks. ....	27
11.	AUQA recommends that BIITE develop a comprehensive workloads policy that relates to the great range of tasks expected of BIITE staff.....	28
12.	AUQA recommends that BIITE review its various programs and schemes for supporting and assisting staff to progress through their careers, including targeted development for Indigenous staff.....	29
13.	AUQA recommends that BIITE consider centralising the student application, admission and enrolment process to achieve economies of time and enhancement of function.....	30
14.	AUQA recommends that BIITE review its student grievance and related feedback procedures to ensure that complaints are recorded and dealt with expeditiously and that other input from students is treated seriously and responded to openly.....	31
15.	AUQA recommends to BIITE that SPARC write a mission statement and a business plan and that it form agreements with schools for the services it can provide. ....	35

## 1 ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

The six Strategic Plan goals are set out in the Portfolio and in the Annual Report. In the former the subsections are termed ‘objectives’ and in the latter ‘strategies’. The goals and objectives most relevant to this chapter are as follows:

### **Goal 4. Achieve excellence in the work of the Institute which draws on and builds upon different cultures.**

#### *Objectives*

- 4.1 *To define quality in terms consistent with the cross-cultural context of the Institute.*
- 4.2 *To maintain quality assurance and improvement processes.*
- 4.3 *To ensure all staff actively engage in implementation of quality assurance and improvement processes.*
- 4.4 *To meet external reporting requirements.*

### **Goal 5. To achieve status as an Indigenous university.**

#### *Objectives*

- 5.1 *To consult with Institute communities on the aspirations to be met by an Indigenous university.*
- 5.2 *To initiate discussions with relevant bodies to develop strategies to reach university status.*
- 5.3 *To determine a phased development and implementation of activities appropriate to a university.*

The extent to which goals are being achieved varies. There is no explicit definition of ‘quality’ as required by Objective 4.1: the cross-cultural context of BIITE is certainly very much at the forefront of its members’ thinking but it is not clear how this might affect definitions of quality. A large number of things are being done well, but systematic processes across the board and the active engagement of all staff are yet to be achieved. External reporting requirements appear to be generally met, albeit sometimes a little late. BIITE does not currently claim to be achieving Goal 5, and there is some ambiguity around it, as explained below.

### **1.1 Institutional Environment**

#### **1.1.1 Mission**

A brief history of BIITE is given in Appendix A. Australia has almost forty universities, that are ‘self-accrediting institutions’ (SAIs), ie they may introduce new courses on their own authority, and BIITE is one of only four SAIs that are not universities. The small number of such institutions has made their character (‘non-university SAI’) seem anomalous, and it was partly for this reason that the 1994 evaluation that recommended increasing autonomy for the Institute also recommended university status. However, MCEETYA has now recognised the value and validity of non-university SAIs. This provides BIITE with a renewed opportunity to reflect on Goal 5 (section 1.2.1).

BIITE has special exemption from equal opportunity provisions so that it is permitted to restrict enrolment to Indigenous students. This makes for a generally congenial and supportive institutional climate for those students, and gives BIITE a heavy duty to meet its responsibilities to those students. Its focus has been on the needs of people in remote Northern Territory (NT) communities, particularly for Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), and particularly for

those for whom study at a BIITE campus may be their first experience outside their community. However, the BIITE Act of the NT Parliament, dated 1 July 1999 and revised in 2005, does not make these geographical restrictions, and refers simply to “education relevant to the needs of Aborigines and Torres Strait islanders”. As the only institution in the country with enrolments restricted to Indigenous students, its responsibilities are really national and should encompass higher education (HE). BIITE has been gradually extending itself in this way. This Report will recommend that BIITE look carefully at how it is carrying out this extension, and whether it is applying to interstate HE students modes that were originally designed to serve the needs of remote VTE students.

### 1.1.2 Partnerships

Attention to partnerships with other institutions and organisations is specified in the BIITE Act as one of the functions of the Institute.

#### *NT Government*

Charles Darwin University (CDU) in Darwin is the only university in the NT and is therefore seen to have a particular responsibility to the Territory. In recognition of this, CDU and the NT Government have set up a formal partnership with regular high level meetings and a program of joint work.

BIITE is also part of the broader social and economic infrastructure and cultural safety net in the Northern Territory, and is on the verge of setting up a similar partnership with the NT Government (Goal 6.5; cf Chapter 6). Because the NT Department of Education, Employment and Training (DEET) provides significant funding for BIITE’s VTE students, there is already a quarterly meeting between BIITE and DEET to discuss statistics, programs and other issues. The hope is that the formal partnership will assist in achieving accountability in both directions, and will also lead to meetings between representatives of other areas, such as the Ministry of Primary Industry, Fisheries and Mines.

#### *Charles Darwin University (CDU)*

As part of its Territory responsibilities, CDU emphasises access for Indigenous students and reaches out to remote communities. In both these respects, it is covering much the same ground as BIITE. Currently, there is some wasteful duplication of activities between BIITE and CDU, particularly in relation to servicing remote communities, which is resource-intensive (see, for example, the AUQA Audit Report of CDU, 2005). In 2004, the Federal Department of Employment, Science and Training (DEST) provided \$3m for the two institutions to develop and implement a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation. This was signed late in 2005, and projects are now being created within it.

Two initial and potentially beneficial formal projects are the Pathways Project (section 2.6) on articulation between HE and VTE and between the institutions, and sharing of workload and facilities in remote communities. It is essential that these two projects be implemented successfully, because they will result in a better service to the institutions’ various stakeholders, and will be a more efficient use of resources. It may be that each institution can specialise in nominated geographical areas of the NT and/or in particular vocational courses and higher education programs. The Audit Panel noted that work is also in progress on articulation of courses and units within teacher education and collaboration on the reaccreditation of teacher education programs.

Since Australian education policies generally tend towards competition, rather than collaboration, the institutions will need to bring much goodwill to the discussions to achieve complementarity. At an informal level, staff are looking at each other’s program and resource strengths and trying not to double up. For example, it is intended to advertise a joint clinical placement coordinator in nursing, and some staff regularly work in the other institution.

While it is good to encourage staff to look for collaborative openings, projects should become somewhat formalised at an early stage. The NT has a high staff turnover, and an initiative that is totally dependent on one or two individuals is very vulnerable.

## **1.2 Governance and Management**

### **1.2.1 Direction**

The draft Annual Report 2005 states that BIITE's vision is to be "A unique place of knowledge and skills, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians can undertake journeys of learning for empowerment and advancement while strengthening identity". BIITE's statement of purpose is that BIITE "serves the interests of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in education and training and, in so doing, contributes to the cultural, social and economic development of Australia". The draft Annual Report then sets out the operating principles and the management environment, followed by the six Goals and associated strategies/objectives.

Many institutions are multi-campus, many are mixed mode, some are dual sector, some have a high proportion of students from equity groups or remote areas or non-English-speaking backgrounds, but BIITE is the only institution that has all these characteristics. In addition, its location in the NT makes it difficult to recruit and retain staff. This makes it a very complex institution with unique challenges for governance and management. In recognition of this, DEET and DEST are as flexible as possible within the spirit and letter of legislation if the Institute fails to meet VTE and HE targets, respectively. The student-staff ratio is of the order of 12 to 1, which is little more than half the national average.

BIITE has been through a difficult period over the recent few years, marked by divisions and an environment that caused staff to leave, with a sharp dip in the number of non-Indigenous staff, and recruitment of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff to become more difficult than usual. Actions of the Council from late 2004, a radical restructuring in 2005, and the appointment of a new Director and senior team this year, have led to positive changes and a widespread optimism among staff and external stakeholders about further improvement.

Another discontinuity in development was triggered by an emphasis over recent years on becoming a university (Goal 5). This resulted in BIITE turning away from some of its community commitment as it spent more time on activities intended to make it look university-like. The focus on university status led to disproportionate attention to research and postgraduate education (which, if followed through, would have as yet unrecognised implications for the style of BIITE governance).

The Audit Panel was variously informed that "Council had turned away from this Goal" and that "progress towards this Goal has slowed down but not gone away". The Portfolio says that "the Institute's planning since the middle of 2005 has given the lowest priority to the objectives of Goal 5" (PF p28). However, the draft Annual Report 2005 still describes BIITE as "an emerging university", and the effects of this appear still to be skewing the Institute's actions, and the concentration on research is, if anything, growing (section 4.2). The student profile of the Institute is so different from any other university in Australia, in both size and HE/VTE balance, that university designation is highly unlikely.

The Audit Panel observed that MCEETYA is likely to approve a new set of National Protocols for HE Approval Processes that will provide for the establishment of non-university self-accrediting institutions (SAIs). BIITE (and the other three current non-university SAIs) will no longer seem unusual. On the contrary, institutions of the nature of BIITE will be more numerous

and a normal part of the Australian HE scene. (Note: MCEETYA subsequently approved the revised Protocols.)

At the very least, this Goal needs more thought and discussion, and a weighing of the costs and benefits of each option.

### **Recommendation 1**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE review its strategic goal in relation to university status.**

#### 1.2.2 Council and Council Committees

The composition of the 22 member Council is set out in the BIITE Act. Because of the nature and responsibilities of the Institute, the Council membership is largely designated by regions within the NT, forming something akin to a council of elders. The Audit Panel investigated the implications of this for the necessary skill mix of the governing body of a SAI. National Governance Protocols under the *Higher Education Support Act 2003 (Cwlth)* apply to BIITE, and the Act was amended last year to bring BIITE into compliance with these Protocols. The amendment provided for the creation of two positions specifically to permit the appointment of members with financial and commercial expertise, but these positions are still vacant. The Council has some academic skills, but no legal expertise among its members. Action is needed on these matters.

