

AUSTRALIAN
UNIVERSITIES
QUALITY AGENCY

**Report of an Audit of
The University of Canberra**

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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

AGRECON	A University-related entity which specialises in applications of satellite imagery and other spatial data for agricultural and environmental resource management.
ARS	Areas of Research Strength
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CELT5	Centre for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Scholarship
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire (GCCA and UC)
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CIT	Canberra Institute of Technology
CQAHE	Committee for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (1993-1995)
DAR(s)	Divisional Annual Review(s)
DBT(s)	Divisional Business Team(s)
DEC(s)	Divisional Education Committee(s)
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
FDDU	Flexible Delivery Development Unit
DRIE(s)	Divisional Research Institute Executive(s)
EFTSU	Equivalent Full Time Student Unit: A measure of student numbers for funding purposes
FDSU	Flexible Delivery Support Unit
FTE	Full-Time Equivalent: A measure to determine staff numbers
FYE	The University of Canberra's First Year Experience survey
GCCA	Graduate Careers Council of Australia (see CEQ & GDS)
GDS	Graduate Destinations Survey (GCCA)
GSS	Generic Skills Scale (CEQ)
HDC	Higher Degrees Committee
HDR	Higher degree by research
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
LRC(s)	Learning Resource Centre(s)
NATSEM	National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling
OSIS	Online Student Information System
PF	The University of Canberra's audit portfolio
QA	Quality Assurance: arrangements designed to ensure quality (as defined by auditee)
QAC	Quality Advisory Committee
QAF	The University of Canberra's Quality Assurance Framework
QTF	Quality Teaching & Learning Framework
RBIC	Royal Brisbane International College
RRTMP/R	Research and Research Training Management Plan/Report
UC	University of Canberra
UCBC	University of Canberra Brisbane Campus
UFLC	University Flexible Learning Committee
URC	University Research Committee
VCAC	Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee
VCSAC	Vice-Chancellor's Student Advisory Committee

OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

In 2002, AUQA appointed an Audit Panel to undertake an academic audit of the University of Canberra (UC) as the first scheduled for 2003.

This Report provides an overview, and then the details of the Audit Panel's findings, commendations, and recommendations. A brief introduction to the University of Canberra is given in Appendix A; the objects of AUQA are shown in Appendix B; and membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix C.

The Audit Panel wishes to thank the University of Canberra for the high level of cooperation it provided at all stages of the audit process, including the visits to its two campus locations, and especially to thank the PVC (Academic) and the Vice-Chancellor's Executive Officer for providing access to supplementary documentation requested by the Panel and coordinating development of the program for the Audit Visit at the University's end. The insight provided by those who managed and facilitated the process and the openness of all those who actively participated in the audit sessions is gratefully acknowledged.

The Audit Process

AUQA bases its audits on each organisation's own objectives, together with the MCEETYA National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes. The major aim of the audit is to consider and review the processes an organisation has in place to monitor and achieve its objectives and the outcomes being achieved. Full details of the AUQA audit process are available in the AUQA Audit Manual available at <http://www.auqa.edu.au>.

On 16 December, 2002 UC submitted a Quality Assurance and Improvement Performance Portfolio and supporting documentation, describing its strategic directions and the range of mechanisms it has in place and is developing to monitor the achievement of objectives and assure and enhance quality across its core activities. The Audit Panel met on 24 January, 2003 to consider these materials. Description rather than analysis was a distinguishing characteristic of the UC Portfolio as the University focused on details of its development and the adoption of its new Quality Assurance Framework. It also became clear that although UC's activities offshore are quite diverse, they were not yet sufficiently developed at any one offshore location to warrant a separate visit being made by the Audit Panel. Instead, the Panel factored consideration of offshore quality assurance into its deliberations on International Education, and held a teleconference with a sample of the University's international offshore partners.

The Audit Panel decided that it would visit the newly opened University of Canberra Brisbane Campus (UCBC). The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a preparatory visit to UC Bruce Campus in Canberra on 12 February, 2003. During that visit, clarification of a number of items was effected, additional information was sought and obtained, and arrangements for the audit visit were finalised. The Panel Chair and AUQA Audit Director visited UCBC on 7 March 2003 and met a range of students and staff.

Following the Preparatory Visit, the Audit Visit took place from 18 to 21 March 2003, with several members of the Panel undertaking a tour of the Bruce Campus on 18 March, and for the next three days the Audit Panel was based at the Bruce Campus.

In all, the Audit Panel met in excess of 260 people during the Audit Visit, including the senior management, academic staff, general and technical staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students (including domestic, international, residential and Canberra-based), external representatives from the University Council, and representatives from the ACT, the regional community and the professions that

the University serves. Organisational arrangements for the visit were very capably handled and the members of staff responsible deserve commendation. Sessions were also made available for any member of the University community to meet with the Audit Panel, and ten people took the opportunity to do this.

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

This Report has taken as its primary structure the main sections of the University's Performance Portfolio, which themselves are based on the categories of the University's recently adopted Quality Assurance Framework. The Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 21 March 2003, and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently.

CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Findings

The AUQA audit of the University of Canberra (UC) is against the objectives that it had set for itself in its current Strategic Plan (1999-2003) and the information and data provided to the Agency in the Performance Portfolio assisted this task. However, the Portfolio follows the University's recently adopted Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for its structure. Consequently, the Audit Panel's investigation followed this structure and it provides the structure for this Report. This arrangement highlights the University's emergent approach to quality assurance through the QAF, teaching & learning, research & research training, community relations, human resources, and student support services & information management. Consideration is also given to the establishment of the new UC campus in Brisbane.

Concerning the new QAF, the Audit Panel considers from evidence that UC has moved from a culture of conducting reviews either ad-hoc or for routine annual reporting, to adopting a much more systematic and robust 'quality managed' approach. AUQA concludes that as an emergent system, the QAF holds considerable promise, and could provide the University with a distinctive and potentially powerful approach to whole-of-organisation quality assurance and enhancement. However, implementation of the QAF, and especially the new *Prospective Evaluation* process, holds some important implications for the Academic Board's role in academic quality assurance.

The Audit Panel decided to visit the University of Canberra Brisbane Campus (UCBC) as a new strategic initiative. As this venture is in its very early stage, the Audit Panel makes a general observation, but does not think it appropriate to make any *explicit* commendation or recommendation.

In relation to Teaching and Learning, the University is commended for its efforts to deliver professional education in a professional manner, and for creating a supportive and nurturing learning and teaching environment. However, AUQA gives recommendations of the need to re-establish course advisory committees across the curriculum, the need for improvement in the collection of student feedback and the implementation of improvement actions, the rewarding of good practice in student support, and the need for further attention to strategic priorities in International Education.

For Research and Research Training, the University is commended for encouraging early researchers, and for the development of Research Learning Plans. However, AUQA also recommends that the University pay further attention to the classification of 'active researchers', 'areas of research strength', 'research', 'commercial research', and 'consultancy', as well as to the handling of complaints relating to supervision, and the allocation of resources for research training.

As far as Community Relations is concerned, the UC Council is commended for its positive engagement with both the University and local communities, and to the University for developing harmonious and mutually beneficial relationships with the ACT and region.

Under Human Resources, the work of the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Scholarship is highly commended, but AUQA recommends that more attention is required to improve the University's overall HR performance management system.

Student Services are commended for their contributions as are the Academic Skills Program and the *Ngunnawal* Centre, while the Dean of Students and the International Office are identified as areas where the University needs to invest more resources. The University itself had already identified the Library and Information Management as areas in need of improvement and the AUQA Audit Panel concurs with these self-review findings.