The problems outlined in the previous section led the Council to take a closer interest in management. Now that it has appointed a new Director and senior staff, it needs to step back from this management role and focus on its rightful function of governance. Council should, however, pay more attention to the goals, institutional performance targets and key performance indicators for the Director. This is listed as the first of the “Council’s primary responsibilities” in the Council Rules approved by the Council in September 2005. The primary responsibilities also refer to actions “consistent with legal requirements and community expectations”, but they could more explicitly state that the primary responsibility of Council is to ensure fulfilment of the functions of the Institute set out in the BIITE Act. It would also be useful for the Council to reflect on how it measures and evaluates its own performance. Furthermore, BIITE identified a need for a greater visibility of its Council in the various communities served by BIITE.

The roles and membership of all Council committees were reviewed following the Institute restructure in August 2005. There are now seven Council committees, including Academic Committee, Audit Committee, Finance Committee, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Committee, and Human Resource Management Committee, all of which include the Director. Their work is mentioned under relevant sections of this Report.

BIITE’s Act requires it to provide education for “Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders”, which give it a national character (although the funding system means that VTE students will be almost all from the NT). As it moves more into HE, BIITE’s national character is growing, but awareness of BIITE outside the NT, or as a national institution, is low. There is scope for more publicity for BIITE interstate, and the Institute is already looking to make greater use of alumni.

#### 1.2.3 Academic Committee and Subcommittees

The Academic Committee (AC) has four subcommittees, namely, Accreditation, Admissions and Progressions Subcommittee (section 2.2.3), Teaching and Learning Development Subcommittee (section 2.4.2), Institute Research Ethics Committee (IREC, section 4.1), and Scholarships and Awards Subcommittee.

The Academic Committee is chaired by the Head of Academic and Research Division. This position combines what would be the roles of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) in a larger institution or university. In an institution with such a small HE population (Appendix A), it is sensible to combine the functions in one position. The position carries no line management responsibilities and is required to foster “lots of cross-Institute collaboration”.

BIITE has a well-developed system of course development and monitoring (section 2.2.3) with a good deal of external input. However, consideration of committee reports appears to be rather more routine at the higher levels. The Academic Committee needs to take a stronger role in ensuring the standards of courses and their equivalence to comparable qualifications from other HE institutions (section 2.3.3).

#### 1.2.4 Senior Management Group

There are 15 Director’s Advisory Committees (and at least one more is proposed), of which the Audit Panel met the Quality Assurance Advisory Committee as a committee, and met many other committee members in other roles. The Director is a member of three of these committees, namely the Senior Management Committee, Executive Management Group and the Staff Liaison Committee, and chairs only the latter two. The Executive Management Group has eight members (Director, Deputy Director, and the heads of the schools and divisions). It meets monthly with an agenda but no formal papers or minutes. The Senior Management Committee has these same eight members and ten others and is chaired by the Deputy Director. It meets fortnightly, and is responsible for operational coordination, information-sharing, and filtering the reports from the other Director’s Advisory Committees and making recommendations to the Director.

There are at least 26 Institute-level committees (plus the Council itself) and there are replicas of some of these at school level. This seems an excessive number of committees for a small organisation. The Audit Panel was not able to determine whether (or to what extent) the workload of committee attendance and actions is detracting from the achievement of academic goals and scholarly endeavour. One senior manager commented that BIITE’s systems and requirements do not leave managers sufficient time to lead, as all their time is spent in managing. Another senior manager remarked that BIITE needed an organisational structure that allowed for both management and leadership. AUQA suggests that the committee structure be slimmed and streamlined as opportunity permits.

### 1.3 *The Quality Assurance System*

#### 1.3.1 Quality Measures

The central purpose of the Director’s Quality Assurance Advisory Committee is to keep BIITE focussed on quality. The Audit Panel was informed that Institute-wide quality appraisal has been absent and the current task of this Committee is to assist BIITE to regain an appropriate perspective on the matters of importance (education for remote communities) and to encourage staff to be alert for ways of improving quality. There will need to be explicit staff development in relation to this issue, as there seems currently to be little awareness of how quality can be promoted, other than through moderation. AUQA suggests that members of the Quality Assurance Advisory Committee educate themselves on the standard quality enhancement processes and procedures adopted in other higher education institutions, eg systematic gathering and interpretation of data, descriptions of best practice, routine performance reviews, and disseminate information on the effective use of these procedures.

The Committee’s prime concern is for degree standards across BIITE, for which internal and external reference points are used, although there is no formal benchmarking. The main measure

used to determine BIITE's standards in relation to other institutions is that BIITE graduates are employable. Although employability is important, it is heavily affected by other factors (not least that many of BIITE's HE students are already employed), and says nothing about whether the nature of the employment is appropriately related to the qualification obtained. Also, it does not evaluate whether students going on to further study are receiving an amount of recognition for prior learning that is commensurate with what graduates of other institutions would receive. Currently, BIITE does not participate in the Graduate Destination Survey.

## **Recommendation 2**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE monitor the progress of its graduates to evaluate the effectiveness of its educational activities.**

### 1.3.2 Reviews

BIITE has undertaken a large number of reviews at Institute level (in addition to the internal and external reviews relating to individual courses). In 2004, the Ramsey review and the Semple review led to major changes in the structure and focus of BIITE in 2005. BIITE has an annual audit as a VTE provider, and 2006 saw the major five-yearly version of this.

It was clear to the Audit Panel that these reviews have had a major effect on the Institute, and it now operates in a more mainstream fashion than it did in the 1980s. The changes are yet to be fully bedded down, and the staff in many of BIITE's structures informed the Audit Panel that the structure had been in operation for only a few months, and/or that they themselves were new to the Institute. There has also been some inconsistency, as the reviews have not all pointed in the same direction. Staff were hoping that the AUQA audit would be the final external review for a while, and that it would tend to confirm the current direction of the Institute, even if it revealed gaps and suggested some adjustments. Senior management certainly see the 2006 VTE audit, the AUQA audit and the current community consultation (Chapter 3.1.2) as a platform from which to build on recent changes. Staff are feeling worn with the extent of change on top of generally high workloads, and the Audit Panel expressed the hope that this audit would be more of a culmination of recent developments than the start of another upheaval.

The Audit Panel found that staff are generally satisfied with the level of communication around the Institute.

## **1.4 Planning**

### 1.4.1 Policy Planning and Secretariat Division (PPS)

Strategic Objectives 2.2 is "To establish and maintain effective analysis, forecasting and planning processes for the Institute" (cf Chapter 6), and there is a Policy Planning and Secretariat Division reporting to the Director. It is just beginning its work and is starting slowly. It is currently concentrating on reviewing, rationalising and updating policies so as to enhance quality, improve consistency, and minimise contradictions. Policies are being made directly available to all staff, online or on CDs. In future, all policies will have a specified three-year life before review.

When it is fully staffed, PPS will also take responsibility for environmental scanning, including scanning economic projections for NT, identifying the skill sets that will be needed, talking to communities, getting feedback on courses likely to be of interest, evaluating the level of demand and making a realistic estimate of likely resulting enrolments. NT Government agencies also scan quite extensively across communities. BIITE's aim is for a planning cycle that is fully informed. Remote area planning is becoming more detailed and more effective.

However, the Division is struggling at present with many vacant positions, so some tasks that should be essential cannot be carried out. BIITE should be planning for a possibly different future, both external and internal. Some indicators, including a student success rate of only 0.37 and the large number of 'no-shows' at residential workshops point to the need to reconsider the mode of provision. Also, BIITE should not act as if it has a captive audience, as there is potential competition from both big universities and private providers able and willing to deliver education to the communities.

As the PPS staff complement is filled, it may find it problematic that it is not responsible for key aspects of load planning such as statistical calculations for five-year projections and so on. These are currently done in the Finance and Infrastructure Division, and in schools in consultation with their industry groups. Forward planning for enrolments and load might be more effectively managed within the PPS.

#### 1.4.2 Risk Management

An extensive risk audit was carried out in mid-2004, resulting in a detailed and comprehensive risk register with items categorised as high, medium or low risk. Reports on these were to be presented to the Council's Audit Committee by the responsible officers each three, six and twelve months, respectively. For various reasons, implementation of this plan did not begin until the end of 2005. However, the plan now seems to be working well, and the risk register is continually revised and updated.

##### **Commendation 1**

##### **AUQA commends BIITE on the establishment of a risk register and reporting schedule.**

It would be advisable now for BIITE to begin to think more creatively in re-evaluating a number of issues in terms of potential risks. For example, the HE environment and funding regime is very fluid and BIITE's heavy dependence on Commonwealth away-from-base funding could be problematic. (DEET and DEST both recognise BIITE's essential role in supporting Indigenous students in relation to the usual financial penalties for failure to meet enrolment targets.) The high number of no-shows at workshops is also a major risk (and attention to aspects of this does feature in the register), as is the possible consequences of students' increasing Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) and Student Contribution Amount (SCA) liabilities and use of their learning entitlements (Goal 1.4 in Chapter 2). The lack of security around the students' residences at the Batchelor campus is also something that needs to be included in considerations of risk.

## 2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The relevant Strategic Plan goal and objectives are as follows:

**Goal 1. Education: provide education and training in accordance with the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from remote, rural and urban settings.**

### *Objectives*

- 1.1 *To establish annual profiles that reflect the needs, contexts and requirements of (i) students; (ii) communities.*
- 1.2 *To develop curriculum relevant to students and communities.*
- 1.3 *To make learning opportunities available through modes of delivery that support all students.*
- 1.4 *To ensure students receive appropriate information and advice to enable informed enrolment and study decisions.*
- 1.5 *To incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paradigms in teaching methodologies and processes.*

BIITE has a highly committed teaching force. Its programs and teaching is meeting community need to a great extent, for example through its range of VTE courses, its degrees in Environmental Health, Education and Nursing. Further thought needs to be given to the delivery modes to ensure that learning opportunities are appropriately provided across both sectors. Students are generally well-supported through the enrolment process, though AUQA noted some gaps and inefficiencies. The notion of ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paradigms’ needs further attention, as staff are generally unclear about what the term means and uncertain about how or where it could be implemented.

### 2.1 *Both-Ways Learning*

The BIITE vision speaks of Indigenous Australians “learning for empowerment and advancement while strengthening identity”. The key strategy developed over 30 years by BIITE has been to enable students to study while remaining connected to (not necessarily always located in) their community. Early in the 1990s, the term ‘both-ways’ emerged to denote an approach to bringing together Aboriginal traditions of knowledge with western educational traditions. This finds its expression in BIITE’s current Strategic Plan in Goal 1.5: “To incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paradigms in teaching methodologies and processes”.

The Audit Panel investigated the understanding of the both-ways concept among staff and students of BIITE. The Panel found a lack of clarity and understanding of both-ways learning, resulting in a variety of interpretations. These include staff and students learning from each other, curricula embodying various cultural perspectives, and student-centred learning. Staff do not know whether these (and others) are all equally valid and acceptable interpretations or whether there is a preferred BIITE model. Furthermore, none of these understandings is being widely implemented. Therefore both-ways is not the unifying concept BIITE hopes for.

The Portfolio states that “Documentation of a ‘both-ways’ philosophy and practices that are drawn from it are required” (p43). BIITE established a working party on both-ways learning early in 2006. The working party had not finished its work at the time of the Audit Visit, but it provided the Audit Panel with an interim statement. This states that “both-ways involves operating in both worlds at the same time. Enabling these...cultures...to speak to each other is not easy. But the Institute will...[pursue] forms and practices which honour Indigenous qualities...and embody the best of Western intellectual disciplines...”. Many academic staff will continue to find it difficult to know how to ‘operate in both worlds at once’, and indeed the statement acknowledges that it

'is not easy'. If BIITE is to pursue its both-ways philosophy successfully, it needs to make the concept precise enough that staff can implement it – even if there is a variety of ways in which this can be done. It may be that both-ways sits better as part of a larger conception of cultural interfaces than as a whole and self-sufficient concept in itself.

### **Recommendation 3**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE carry out further investigation and development on expressing how 'both-ways' may best work for BIITE over the coming years, including its relation to BIITE's values, research, curriculum and teaching.**

This work could usefully take account of what is occurring elsewhere, and the contemporary dialogue about cultural interfaces. The results of the work and actual practical examples of implementation of the both-ways philosophy could be written up as article for the BIITE journal *Ngoonjook* and considered for wider dissemination, for example through publication in national journals. This would share, and help to develop, a common understanding of the scope and application of the philosophy, as well as giving staff an incentive to put their ideas and experience in writing. It would inform thinking and practice in Indigenous centres in Australian universities while at the same time strengthening BIITE's national profile in this area.

In 2004, BIITE began a project on supplementing the both-ways philosophy with defined cultural standards. Standards from Alaska were considered, but BIITE Council has decided that these are not an appropriate model for BIITE. AUQA notes that BIITE has decided not to take that particular approach, but suggests that the Institute does need some analogous framework that works for BIITE in a both-ways milieu. (The Research and Research Training Management Report for 2004 states (p11) that the use of such standards to measure quality assurance and outcomes would be "paramount".)

In fact, Goal 1.5 does not speak of 'both-ways' but of Indigenous 'paradigms'. There is some confusion between Indigenous paradigms and both-ways learning. This can (and should) be addressed in the context of the further work on both-ways.

BIITE must reflect on what it means by "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paradigms" and how to develop and implement them. Included in such a reflection could be aspects such as empowering people to look at their own history and culture, philosophy, world-view, and self-esteem. Some staff expressed the view that the small number of senior Indigenous staff means that there is insufficient Indigenous input to the curriculum to incorporate such paradigms effectively. BIITE's vision of being a unique place where "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians can take journeys of learning for empowerment and advancement while strengthening identity" provides a starting point for the expression of these paradigms.

## **2.2 Course Development, Accreditation and Review**

### **2.2.1 Council and Academic Committee**

The BIITE Act states the functions of the Institute in great detail, extending to 18 specific points. The first six of these relate to the Institute's educational activities, and these are largely caught up in Goal 1. In its responsibility for the Institute, Council receives reports from the Academic Committee (AC) on matters of program accreditation. It also receives presentations from senior staff. The AC is responsible for "approving proposals to develop new courses" and "providing a recommendation to Council on...accreditation matters". The AC "acts only on behalf of Council, and any policy decisions that it makes must be endorsed by Council". However, no Council is expected to have academic expertise across the curriculum, and the AC must take responsibility for the rigour and completeness of its academic considerations.

### 2.2.2 Curriculum Relevance

The Audit Panel investigated the achievement of Goal 1.2 (relevant curriculum) and the extent to which the ambitious target of ‘annual profiles’ (Goal 1.1) is achieved. BIITE makes a major effort to interact with its communities, although the emphasis is mainly on the remote rather than the rural or urban (Goal 1). BIITE needs to adapt its thinking and recognise that almost 40% of its HE student population is from interstate and is largely urban. Also, the information flow to, from and about communities is not systematic. There is a built-in assumption that since both school lecturers and Remote Area Operations staff spend a lot of time in the field, the information acquired will automatically reach the right destinations and be acted on.

The demand for three-year courses is not high, and BIITE is appropriately offering such courses as advanced diplomas (and could consider associate degrees). The total number of courses is high for the number of staff (39 in HE and 53 in VTE). Some are nested in others, but there are 12 distinct bachelor degrees. BIITE needs to ensure that its suite of courses is sustainable, in terms of number, variety and mode.

### 2.2.3 Course-Related Committees

The course approval and monitoring system is extensive and thorough, with a good deal of external input from industry and academics from other institutions. It includes: course working parties, Course Development Committees, Course Assessment Committees (some at both school and Institute level), and the Admissions, Accreditation and Progressions Subcommittee (AAP) of Academic Committee, together with the AC itself and Council. The guidelines on course development are comprehensive and relatively reader-friendly. Those staff who had been involved in course development found the information of value. That BIITE is conscious of the need for rigorous course development procedures is attested to by its decision to re-run the Master of Indigenous Knowledges through the course approval process when it recognised that some of the specified procedures had not been implemented.

#### **Affirmation 1**

**AUQA affirms BIITE’s decision to revisit the accreditation process for the Master in Indigenous Knowledges.**

Once a course is operating, there is an annual review of the course by the Course Monitoring Committee. Academics from other institutions and people from industry sit on several of these and BIITE is to be commended for this systematic attention to external cross-referencing.

For some courses, such as Nursing and Environmental Health, professional accreditation is relevant, and the Audit Panel noted that all professional courses have the relevant accreditation. The Panel also investigated whether the professional accreditation bodies accept the variation from ‘standard’ courses necessitated by BIITE’s both-ways approach. The Panel saw evidence that the courses proposed for accreditation contain the desired BIITE emphasis, but are acceptable to the accreditors.

Reports from the Course Development Committee are considered by the respective school and then the AAP for decisions or recommendation to AC.

The Panel was convinced that the accreditation processes are rigorous and are appropriately applied. The Panel noted also that the processes for VTE and HE are integrated as much as possible, so for example there may be a single development committee (and later a single monitoring committee) for both certificate and degree courses in the same field.

## **Commendation 2**

### **AUQA commends BIITE for its thorough course development and accreditation processes and their application.**

AUQA suggests that BIITE ensure that adequate attention to Australian Qualifications Framework requirements be included in these procedures.

## **2.3 Assessment and Moderation**

### **2.3.1 Assessment**

BIITE has an Assessment Policy that was revised in February 2006. It describes grades, and details categories of academic misconduct (plagiarism etc). The Policy provides that late assignments normally incur a 10% mark penalty per day, but this appears not to be implemented (and indeed may be unrealistic since timely submission may be partly dependent on mail delays).

### **2.3.2 Moderation**

Assessment is supported by a detailed approach to moderation. The Panel was not able to obtain a copy of a moderation policy, and the Panel heard slightly different descriptions of the process. At heart, it is the common procedure of exchanging scripts, and at least some staff exchange scripts that they have marked at five different grades. This is a good internal process, and many staff are involved, with final approval of grades occurring only after the documentation has been checked centrally. This was proving to be a bottleneck, and BIITE is considering allowing finalisation of results at school level.