Commendations

1. AUQA commends the University of Canberra Council for its diversity of expertise and the relationships established with the local and regional community, the close links developed with the ACT Government, and the level of positive interaction with the University community..... 12
2. AUQA commends the University of Canberra for developing the Quality Assurance Framework and the generally positive impact that this approach is starting to have in helping organisational units to focus more clearly on identifying relevant quality assurance and improvement targets..... 13
3. AUQA commends the University of Canberra for setting for itself a mission to deliver ‘professional education professionally’ and for achieving distinctive recognition in its chosen markets for effective performance in the pursuit of this mission..... 20
4. AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the overall level of care that it displays in providing a supportive, inclusive, and nurturing learning and teaching environment for its students, both local and residential, and domestic & international..... 23
5. AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the importance it gives to activities designed to support and to encourage early researchers..... 29
6. AUQA commends the University of Canberra for being sensitive to the needs of its higher degree students and for responding to concerns expressed by students about the need to improve research training, and in particular for developing Research Learning Plans..... 30
7. AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the harmonious and mutually beneficial community relationships it has developed with the ACT and rural NSW..... 32
8. AUQA commends the University of Canberra’s Centre for the Enhancement of Learning Teaching and Scholarship and its support of academic development, research supervision, innovative teaching & learning, using flexible learning, the use of WebCT for online development, and, for its induction programs for newly appointed academic staff..... 35
9. AUQA commends the University of Canberra’s Academic Skills Program, for the consistently high regard in which its services are held by students..... 37
10. AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the services provided to Indigenous students through the *Ngunnawal* Centre..... 38
11. AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the effective use it is making on a relatively limited budget of information and communication technology..... 40

Recommendations

1. That the roll-out of all Tactical Plans across all organisational units at the University of Canberra be closely monitored, to ensure that the objectives of the full range of Tactical Plans are being addressed in the Annual Operational Plan of each unit, especially those with university-wide or Divisional functional responsibilities..... 14
2. That the University of Canberra review the role, membership and terms of reference of the Academic Board, and in the light of the increased devolution of responsibility for academic quality assurance to other bodies described in the Portfolio, consider strategies for involving the Board earlier, and more formally, in the Prospective Evaluation process..... 15
3. That the University of Canberra consider the implications of all the recommendations made in this Report, as they apply to the University of Canberra Brisbane Campus..... 18
4. That the University of Canberra ensure there is adequate external input into the monitoring of all courses, perhaps by establishing course advisory committees covering all areas of the curriculum..... 20
5. That the University of Canberra pay further attention to ensuring that there is more consistent collection of student feedback data on subjects, courses, teaching effectiveness, and the quality of student support services across all areas, and that it establish a clearer identification of the responsibilities of ‘process owners’ to improve the implementation and reporting of actions in response to feedback, especially to external course stakeholders..... 22
6. That the University of Canberra more explicitly identify and reward the best practice areas of service provision in order to provide performance benchmarks and assist the promotion of a more consistent approach to student support..... 23
7. That the University of Canberra pay special attention to reviewing the financial viability and strategic directions of its existing and any new off-shore initiatives, and that the University communicate to relevant stakeholders its planned path, scale and ultimate profile for the further development of its International Education program..... 25
8. That the ‘Active Researcher’ classification categories at the University of Canberra be tightened by paying closer attention to the comparability of sub-category requirements and the entry level requirements, especially at Researcher Classification Levels 1&2..... 27
9. That the University of Canberra take steps to resolve an apparent tension between its chosen developmental strategy of encouraging commercial research capacity on a relatively broad front, while simultaneously cultivating niche areas of national and international research competitiveness..... 28
10. That there be a clearer definition of, and differentiation between, ‘research’, ‘commercial research’ and ‘consultancy’ at the University of Canberra, as distinctive categories for the prioritisation of research activity..... 28
11. That the University of Canberra use its surveys, learning plans, and its revised version of the ‘Gold Book’ to signal clear, consistent and confidential complaint reporting pathways for research students, which will allow them to report issues confidently and without fear of prejudice to any future study opportunities; and use its revised version of the ‘Gold Book’ to assure consistency in the quality of supervision and consider upgrading the standards of facilities and support for doctoral researchers..... 30
12. That the University of Canberra ensure there is greater transparency in the allocation of resources across categories and areas of research, especially by more clearly differentiating between honours and HDR student entitlements..... 30