BIITE is just embarking on a joint project on assessment with CDU, under the MoU, to review good practices in assessment nationally, and as appropriate adapt them for BIITE and CDU.

## **Commendation 3**

### **AUQA commends BIITE for its robust assessment moderation procedures.**

### **2.3.3 Course Monitoring Committees**

BIITE has two major mechanisms which it believes enable it to monitor courses and ensure the achievement of standards comparable to those achieved by analogous qualifications from other institutions. These are the internal moderation system (just described) and Course Monitoring Committees.

Each course has a Course Monitoring Committee (CMC), which meets annually, and the Panel read a number of CMC reports. The Portfolio states that all CMCs have external members, including academics from other institutions interstate, but the Panel noted that some CMCs did not include external academics, though the AC relies heavily on the expected external input. The CMCs carry out a review of the course over the previous year on the basis of statistical information, and feedback from students, lecturers, graduates and employers (as available). This feedback refers mainly to the individual subjects, and this therefore tends to be the emphasis of the CMC reviews, which pay less attention to the coherence of the course as a whole. The CMCs report to the AC, with recommendations for improvement of the course. From the beginning of 2006, the reports are made to the AAP for consideration and passed on to AC for noting and if actions are required.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE ensure that all its Course Monitoring Committees include input from external academics.**

CMCs appear to be effective in ensuring that a course meets its originally approved accreditation requirements, and that it is revised in the light of student comment (where obtained) and employer input. It is less obvious that CMCs are effective in judging the comparability of standards of BIITE qualifications with those achieved by other institutions. AUQA suggests that this requirement should be added as an explicit term of reference for CMCs, and that Academic Committee satisfies itself on the results of these CMC deliberations.

The Audit Panel noted that staff understand and apply the moderation process well, achieving internal consistency, but are less clear about the external comparability of academic standards. AC needs to address this issue explicitly.

The Panel was informed that a few years ago, two degree courses were externally moderated in their first years of operation with a small sample of BIITE student work being second marked by academics at other institutions to permit comparison with student work elsewhere. If possible, it would be useful for BIITE to resume this practice, particularly as some staff are marking in both VTE and HE courses.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE investigate the possibility of resuming the practice of having some sample work marked by external academics.**

### **2.4 Teaching Practice**

#### **2.4.1 Teaching Modes**

Staff at BIITE are highly committed to the Institute and their students. Teaching and other student-related activities are clearly the main priority. Discussion with students reveals a high level of satisfaction with the academic staff and the teaching they receive.

Goal 1.3 refers to 'modes of delivery that support all students'. Over the years, BIITE has put in place unique systems for encouraging, supporting and educating students from remote Indigenous communities. This begins with remote area lecturers (Chapter 3) maintaining contact with communities, and academics being involved with students from the time they apply. It continues with the format of the educational activity, which is provided in intensive teaching blocks.

Students come to one of the Batchelor campuses for two-week intensive study periods called 'workshops'. Each student is expected to attend about four of these per semester. BIITE has an orientation towards students at a distance, but the predominant mode of education is not 'supported distance education (DE)' but 'supported face-to-face'. In an extreme case, a student with no practicum or work experience requirement can complete the course by the work done during the workshops. Conversely, few courses have the materials necessary for them to be offered totally by DE.

It cannot really be claimed that BIITE's mode of delivery supports all students. Firstly, the Audit Panel noted that there is a high level of attrition (see next paragraph), and BIITE needs to reduce this. The workshop block mode is actually high risk. If a student misses a workshop, s/he cannot easily catch up. Furthermore, attending four or five two-week blocks per semester may be very disruptive of the student's home and work commitments. There is a need to develop distance education materials for more of the courses. These could be used as the basis for the workshop

activities, and would be available as a backup to take other students through the same provision. There are now many more options for DE, including phones, email, CDs, bulletin boards, learning management systems, and so on. Currently, many BIITE staff do a lot of travelling, which is expensive in time and money, but it is still not retaining students at the desired rate. BIITE is beginning to talk to other institutions about collaboration on online learning.

Evidence for the failure of the BIITE strategies may be found in the Indigenous equity indicators. Access and Participation indicators for Indigenous students (or other equity groups) are defined by reference to the size of the total cohort. Since BIITE does not have any non-Indigenous enrolments, its Access and Participation rates are essentially the total number of enrolments (which have been falling since 1999). The Retention indicator is tracking below that of the NT and the whole sector, but moves from 0.43 in 2000 to 0.51 in 2004 (latest available figure). Nursing has higher retention than other areas, and BIITE is investigating this. The Success indicator is also tracking below that of the NT and the whole sector, and fell from 0.44 in 2000 to 0.37 in 2003 (latest available figure).

A second factor relating to the current mode of education is that it was devised with remote VTE students in mind. BIITE should reflect on who and where its HE students are. It is likely that few of the HE students are truly remote, and are therefore likely to have access to other resources. Interstate students interviewed by the Panel stated that they regularly use the resources of local libraries and those of their employer.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE investigate the possibility of developing (or adapting) more distance education materials, with the aim of increasing student retention and decreasing travel costs.**

#### 2.4.2 Teaching and Learning Development Committee

The Teaching and Learning Development (TLD) Committee is listed as a subcommittee of the AC. It was constituted in 2005 with the main focus of developing the Teaching and Learning Policy and addressing how 'both-ways' might be given practical effect. A subcommittee of the TLD Committee undertook the task of developing a systematic approach to student evaluation. The TLD Committee has responsibility for "the understanding and application of Institute philosophies", and the work on both-ways learning (section 2.1) is its major current task. After this work, it plans to address other matters in its terms of reference, such as innovations and capacity-building.'

As the TLD Committee swings into action, there is an opportunity to consider who has overall responsibility for monitoring and enhancing the quality of teaching. The quality of teaching is important to staff at BIITE, who appreciate advice and support from informal mentors. However, the aggregate outcomes of student evaluations and enhancement of teaching receive little explicit attention at institutional level. The TLD Committee may be an appropriate group to take on these roles.

#### 2.5 *Graduate Attributes*

BIITE has declared eight graduate attributes, including decision-making, teamwork, and multi-cultural orientation. As always with such holistic targets, it is necessary for an institution to have systems that ensure that every course developed takes them into account. These are meant to be embedded in course accreditation documents and course assessments, but knowledge of and attention to this is not widespread.

BIITE should be clear on the characteristics it expects of its graduates, and it may wish to revisit the currently declared attributes. If it reaffirms them (or a revised set) they should be systematically implemented.

## **2.6** *Articulation*

BIITE pays full attention to the concept of articulation between courses. In most fields there is a suite of courses that encourage the student right through VTE and into HE at diploma and degree level. One of the initial projects with CDU under the MoU is to identify pathways between VTE and HE and between the two institutions (the 'Pathways Project').

### 3 COMMUNITY AND ACCESS

The relevant Strategic Plan goals and objectives are as follows:

**Goal 6. Foster partnerships which engage the Institute in the life of its communities and contribute to the achievement of its goals.**

*Objectives*

- 6.1. *To encourage and support staff participation in community service.*
- 6.2. *To support planning and projects initiated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.*
- 6.3. *To promote inter-cultural communication and cross-cultural competencies.*
- 6.4. *To encourage outside bodies to contribute to the achievement of Institute goals.*
- 6.5. *To ensure the development and maintenance of mutually beneficial partnerships.*

Also:

**Goal 1. Education: provide education and training in accordance with the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from remote, rural and urban settings.**

*Objectives*

- 1.1 *To establish annual profiles that reflect the needs, contexts and requirements of (i) students; (ii) communities.*
- 1.2 *To develop curriculum relevant to students and communities*

BIITE is renewing its commitment to access and provision for remote communities, though there is not as much take-up of the options as the Institute would wish.

#### 3.1 Remote Area Operations

##### 3.1.1 Remote Area Operations Unit

BIITE has campuses at Batchelor and Alice Springs, annexes at Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Tennant Creek, six study centres (established by BIITE), a large number of learning centres (rooms leased by BIITE), and over 90 remote communities in total with which it maintains contact.

In December 2005, the former Regional Administration Unit (RAU) was reviewed. RAU had come to have a heavy responsibility for the state of the community study and learning centres and other facilities, and of the computers and other resources in the centres, with staff spending little time on educational matters or curricula. The review resulted in a decision to move RAU staff (renamed Remote Area Operations Unit: RAO) towards being 'educational brokers'. To assist this, BIITE has created and filled a position of 'Campus Manager (Remote)' to take over the attention to remote facilities, although the RAO staff still have a large number of administrative, facilities and resource responsibilities.

BIITE divides the NT into six regions for the purpose of RAO, and there is a remote lecturer (RL) in the Unit for each of the areas, reporting to the RAO Coordinator, based in Batchelor. The RLs spend a lot of time on the road, visiting over 90 communities, facilitating course delivery, meeting organisations to discuss training needs and how BIITE can fit in. The role is essentially that of marketing BIITE ("show your face and the numbers will grow") in a responsible way

(“don’t promise what can’t be delivered”) primarily for prospective VTE students. RLs file a report on every visit, report possible openings and prospective students back to the relevant school, and constantly update a community profiles database, to which all BIITE staff have read-only access. The database is a list of people in the community and their contact details, with other relevant information about the community. This is what is meant by the ‘community profiles’ (Goal 1.1).