13. That the University of Canberra identify a consistent way of addressing poor performance as the current way of dealing with performance management appears not to be consistent across the University, across all courses, and across all forms of academic work generally.....34
14. That the induction process with general and academic staff at the University of Canberra be improved and made more consistent at the organisational unit level, and that consideration be given to offering the CELTS university-wide Induction Program more frequently, at least each semester.....34
15. That the University of Canberra exercise caution that it is not inadvertently encouraging excessive workforce casualisation through its workforce management practices.....35
16. That all student service providers at the University of Canberra continue exploring opportunities for greater synergy and complementarity between their efforts; and that in particular there be improved collaboration between the Divisional Learning Resource Centres and other student support services.....37
17. That the University of Canberra's International Office consult more closely with existing and new International students to enhance the responsiveness of its services to meet the expressed needs of students. The University should ensure that it has the capacity to meet student needs should International student numbers continue to grow.....38
18. That ways be developed at the University of Canberra to provide a level of service to meet both the needs of domestic students, and the expected increase in the number of International students at both the Bruce and UCBC campuses.....38
19. That the University of Canberra consider restoring the Dean of Students to a full-time position, to ensure that student issues can be dealt with proactively.....38
20. That further consideration be given to the adequacy of the match of the University of Canberra's Library collection to the courses taught, and the catalogue, and to access issues associated with increased downloading by students, especially doctoral researchers, of electronic resources and that these be attended to by the University as a priority.....39
21. That the University of Canberra's plans to provide back up for ICT system security and disaster recovery be addressed as a matter of urgency.....40

1 ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

1.1 *Organisational Overview*

The University of Canberra (UC) was established by the Commonwealth Government in 1967 as the Canberra College of Advanced Education, and became a university on 1 January 1990 when the University of Canberra Act (1989) came into effect. The University passed to the jurisdiction of the government of the Australian Capital Territory on 1 December 1997. These origins and the change in jurisdiction in part explain the strong ACT regional focus of the University, and the close links it has developed with the local and surrounding community. The University is located in the suburb of Bruce, about eight km from the Canberra CBD. In 2003 the University of Canberra Brisbane Campus (UCBC) accepted its first students, with a commencing enrolment of about 40 students.

In 2002 the University had an enrolment of just over 9000 effective full-time higher education students, the bulk of whom were enrolled in bachelor degree programs, with 17.5 per cent enrolled in postgraduate courses. The student profile is characterised by a significant majority of full-time enrolments; a smaller majority of students aged under-25; and, due in part to sizable numbers enrolled in Teaching and in Nursing, more females than males. The University also had a sizable enrolment of international students (16.2% of the student body born overseas), accepting students from 92 countries. The University offers courses off shore at a number of locations in Asia: Singapore, Hong Kong, and China in particular.

At the time of the Audit Visit UC courses were being administered by fourteen Schools, organised into three Academic Divisions: Communication and Education; Management and Technology; and Science and Design. There are also two Administrative Divisions: Client Services and Corporate Services.

1.2 *Context for Audit*

The current UC Strategic Plan has been in place since 1999 and the Audit Panel considered the University's performance against the objectives of that plan. Since 1999 the University has also been reorganised into a broad divisional structure (from a faculty-based one) creating Schools within the Academic Divisions as the prime academic organisational units. In the twelve months prior to the audit there had been considerable turnover in the senior management team, with the Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and two Pro Vice-Chancellors being newly appointed.

In terms of quality assurance and enhancement, the Portfolio describes a transition from the former 'bureaucratic and formalistic' Faculty Reviews, to Divisional Annual Reviews (DARs). DARs were introduced in 1999, but by 2002 it was decided to replace them, and a new approach, described as the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) was adopted. The nature and value of the QAF as an approach to quality assurance and enhancement are considered in the sections that follow.

Parallel to these developments, the Portfolio states that, 'Council delegated to the Vice-Chancellor the authority to approve new courses, and the Academic Board authority to accredit them, after due consideration' (PFp5). It also describes how 'the Academic Board devolved to Schools more responsibility for quality assurance. A new set of procedures for course development and quality assurance was approved by Academic Board in 1999.' (PFp5)

It is important that these contextual factors be borne in mind when considering the Audit Panel's findings in relation to the University's adoption of the QAF, and especially the place of academic quality assurance within the broader University-wide quality framework.

1.3 *Council and Quality*

The University of Canberra Act appears to give its Council a distinctive role as the governing authority, by charging it with 'the entire management of the University'. However the Audit Panel was advised by senior management that in reality this referred to Council's role in providing effective leadership at the strategic level, rather than involving itself in management at an operational level. The Panel spoke with the Chancellor, the Deputy Chancellor, and six external Councillors and noted positively the diversity of the attributes they bring to the University. The Panel commends Council's enthusiasm and positive engagement with the University, especially in relation to cementing relationships with the ACT community and government, and for their close interaction with stakeholders within the University.

Commendation 1

AUQA commends the University of Canberra Council for its diversity of expertise and the relationships established with the local and regional community, the close links developed with the ACT Government, and the level of positive interaction with the University community.

The Panel also reviewed a Self-Assessment completed by the Council in 2002. The Self-Assessment had been thorough and had led to changes in Council operation. The Panel also learned that the University's strategic decision to establish a campus of the University in Brisbane had strong support from Council. The contribution of Council to the University's community relations mission is also commented on in the Community Relations section of this Report (p31).

1.4 *The Quality Assurance Framework*

Following the structural and management developments outlined in the context section above (p11), the University embarked on the wholesale overhaul of its approach to the assurance and enhancement of quality, through the adoption in 2002 of an integrated suite of plans and monitoring and review processes. The key elements of the new framework are described in the Portfolio in the following terms:

'Briefly, the University's quality processes depend on the establishment of an integrated system, involving the following elements:

- *Strategic planning;*
- *A data analysis and feedback loop which will include a range of input and output indicators, including the use of McKinnon-Walker benchmarks;*
- *Achievement analysis against these indicators; and*
- *Resource allocation which will include a performance component.'* (PFp7)

These translate into adoption of the following approach:

- *The University's Strategic Plan* – the current Strategic Plan covers the period from 1999 to 2003. The Vice-Chancellor has signalled the development of a new Strategic Plan as one of the University's priorities for 2003;
- *Rolling five-year Tactical Plans* focusing on key activities – there are eight such key areas of activity: Teaching & Learning, Research & Research Management, Community Relations, Student Services, Information Management, Human Resources, Marketing and Internationalisation, and Capital Management. At the time when the Portfolio was

submitted only the first three of these had been approved. By the time of the Audit Panel's visit there was evidence of progress on several others;

- *Annual Operational Plans* – developed by organisational units such as Schools, these are to be closely linked to the *Tactical Plans* by the annual identification of *performance targets* appropriate at the organisational unit level, and to the budgetary system; and
- *Prospective Evaluations* – comprehensive evaluations at the organisational unit level. At the time of the audit only one evaluation had been completed (on the School of Teacher Education). A claimed advantage of the *Prospective Evaluation* process over earlier approaches to the review of quality is that the previous reporting at the Divisional level obscured more specific detail at the School level, and that information can be disaggregated at a more useful level for operational planning purposes.

Though good progress has been achieved, at the time of the Audit Panel's visit this new system could only be described as *emergent*, as there is to be a new *University Strategic Plan*, the *Tactical Plans* were not all yet written and signed off, and though unit *Operational Plans* for 2003 had been completed, they were yet to be fully integrated with all *Tactical Plans* with resource allocation not addressed until September / October, and the findings of only one *Prospective Evaluation* process have been received.