To be of greatest value, there is a need for more systematic feedback on community education needs and research possibilities. Perhaps the RL roles need to be better defined in terms of their two-way responsibility to both BIITE and the communities.

### **Recommendation 7**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE strengthen the links between Remote Area Operations staff and the rest of the Institute so that relevant information is captured systematically and flows to those who are able to collate and use it.**

The Central Region RL has revived the Centralian provider network for collaboration between institutions in the Alice Springs area. This includes BIITE, CDU and others.

BIITE was over-extending itself by having RAO staff responsible for centres outside the NT, but is now cutting back. The Audit Panel commented that students interstate are mostly in larger centres that do not need the RAO type of attention. Two former RAO centres in Queensland are now the responsibility of the schools.

School lecturers have more of a responsibility for HE in the communities. BIITE’s approach of having the whole of a student’s contact via a single academic (section 2.4.1) has also meant that lecturers from the schools can travel great distances, including interstate, to make contact. AUQA urges BIITE to reconsider whether this is necessary or valuable.

#### 3.1.2 Community Consultation

The high priority given over the last couple of years to achieving university designation caused some attention to be turned away from serving the communities. This was exacerbated in late 2005 by a lack of staff, and consequently a reduction of over 30% in the number of visits undertaken. As part of the renewal this year, it was realised that this period of neglect must be offset by a special effort to reach out to the communities, and in mid-2005 the BIITE Council reaffirmed that BIITE’s priority is “to respond to the education and training needs of remote communities” (PF p28).

Over the period April to June 2006, there was a major community consultation, during which 20 communities were visited across five different regions of the NT by groups of four people (the RAO Coordinator, a Council member, a women’s representative, and the relevant RL). The consultation also involved 10 Indigenous organisations.

Issues emerging from the consultation include the following:

- Community leaders and employers are unsure why students leave their communities to study at BIITE, and would prefer community-based training and work-based training.
- Some elderly people would like to study, but do not want to fly.
- There is little demand for two or three year programs.
- A desire for a variety of delivery modes.
- Adequacy of staffing resources.

On the other hand, education provided totally in the home community (or even teacher practicums in the home community) gives students no 'inter-cultural communication and cross-cultural competencies' (Goal 6.3), although it may encourage students to stay in that community.

The community consultation has clearly recovered a good deal of goodwill for BIITE, as well as providing valuable data for development and initiatives in the immediate future.

#### **Commendation 4**

**AUQA commends BIITE for the thorough and valuable community consultation carried out this year.**

### **3.2 *General Community Relations***

BIITE is evidently committed to its various communities, and has a range of positive relations with them. Several of these relationships have improved during 2006 (see the comment in the previous section on the beneficial effects of the large-scale community consultation). There is a long list of staff community service work (Goal 6.1), and BIITE is meeting its aim of wide access. The community is very appreciative that the Institute libraries are open for, and indeed actively support, community use.

Traditional owners are involved in graduations and other ceremonies. Interaction with the local Coomalie Community Government Council has improved this year and BIITE's graduates employed by the Council were spoken of highly. The Council also expresses satisfaction with the community's access to the library and with collaboration on joint community projects.

#### **Commendation 5**

**AUQA commends BIITE for its extensive and positive relations with its various stakeholder communities.**

The communities appear to appreciate BIITE's interest, as people are positive about BIITE, although it is difficult to entice people in remote communities to provide feedback. Many communities are problematic, with no identifiable community voice, and it is not easy for BIITE to determine whom to talk to nor what best to put in courses. More work needs to be done to get and act on community input systematically. Conversely, because BIITE does not have unlimited resources, it must attempt to educate communities to understand their responsibilities if they want a service from BIITE.

Another partnership that has been a long time in coming is the Desert People's Centre, a joint venture with the Centre for Appropriate Technology and the NT Government in the Desert Knowledge Precinct on the edge of Alice Springs. This was due to be operating from January 2006, but administrative problems (outside BIITE's control) have caused delays. The new projected date is January 2008, with a reduced, less energy-efficient complex because of cost increases. BIITE will move its Alice Springs campus to the Precinct, and this should provide a good basis for significant collaborations.

## 4 RESEARCH AND SCHOLARSHIP

The relevant Strategic Plan goals and objectives are as follows:

### **Goal 3. Promote research and scholarship that contributes to broader knowledge within the Institute and wider community.**

#### *Objectives*

- 3.1. *To ensure that Institute research incorporates Indigenous research frameworks.*
- 3.2. *To foster a culture of research and publication across the Institute.*
- 3.3. *To promote partnerships in research and scholarship with other organisations and researchers.*
- 3.4. *Encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in setting Institute research directions, conduct of research and application of research outcomes.*
- 3.5. *To facilitate acquisition of research funding.*

(See also Goal 5, quoted in Chapter 1.)

BIITE is still at an incipient stage of achieving this goal. This Report recommends that BIITE reconsider and refocus it.

### **4.1 Research Structures**

In pursuit of Goal 3, BIITE has had a number of research structures. The Institute Research Ethics Committee (IREC) is a subcommittee of AC. IREC would be better titled the Institute Research **and** Ethics Committee as it combines the functions of a research committee and an ethics committee in a larger institution. This combination makes for some efficiency, and also recognises that almost all research carried out by BIITE would be the subject of human ethics considerations. However, there is also a certain measure of confusion (for example, one document is variously called the 'research policy' and the 'research and ethics policy'). A separate ethics process may assist in reflecting on ethics issues and addressing them separately from related financial considerations. A BIITE working party has recently identified some shortcomings in research- and ethics-related documents, and the necessary distinctions could be clarified in any new documents produced as the working party's recommendations are addressed.

The Research and Research Training Management Report for 2004 reports the establishment of the Interactive Distance Education and Research Centre, but this ceased just before the Audit Visit because of the resignation from BIITE of the main researcher in it. This event illustrates the precarious nature of a system with so much tied up in one person (which continues to be the case). The same Report states that BIITE "is establishing a Centre for Research in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Postgraduate Studies...to coordinate the research activity and postgraduate research". In 2005 it was decided that the desired aims would be better achieved by an entity that sits in the BIITE structure as an administrative division, rather than a research centre, and so the Academic and Research Division (A&R) was created to replace the Centre.

A&R has no terms of reference, and its activities are based on the job description of the Head of the Division (section 1.2.3), who was appointed in 2005. The Division has a staff of eight, including the Institute Quality Assurance Officer, the Head's Executive Assistant, a Curriculum Writer for the Master of Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and the Executive Officer of IREC. Nonetheless, the Portfolio makes the ambitious claim that the A&R staff are 'largely carrying out full-time research' (PF p37). An Indigenous researchers' network has been established.

BIITE has other research centres, in collaboration with other institutions, as for example the Desert Knowledge Cooperative Research Centre.

Goal 3.3 is to promote partnerships in research, and BIITE is doing this. However, because of the current strong pressure for research, it is not being very discriminating. It is currently the junior partner on several research grants. Criteria are needed for evaluating potential partners. These would include reference to BIITE's research strengths (next section). There should also be clear explicit objectives of each partnership, and a process for evaluating the achievements of the partnership from time to time.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE devise a process for evaluating the benefits and risks of research partnerships.**

See also the comments on this in section 4.3.

### **4.2 Research Culture**

Goal 3.2, to foster a culture of research and publication across the Institute, is high on BIITE's agenda. The A&R has been established, a research requirement is being progressively included in staff performance agreements, and courses are run for beginning researchers (to assist in acquiring grants: Goal 3.5). Staff feel themselves under pressure to conduct research but do not have the necessary time, and in some cases background, to move into research. The pressure may derive from the former emphasis on Goal 5 (university status) and could be reconsidered in the light of Council's decision to reduce this emphasis.

The Audit Panel noted some problems arising from the emphasis on Goal 3.2. Firstly, some (valuable but routine) administrative investigations are being described as research, which is actually counter-productive to BIITE's research image. Secondly, the strong pursuit of this goal is not augmenting BIITE's community commitment (Goal 6). Thirdly, the majority of BIITE's funding is as a VTE institution, and correspondingly many staff are VTE-only or both VTE and HE. Therefore, BIITE cannot expect everyone to do research, and there is little leeway in teaching funding to support research. Fourthly, BIITE has difficulty in attracting staff, and will have difficulty attracting many researchers.

As stated, the Goal is unlikely to be achieved, and BIITE's approach to research must be focused, strategic, manageable and sustainable if BIITE wishes to develop a research presence. BIITE needs to identify its actual and potential research strengths, taking into account community needs, postgraduate opportunities, and which areas (such as Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Indigenous Language and Linguistics) are strong in other institutions with Indigenous academics. Then, it needs to establish, develop and support a small high-quality research cell in these areas of strength.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE review its goal of research with a view to establishing a manageably small number of research pockets that support BIITE's other goals, and then plan strategically around these strengths.**

This will have implications for the direction of postgraduate development.

BIITE's major strength is in educating in a particular context, and staff are highly committed to this work. Staff are also heavily involved in administrative tasks (Chapter 5), and many feel overwhelmed by the thought of having to do research as well. There is a need for balance in staff commitments, and it is not conducive to BIITE's strong development to insist on unwilling staff

doing research. A more realistic aim for the culture of the whole Institute is to promote a culture of scholarship, with everyone active in their discipline. As mentioned earlier (section 1.2.1), the expected opening up of the non-university self-accrediting institution category could be very beneficial for BIITE.