Even so, the Audit Panel considered, from evidence gained from review of performance against the objectives of the current Strategic Plan and its contingent plans, the earlier Faculty Reviews, and the DAR regime, that management at UC had moved from a culture of conducting reviews on an ad-hoc basis, or for routine annual reporting, to adopting a much more systematic and robust 'quality managed' approach. It was clear that the leadership for this came from the senior management group with the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, and the Quality Advisory Committee, chaired by the PVC (Academic), playing leading roles.

Although keen to acknowledge this leadership as a positive development, the Panel investigated whether this new approach had been merely superimposed on and driven down through the organisation by senior management. The Panel tested to see if awareness of the QAF had penetrated down to, and was indeed being embraced by, the staff of the University at the operational level.

The Panel found that the operational staff interviewed overwhelmingly spoke about the QAF in positive terms, as being an approach that worked effectively for them at both the University-wide strategic level, and at the more operational level of their own organisational unit. There was however a small number of staff who felt that there had been too much emphasis on change management within the University, with insufficient attention to quality planning and inadequate budgetary provision to implement effective change.

The Panel concluded that as an emergent system, the new QAF holds considerable promise, and if it continues to be implemented in such a way that engages line staff meaningfully in University-wide quality processes, that it could provide the University with a distinctive and potentially powerful approach to whole-of-organisation quality assurance and enhancement. The Audit Panel heard consistent, although not universal, statements in support of the QAF and found the framework to be well designed from a quality assurance perspective.

Commendation 2

AUQA commends the University of Canberra for developing the Quality Assurance Framework and the generally positive impact that this approach is starting to have in helping organisational units to focus more clearly on identifying relevant quality assurance and improvement targets.

It is now important for the University to build on this achievement and ensure that the QAF is fully understood and implemented, especially as the full range of *Tactical Plans* is initially rolled out, and as over time, organisational units are asked to factor multiple performance requirements based on these plans into their *Annual Operational Plans*. This attention to deployment will be required to ensure that UC can achieve what the PVC (Academic) described as ‘*a sense of the whole University moving forward, by all levels accepting responsibility for follow through.*’

From a quality management perspective a vitally important part of the framework is the *Prospective Evaluation* process, as it provides a systematic, planned, and structured approach to the review of organisational performance. However, the Audit Panel noted that the only organisational units scheduled to undergo Prospective Evaluation were the Schools, and that this created an additional requirement to ensure quality in the administrative organisational units through their participation in the quality planning and performance reporting processes, rather than through a structured process of quality review. This places a premium on the quality of the planning and reporting processes themselves on the administrative side of the organization, and an obligation to extract maximum value from participation in the Prospective Evaluation process on the academic side.

Recommendation 1

That the roll-out of all Tactical Plans across all organisational units at the University of Canberra be closely monitored, to ensure that the objectives of the full range of Tactical Plans are being addressed in the Annual Operational Plan of each unit, especially those with university-wide or Divisional functional responsibilities.

This is to optimise the identification of improvement targets across all eight areas of ‘tactical’ importance to the University.

1.5 Academic Quality Assurance

The introduction of the QAF and the simultaneous devolution of responsibility for some aspects of the course approval and review process have in the Audit Panel’s view combined to diminish Academic Board’s primary responsibility for academic quality assurance.

This interpretation was strongly challenged by the UC senior management team who pointed to the well-developed system of reporting up and down through Academic Board and sub-committees, Divisional Education Committees (DECs) and the Academic Programs Committee. The role of the Divisional Educational Committees is critical to the implementation of the QAF. It was pointed out that there is common membership (or cross-representation) between the Board, these committees, and the Vice-Chancellor’s Advisory Committee (VCAC) and the Quality Advisory Committee (QAC). For example the PVC (Academic) chairs the Academic Board’s Education Committee, as well as the Academic Programs Committee, and QAC. Also, the Tactical Plans are all submitted to both VCAC and Academic Board for approval. If one considers these aspects in combination, but in isolation from the nature of the new quality review apparatus of the QAF, there appears a reasonable case for the Academic Board being the prime repository of responsibility for academic QA.