It is hoped that an increase in research will enhance BIITE's income, but research activities usually need cross-subsidy in the form of infrastructure support.

### **4.3 *Indigenous Research***

There is no evidence that Goal 3.1 is being achieved. Just as with the uncertainty surrounding "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander paradigms in teaching", so there is no description of what is meant by "Indigenous research frameworks". The BIITE Portfolio suggests that "incorporating Indigenous research frameworks" is seen simply as a matter of Indigenous people doing research. This is of course an improvement over being the subject of research, as was mentioned by many of those interviewed by the Audit Panel, and this indeed may be the source of the pressure to do research.

There appears to be no formal or structured opportunities for staff to network with colleagues engaged in Indigenous research in universities. The inclusion of BIITE in a number of collaborative research projects appears to be the result of universities seeking to have an Indigenous partner in a research grant application. BIITE will need to ensure that it gets true benefits from these research collaborations.

Increasingly, prospective staff are told of the research expectations when they are interviewed, and Goal 3.4 on Indigenous participation in the control of BIITE research. The picture is confused by the very broad definition of research mentioned above, as the Goal can rather easily be achieved in those terms, but it would be a goal that had lost its value in terms of empowering Indigenous researchers.

However, community consultations have not picked up research desires in communities. To achieve this Goal more broadly (ie Indigenous people outside BIITE setting some of the research directions) BIITE needs to be more diligent in asking about community research needs, and needs a system for feeding this information into the Institute so it reaches the right destinations (cf section 3.1.1).

### **4.4 *Postgraduate Courses***

At present, BIITE has no postgraduate course, but is developing its first masters by research. As mentioned above, the Research and Research Training Management Report for 2004 reports the establishment of a Centre for Research in Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Postgraduate Studies, and foreshadows that BIITE's postgraduate courses will assist in advancing Indigenous Knowledge Systems. However, the three attributes of graduate students (over and above the 'graduate attributes' mentioned in section 2.5) include "advance Indigenous knowledges". The Audit Panel noted some confusion in the BIITE documentation and among staff regarding the title of the emerging masters by research, namely whether it is a 'Master of Indigenous Knowledges' or a 'Master of Indigenous Knowledge Systems'. BIITE needs to clarify its understanding and the consequent title.

The course has four special topics (totalling 25%) and a thesis (75%). Three of the special topics will be given face-to-face by a lecturer from James Cook University.

## 5 SUPPORT SERVICES

The areas described in this section do not feature explicitly in the Strategic Plan, but are enabling activities.

### 5.1 *Staff Support*

#### 5.1.1 Human Resources Unit

BIITE has over 300 staff and a larger number of casual staff. As far as possible, academic staff are recruited to teach in both HE and VTE, in multiple disciplines, and are paid at HE rates. If staff teaching VTE courses do not possess the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment when they are appointed, they are expected to obtain it within three months.

The staff area is overseen by the Human Resources Unit (HRU). The Portfolio reported a number of problems with this Unit, including an excessively long appointment process (particularly serious when BIITE has trouble attracting and retaining staff anyway), problems with the outsourced payroll, and most processes still being manual.

A staff survey on HRU's services raised a number of issues, including that HRU is not very client-focused. The survey results have yet to be fully analysed, but as an immediate response the HRU has provided enhanced information in a number of areas.

#### 5.1.2 New Staff

All members of selection panels are trained for the task. Some panels have external members. Staff report a good experience of induction, when they have received it. Unfortunately, its frequency is such that a staff member may be at BIITE for many months before they can attend it.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE make staff induction materials available online, and supervisors to be required to ensure that new staff access it within the first two weeks.**

The online provision should not be a complete replacement for in-person induction, which would be preferred if timely.

All new staff are also expected to attend a cross-cultural awareness course, and most staff interviewed by the Audit Panel had done so. It is a two-day program, given four times per year. The utility of the course was much criticised as not giving staff the practical knowledge they need to avoid pitfalls in operating with different cultures. Staff suggest that they need early, clear and practical information about how to handle themselves and interact with the Indigenous communities and that more attention be given to actual examples and handy hints and less to theoretical models. BIITE should ensure that the course is revised, and perhaps a new provider used. The course should also be made compulsory.

The Audit Panel was informed that BIITE is considering implementing a mentoring program. However, noting the size of BIITE, the Panel was of the view that this would not be necessary provided that supervisors (and new staff) take responsibility for ensuring that staff attend induction very early in their career at BIITE, and that the performance management system is used in a timely and thorough way.

### 5.1.3 Workloads

A full-time academic workload is specified in the Enterprise Agreement as 36.75 hours per week. In terms of teaching load, this is specified as a maximum number of units, EFTSL or actual hours of contact (AHC) for each lecturer level. A load exceeding this triggers a Workload Board of Review that reports to the Director. The specifications of workload should be included in a more nuanced workload policy.

#### **Recommendation 11**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE develop a comprehensive workloads policy that relates to the great range of tasks expected of BIITE staff.**

### 5.1.4 Planning

At present, less than 30% of staff are Indigenous with more than half at the lower levels of academic and general staff scales. BIITE has strategies to increase the total numbers and the number of Indigenous staff at higher levels. Unit Heads and Cost Centre Managers have to identify positions and consider whether the vacancy could be filled by an Indigenous person. BIITE may then advertise that only Indigenous people may apply. Advertisements are placed thoughtfully, eg in the *Indigenous Times*. For higher level positions, BIITE Council members are asked to circulate information about the positions within their own networks.

Selection panels must have at least one Indigenous member, and preferably 50%. Some time ago, Council decided that appointments should be the subject of affirmative action, but that the appointee must be one of the best applicants for the job. Attempts are made to place unsuccessful but credible applicants in other positions.

BIITE finds it difficult to get and keep staff. Currently there are about 40 vacant positions. This is a common problem in the Northern Territory, exacerbated by BIITE's location outside all major population centres. Most staff have been at BIITE for a long or short time (there are few in the middle ground). Nonetheless the Audit Panel met a good number of staff whose end-of-contract departure was imminent, and urges BIITE to be flexible in finding positions for good people who want to stay.

## 5.2 *Staff Progression*

Each year staff members have a performance management meeting with their supervisor at which a performance agreement is drawn up. The agreement will be the subject of an interim review mid-year, and full consideration at the end of the year. Most staff interviewed by the Audit Panel had experience of such meetings, but had mixed views of their value, with several seeing it as little more than a formality.

Professional development (PD) needs identified at these meetings are sent to HRU which will try to arrange either in-house or external training for needs identified for several staff, or arrange through individual supervisors for more individual needs. The level of staff attendance at PD workshops is high, with administrative staff more likely to attend than academics. This is probably because the majority of the workshops appear more general or administrative than academic. Also, staff do not see a strong link between what happened at a past performance management meeting, and a workshop later advertised by HRU (although the catalogue of courses for 2006 is well-presented and impressive). If the performance management system were better linked to PD, it would contribute more effectively to career development.

Overall, the PD structure needs to be more coherent. At present BIITE is working with a superseded 1997 written policy, with the updated system largely in people's heads. In terms of this policy and its updates, BIITE offers: the short course staff development program mentioned

above; Professional Development Assistance Program (funding study leave for a small number of people to upgrade qualifications); Individual Research and Scholarship Program (giving six weeks of paid leave on approval of the program by the head of school or division); and \$250 per staff member to the heads of school for conference attendance. A sustained PD program to enhance general management, IT and teaching skills could form one part of a revised PD structure and would help to improve the skills base and balance skills across BIITE. Staff should also have opportunities for career development within their areas of disciplinary expertise.

There is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Committee of Council that takes a particular interest in attempting to enhance the career pathways for Indigenous staff. There is an Indigenous staff development policy, but the Committee believes the implementation is weak. It is important for BIITE to maintain a good system of support and professional development of Indigenous staff.

### **Recommendation 12**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE review its various programs and schemes for supporting and assisting staff to progress through their careers, including targeted development for Indigenous staff.**

Student evaluations are required when an academic seeks promotion, but the evaluations could also be used to improve the effectiveness of the performance management and PD system. Feedback on staff often comes to the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) tutors, and this should also be passed on for performance management consideration through a formal feedback mechanism.

## **5.3 Student Systems**

### **5.3.1 Student Recruitment**

At BIITE, academics have a high level of involvement in the student recruitment processes. Lecturers go into communities and generate applications; the completed application forms are brought back to the school records officers who enter the data into Callista. When the student attends a workshop for the first time, s/he is enrolled by the lecturer. This heavy dependence on the lecturer has developed because of a perceived need by students (and their families) in remote communities for the student to have an identified close supporter in the Institute. The practice has a number of problems.

It sets up such a close relation between lecturer and individual students (reinforced by the nature of the workshop system) that academics may find it more difficult than normal to objectively assess the students. It is an expensive model, as lecturers may travel large distances to see a single student. It is probably an outdated paternalistic system, treating all students as if they were coming to education for the first time. Many interstate students are from large centres, such as Sydney, and do not need to be treated as if they were from a desert community of 300 people. Other universities are recruiting Indigenous students from interstate without adopting this expensive approach. There is a nationwide drop in the number of Indigenous HE students, but this resource-intensive approach does not seem advisable or effective. If more is needed, recruitment agents could be considered.

The current system appears to satisfy no-one: academics complain of the time spent, and administrators complain of errors and omissions. Centralising these operations would avoid multiple handling and gather more information in a usable form. If school lecturers do not carry out distant visits, it may be possible to have the remote support lecturers acquire the first piece of applicant information and put that into the BIITE system.

### **Recommendation 13**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE consider centralising the student application, admission and enrolment process to achieve economies of time and enhancement of function.**

#### 5.3.2 Student Support

Goal 1.4 is about students receiving appropriate information and advice, and the Audit Panel identified a number of gaps in this area. Because there is a high attrition rate, one of the most important pieces of information for students relates to the accrual of a Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) or Student Contribution Amount (SCA) debt. It is particularly serious that students may accumulate a debt for incomplete courses, as they have the debt but no corresponding qualification.

In the past, a lot of paperwork was done the first time a student attended a workshop. This would include enrolment forms and HECS (now SCA) forms. Student Support Services (SSS) was also invited to go and give workshops on HECS implications of withdrawal. Since decentralisation (see previous section), students do not necessarily get that information. SSS is aiming to set up an Admissions and Enrolments Office as a central area that students can come to for directions. Consideration is also being given to the introduction of a general student induction/orientation program.

Furthermore, since SSS does not process enrolments or withdrawals, it is not involved in issues relating to students withdrawing. The Counselling Service may learn that a student is planning to withdraw because s/he has visited the Student Travel Officer to say s/he wants to go home. Counselling then tries to identify the issue, and work on resolving things to encourage the student to continue.

#### **Affirmation 2**

**AUQA affirms BIITE's intention to introduce a one-stop shop for student admissions and enrolments and to introduce an orientation/induction for students on their first arrival at a Batchelor campus.**

This is particularly necessary for students arriving at campus for the first time and trying to find their way around the residences and the campus, perhaps after dark, when any staff who can help with problems have left.

#### 5.3.3 Travel

A major and unusual feature of student support at BIITE is student travel. With up to 250 students travelling to or from Batchelor and up to 100 students travelling to or from Alice Springs in any one week for workshops, plus staff travel and other incidentals, the student travel office makes on average 300-350 bookings a week, and up to 500 in some weeks. Because of the rate of non-attendance at workshops, the Office overbooks (like the airlines). Student complaints about overcrowding in the Batchelor campus residence probably relate to the last occasion, several years ago, when the residences were overbooked and more students arrived on campus than it is intended to accommodate.

The Audit Panel investigated whether such extensive travel arrangements are over-servicing, but decided that (given the workshop block mode) this is the only feasible option. (BIITE gets far better travel rates by organising its bookings than the average person, especially if they leave it to the last moment; and there is no problem with the possible misuse of funds.)

So the Office knows which students to book for, the lecturers have to provide travel lists. This is another administrative activity that lecturers find tedious. The problem is that there are so many factors that influence whether a particular student should or could come to a particular workshop that Callista cannot simply produce the lists.

Since Batchelor is 100km from Darwin on a fast sealed road, many staff live in Darwin and commute daily. BIITE provides a fleet of buses that arrive at 8.15am and depart at 4.15pm, which has implications for when someone might be around on campus. Academics are rostered to drive the buses and are responsible for refuelling them. This is another source of irritation for a number of academics.

#### 5.3.4 Student Complaints and Grievances

The 'Student Complaints and Grievance Resolution Rules', dating from 2000, are easily found on BIITE's website, together with a related set of 'Explanatory Notes'. Nonetheless, students have not found these procedures to be working well. BIITE has a specific grievance officer for external complaints (as it is required under the Australian Quality Training Framework) and a grievance procedure for staff (under the Enterprise Agreement), but the student grievance process in practice seems more ad hoc and fallible. Indeed, the major complaint of students interviewed by the Panel was that grievances and complaints remained unaddressed until the level of complaint has been escalated.

AUQA suggest that BIITE nominate a specific student complaints officer, and maintain a complaints/grievance register. This will enable BIITE to ensure that complaints are addressed, and it will enable BIITE to identify frequency and patterns of problems (and it will tell the good news of complaints being resolved).

#### **Recommendation 14**

**AUQA recommends that BIITE review its student grievance and related feedback procedures to ensure that complaints are recorded and dealt with expeditiously and that other input from students is treated seriously and responded to openly.**

BIITE would like more student involvement in committees, but this is difficult when students are on campus for only short (and very busy) periods. BIITE needs to find effective ways of hearing the student voice. Reference to making greater use of student evaluations was made in section 5.2, and an enhanced complaints procedure would also help. Students should also be informed more systematically of actions that have been taken on student evaluations.

One student suggested that BIITE might consider having a bookshop/stationery store on the Batchelor campus.

#### 5.4 *Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Service (ITAS)*

BIITE has \$1m p.a. from DEST for ITAS, 85% being spent on the academic activity, and only, 15% on administration. The reasons for not acceding to a request for an ITAS tutor are unavailability of an appropriate tutor or a judgment that the student will not benefit. Funding has not been a reason (though exorbitant requests are not met, eg flying to remote locations).

There are 67 ITAS tutors, of whom 16 are Indigenous. There has been a determined effort to recruit Indigenous tutors over the last nine months. ITAS tutors are casual staff, and are currently on contracts until 2009, though only paid for actual hours worked. A Course Monitoring Committee report of August 2005 says 'address ITAS problems as soon as possible', and the Audit Panel investigated the reason and the action.

A new ITAS Coordinator was appointed in August 2005 to address the problems. When contacted by BIITE to do some tutoring, ITAS tutors are supposed to receive a worksheet at least a week before the tutoring event, detailing the student, course, lecturer, and various employment-related information. These had been arriving a couple of months later. Also, tutors found the ITAS staff unresponsive and unhelpful. The system was quickly revised, and feedback from late in 2005 about the ITAS system was uniformly positive.

#### **Commendation 6**

**AUQA commends BIITE for identifying and rectifying problems with the implementation of the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme.**

## 6 RESOURCES AND FACILITIES

The relevant Strategic Plan goals and objectives are as follows:

**Goal 2. Provide effective management of resources that enables the Institute to be a capable, performing, accountable and just organisation.**

### *Objectives*

- 2.1. *To develop and implement a framework for effective and accountable management of resources across the Institute.*
- 2.2. *To establish and maintain effective analysis, forecasting and planning processes for the Institute.*
- 2.3. *To enable all employees to contribute to the organisation and management of work.*
- 2.4. *To facilitate the achievement of School, Division and work unit goals through the provision of sufficient and effective support services.*
- 2.5. *To ensure the Institute is equipped to pursue continuous improvement in a changing environment.*

Achievement of objectives 2.1 and 2.2 has been modest, but the other objectives are closer to achievement.

### 6.1 *Finance*

It is noteworthy that BIITE has specific goals relating to the management of finance and facilities. This puts a heavy responsibility on the heads of these areas. The recent restructure creating the new Finance & Infrastructure Division is a good step, giving a more cohesive operation and better alignment of specialist areas, eg a separate Asset Management Unit and a plan for more coherent support of the facilities to be implemented gradually over the next few years.

Despite there being only two schools, the cost centre management is decentralised. The Audit Panel was informed that some managers had shown a lack of responsibility in the former highly centralised system, with irresponsible spending. There are now procedures and incentives for managers to be more precise in their budgeting and spending. They are monitoring the budgets more closely and putting pressure on staff not to seek funds unnecessarily.

The division of expenditure is roughly 60:40: administration:academic. The main reasons for this is the 'away-from-base' money. The total of student travel and staff travel for teaching is \$9m per year. The administration costs also include a lot of work that is often outsourced, such as cleaning, catering, etc. There are gaps between what some students want and what BIITE can provide on government funding, eg basic English teaching.

The budget model is formula plus bids, and the Panel investigated whether this allowed for effective institutional planning. The controls to achieve this are through a thrice-yearly review of the budget. Senior Management does not allow more funding to be allocated unless there is evidence of achievements from previous allocations.

### 6.2 *Facilities*

The Audit Panel was aware that BIITE has a large number of facilities to manage and many are very remote from its main campuses at Batchelor and Alice Springs. The Panel acknowledges the difficulties in managing remote sites some of which are subject to the harsh elements of the

outback. However, the Audit Panel heard a range of complaints about facilities, including facilities at its main campuses.

A major area of student concern and complaint is the residences at the Batchelor campus, primarily the lack of air-conditioning in many rooms, broken fittings and various gaps in security. Again, students perceive a lack of action on the problems, though the Panel acknowledges the difficulties posed by frequently-used buildings that are reaching the end of their usable life, and BIITE is beginning to address these issues.

The age and construction of buildings is also an issue at the Alice Springs campus, where maintenance planning has been made more difficult by the continual deferral of action on the Desert Peoples' Centre, which was originally promised by the NT Government for January 2006. At some remote sites the equipment is in poor condition, the facilities have deteriorated, the responsibility has been fragmented, and academic staff have been responsible for facilities maintenance.

The appointment of the Campus Manager (Remote) is already proving beneficial, as he is checking leases, organising work orders, inspections, etc.

### **6.3 Library**

The main library collection is in Batchelor with a smaller collection in Alice Springs and resources in about 20 study centres. The study centre collections are checked occasionally by the RLs and perhaps surprisingly few items go missing.

The Library does not have collection targets: it bids for money and then manages that. Senior Management of BIITE has been very supportive and over the last 15 years has increased the funds to the Library to change it from a mediocre secondary school collection to a good quality HE one.