While the Audit Panel accepts the basis of this explanation, in practice Academic Board has not had a significant role in the Prospective Evaluation of the School of Teacher Education, in that the Board will only receive a final report of the actions to be implemented as a result of the Prospective Evaluation process *after* these have been considered and approved by a reporting process involving only the QAC, VCAC, and the School in question. The Panel reviewed the Report of the Prospective Evaluation of the School of Teacher Education and noted that some of its recommendations clearly related to policy areas that are the responsibility of Academic Board,

such as determining the need for Course Advisory Committees in the review and re-accreditation of courses. Also, when asked if they had read the report of the Prospective Evaluation of the School of Teacher Education, only three out of the eight Heads of School present had done so. It seemed to the Panel that an opportunity to disseminate across the University the good practices and opportunities for improvement identified by that report had not been taken up.

Given the evolving deployment of the QAF, the Panel believes there is a danger that senior management advisory committees could become, or be thought to be, the prime arbiters of questions of academic quality assurance, and that consequently, following the earlier devolution of some quality assurance responsibilities to the Schools, the role of the Academic Board could be further diminished as an unintended consequence of the introduction of the QAF. The Audit Panel concluded that because of the initial success of the QAF initiative, it would now be timely to look again at the role relationship and responsibilities of Academic Board and its sub-committees in relation to the work of the QAC and VCAC under the QAF, with a view to achieving the most effective deployment of the new approach.

Recommendation 2

That the University of Canberra review the role, membership and terms of reference of the Academic Board, and in the light of the increased devolution of responsibility for academic quality assurance to other bodies described in the Portfolio, consider strategies for involving the Board earlier, and more formally, in the Prospective Evaluation process.

2 UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA BRISBANE CAMPUS

In addition to its main campus at Bruce, and involvement at several other sites within Canberra, the University now operates a second campus located in Brisbane – University of Canberra Brisbane Campus (UCBC). At the time of the visit to Brisbane, UCBC had only just commenced operations. This initiative represents a significant strategic departure for UC.

2.1 *UCBC Strategy*

The strategy for UCBC has changed substantially from that originally conceived. The Audit Panel was advised that the initial plan was that UCBC would cater 100% for International students recruited from Asia. Following problems with the University's strategic associate's marketing and recruitment operations, a new agreement led to UC taking over these responsibilities, and a decision to shift some HECS-funded places from Bruce Campus, with an expectation that 70% of students would be International, and 30% domestic. The first student intake is in fact the inverse, with only seven of the forty commencing students being International students.

UCBC expects a substantial increase over current enrolments during the next 12 months. It is now anticipated that about one-third of the student intake will be domestic students recruited locally, one-third international students, recruited on-shore, and one-third international students, recruited off shore. If this is achieved, then phase 2 of the UCBC operation envisages either a re-negotiation of the current landlord-tenant relationship with the strategic associate, or re-location to a larger facility.

Despite UC's rationale for a Brisbane campus based on the demographic growth advantage of SE Queensland over the ACT, there is a policy tension between UC's role as a regional provider of higher education in the ACT region, and the establishment of a branch campus in the capital city of another State. This is especially the case since the transfer of HECS-funded places away from the ACT has been necessary to ensure start-up. The Audit Panel found it difficult to reconcile the demographic argument with this statement in the Portfolio about UC's regional mission: *'Balancing the provision of higher education to meet the needs of the ACT and region with the need to maintain appropriate breadth in the academic program.'* (PFp12)

The UCBC initiative was conceptualised as an International Education initiative. Despite the advantages of the Brisbane location, the Audit Panel considers that moving HECS-funded domestic student load from Bruce Campus must be only a very short-term strategy. The University acknowledges that UCBC must succeed in recruiting a high percentage of full-fee-paying international students, both locally and off shore. The Panel noted that the UCBC initiative is currently dependent upon the success of a marketing strategy being driven from Bruce Campus, and on the University's overseas agents promoting Brisbane over Canberra as an attractive Australian study destination.