Lecturers arrange with the Library for induction for their students, who are usually brought to the Library in the first week of semester. The Library discusses with the lecturer the type of library induction needed for the particular course, eg how to use the Internet, how to use databases, etc.

The Library has a member on the Accreditation, Admissions and Progressions Subcommittee (AAP) so is alerted to what courses are being developed when the accreditation documents reach AAP. Then the Library gets the references required. The Library is not involved in the Course Development Committees, but could usefully be involved in the curriculum writing process. Generally 20% of curriculum resources recommended are out of date or unavailable, and if the Library were involved in curriculum development, this advice could be provided at the right time.

The Library should be more centrally involved at the stage of course development to ensure that it can plan for the needed resources. It would then be better able to diversify its holdings to reflect the uniqueness of BIITE, including local, grey (not commercially published) literature and comparative titles.

The BIITE Act requires the Institute to "provide library and other educational facilities for use by the public". As remarked earlier, the community is highly appreciative that the Batchelor Library is open to them. The main Batchelor Library also services the Batchelor Area School.

The Library is also linked to the wider community through LINNet, the NT library network. This facilitates access to resources. The Library has enough online resources at present, but developments in research and in postgraduate study would require a significant upgrading.

### **Commendation 7**

**AUQA commends BIITE for its commitment to the development of the Library collection and for ensuring public access to library resources.**

#### **6.4 Information & Communications Technology (ICT)**

The Audit Panel found that the ICT section is providing an efficient service. All the computers are phased out after four years, and given to local communities and schools. BIITE currently has a working group evaluating a couple of management systems. It will recommend a decision to the Senior Management Committee, and ICT will implement it. As with the library, if ICT could be involved at an early stage of system discussion, it could provide useful advice on which system is most compatible with the existing BIITE network. ICT has not had input into the discussion of learning management systems either. New systems are considered and recommended by a subcommittee of the Communications and Technology Committee.

ICT provides orientation programs for students, one-to-one if possible.

The study centres have computer labs which are available to the local communities, again showing BIITE's support of the community. Maintenance of these is difficult, and a lot of travelling is involved for ICT staff. The NT infrastructure is an issue, for example the quality of telephone lines and the lack of ADSL facilities. Only recently has IDSL been in place in Gove or Tennant Creek.

### **Commendation 8**

**AUQA commends BIITE's Information and Communications Technology Section, in particular for the provision and support of computer laboratories in remote communities, and for working with the academics on e-learning.**

#### **6.5 SPARC**

The Specialised Publications and Academic Resource Centre (SPARC) is a diverse, small unit of BIITE. Until the recent restructure, it did more research and teaching. It is now trying to find a coherent role. Its current activities include development of teaching and learning resources (instructional design and templates for teaching for internal and external clients eg NT Government); design of publications and promotions, uniforms, teaching resources; printery; audio-visual, supporting the Indigenous Media Unit; workshops; Style Manual, copyright and IP, preparation of documents for pre-press; *Ngoonjook* (biannual journal) and *BiiteN* (internal biannual journal).

Batchelor Press, a unit within SPARC, is self-funded and has no staff, but its services are in demand. People want the imprint and will pay for vanity publishing. Publishing enquiries come from all around Australia, with a good deal of interest in Indigenous languages. Institute restrictions make it difficult for the Press to be commercial at present. SPARC needs to be more clearly integrated into BIITE.

### **Recommendation 15**

**AUQA recommends to BIITE that SPARC write a mission statement and a business plan and that it form agreements with schools for the services it can provide.**



## APPENDIX A: BATCHELOR INSTITUTE OF INDIGENOUS HIGHER EDUCATION

### History and Location

Batchelor, named after a former Surveyor-General of South Australia, is 100km south of Darwin on the road to Litchfield National Park. It is a small community of 400 people, so the Institute and its students in residence at any time more than double that.

Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE) began as a small annexe of Kormilda College - then a government boarding school for Aboriginal school students on the outskirts of Darwin - in the mid-1960s. The annexe provided short programs for Aboriginal teacher aides and assistants in community schools. From 1974 these programs were conducted at Batchelor and in 1982 the institution was named Batchelor College. The Commonwealth Government recognised Batchelor College as a higher education institution in 1988 and in 1990 a second campus was established in Alice Springs. Later that year, annexes were opened in Darwin, Nhulunbuy, Katherine and Tennant Creek.

An independent evaluation by a team from the University of Western Sydney in 1994 recommended the College move towards independent university status. As a first step in this direction, the College was granted agency status within the Northern Territory Public Sector in 1995. This was followed in 1999 by the establishment of the Institute to replace the College, with the institution's governance passing to the Institute Council.

With this development, BIITE became the first Indigenous institution in Australia offering courses in both the higher education (HE) and Vocational and Technical Education (VTE) sectors.

### Academic Profile

BIITE has two academic schools, namely Education, Arts & Social Science and Health, Business & Science. The school structure integrates the VTE and HE provision, providing a range of professional, para-professional and preparatory courses to an enrolment of about 3000 students, with over 2000 of these in VTE.

About 15% of BIITE's enrolment comes from interstate, and this is in HE. The other 25% of the enrolment that is in HE is from the Northern Territory.

### Key Statistics 2005

		HE	VTE
Total Student Enrolments (as at November, 2005):		750	2176
Total Student Teaching Load (targets)		498 EFTSL	473,000 AHC
Total Staff FTE (excluding casual staff) as at 30.8.06:	Academic:	152	
	General:	194	
	Total:	346	
Total Operating Revenues (2004):		18,364,000	16,659,000
Total Operating Expenses (2004):		16,085,000	19,099,000

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

### Mission

By means of quality audits of universities and accrediting agencies, and otherwise, AUQA will provide public assurance of the quality of Australia's universities and other institutions of higher education, and will assist in improving the academic quality of these institutions.

### Objectives

1. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of quality assurance arrangements relating to the activities of Australian universities, other self-accrediting institutions and state and territory higher education accreditation bodies.
2. Monitor, review, analyse and provide public reports on quality assurance arrangements in self-accrediting institutions, 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 higher education 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 higher education system and its quality assurance processes, including their international standing, as a result of information obtained during the audit process.

### Values

AUQA will be:

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

## Vision

- AUQA's judgements will be widely recognised as objective, fair, accurate, perceptive, rigorous and useful: AUQA has established detailed and effective procedures for audit, that include auditor appointment and training, extensive and thorough investigation, and consistent implementation.
- AUQA will work in partnership with institutions and accrediting agencies to add value to their activities: AUQA audit is based on self-review, acknowledges the characteristics of the institution or agency being audited, and accepts comment from the auditee on the best way of expressing the audit findings.
- AUQA's advice will be sought on matters related to quality assurance in higher education: AUQA will carry out consulting activities, including workshops, publications, and advising, and will publish and maintain a database of good practice.
- AUQA will be recognised among its international peers as a leading quality assurance agency: AUQA will build international links to learn from and provide leadership to other agencies, and will work with other agencies to the benefit of Australian institutions.

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

Professor Larissa Behrendt, Director, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology, Sydney

Emeritus Professor Colin Bourke, Professorial Fellow, Monash University, Victoria

Professor Robyn Quin, Executive Dean, Faculty of Communications and Creative Industries, Pro Vice Chancellor, Teaching & Learning, Edith Cowan University, WA (Panel Chair)

Professor Nasila Rembe, Chairholder UNESCO "Oliver Tambo" Chair of Human Rights, University of Fort Hare, South Africa

Dr David Woodhouse, Executive Director, AUQA, Melbourne

## APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

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

A&R .....	Academic and Research Division
AAP .....	Accreditation, Admissions and Progressions Subcommittee
AC .....	Academic Committee
Act .....	<i>Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education Act 1999</i>
AHC .....	actual hours of contact (in VTE)
AUQA .....	Australian Universities Quality Agency
BIITE.....	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
BIITE Act.....	<i>Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education Act 1999</i>
CDU .....	Charles Darwin University
CMC.....	Course Monitoring Committee
DE.....	distance education
DEET.....	NT Department of Employment, Education and Training
DEST .....	Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training
EFTSL .....	equivalent full-time student load
FTE.....	full-time equivalent
HE.....	higher education
HECS.....	Higher Education Contribution Scheme (replaced by SCA q.v.)
HRU .....	Human Resources Unit
ICT .....	information & communications technology
ISDL.....	ISDN Digital Subscriber Line
Institute.....	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education
IREC.....	Institute Research Ethics Committee
ITAS .....	Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme
LINNet .....	Libraries in the Northern Territory Network
MCEETYA.....	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
MoU .....	Memorandum of Understanding
NT.....	Northern Territory
PD.....	professional development
PF p .....	Performance Portfolio page reference
Performance Portfolio,	
Portfolio.....	Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education Performance Portfolio
PPS .....	Policy Planning and Secretariat Division
RAO .....	Remote Area Operations
RAU .....	Regional Administration Unit

- RL..... remote lecturer
- SAIs ..... self-accrediting institutions
- SCA ..... Student Contribution Amount (replaces HECS fees q.v.)
- SPARC ..... Specialised Publications and Academic Resource Centre
- SSS ..... Student Support Services
- Territory..... Northern Territory
- TLD ..... Teaching and Learning Development
- VTE ..... Vocational and Technical Education