There are also questions about the longer-term return on investment to be considered, involving the limits to growth of the UCBC operation at its current prestigious location, the nature of the agreement with the University's strategic associate, and the cost of overheads that the location involves.

2.2 *UCBC Culture*

Though named and clearly identified as 'the UCBC Building', the facilities are in fact shared with the Royal Brisbane International College (RBIC), an educational provider owned by the University's strategic associate for the UCBC initiative. RBIC provides diplomas and English

Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students, while UCBC provides degrees. At the time of the visit RBIC also had an enrolment of about 40 EFTSU. The Audit Panel acknowledges that there are potential synergies to be had in this arrangement, but points to the potential for competition between the providers for student access to shared facilities, especially if both are successful in achieving substantial growth in student numbers.

The UCBC Building is well located in the South Bank Arts and Education precinct and well served by transport access. UCBC has negotiated borrowing rights for its students at the Queensland University of Technology Library, and is investigating use of the State Library facilities, both within walking distance. The teaching facilities are new and all classrooms are equipped with whiteboards, A/V and computer network links. The Panel witnessed UCBC staff logging on to the University's web page to download information. There are also plans to set up video-conferencing with Bruce Campus.

The Audit Panel discussion with UCBC staff centred on their experience of working at or with UCBC so far, with generally positive responses, especially praise for the efficiency of the UCBC administration, and in particular the level of cooperation and support provided by the Campus Manager. Another positive aspect observed was the interaction between an experienced Bruce-based staff member and the locally-recruited Sessional IT teacher and evidence that Bruce-based staff had been assigned teaching duties at UCBC. All staff interviewed appeared to have a reasonable background for undergraduate teaching in their particular field of study.

However, variation was apparent across different subject areas as to the consistency of advice that had been provided to staff on matters of policy and procedures for Teaching & Learning (such as subject outlines, assessment practices, and the frequency and nature of student evaluations of subjects and teaching), and their experience of a formal induction process was mixed, especially in relation to OH&S and HR. One respondent stated that they had received a three-page contract, which was not very informative, but that they could find out everything else by asking, or by being told.

When asked about the strengths of the UCBC initiative, one clear response was that the availability of HECS-funded places was considered to be the key to initial, and perhaps continuing, success for the recruitment of students at UCBC.

The panel also spoke with six of the seven students in the 2003 Bachelor of Information Technology intake at UCBC. The students spoke very positively about their interaction with UCBC (again, in particular, the Campus Manager), and with their teachers, citing the campus location and the small class sizes as being very positive aspects of studying at UCBC. The availability of the three semester academic program and the flexibility of the academic program were also mentioned as strengths.

In terms of areas in need of improvement, the students mentioned the need for coordination at the course level (as distinct from the individual subject level), and the importance of the linking back to staff based at the Bruce Campus. The Panel concurs with these observations.

2.3 *Academic Policy at UCBC*

In terms of its relationship with the University of Canberra, it was emphatically stated that the UCBC was always conceived as a 'branch campus operation' and that it would therefore only ever use UC academic QA policies and procedures to ensure consistency of standards. In its discussions with staff at UCBC and at Bruce Campus, the Audit Panel found this requirement to be well understood but it was too early to determine whether it was being routinely followed.

It was also anticipated that eventually there would be suites of nested UG and PG programs available across Business, Law & Information Science, Science & Technology, and Communications & Education (the University's three Academic Divisions).

Given the issues described above, from an academic QA perspective, the Audit Panel concluded from the visit to UCBC that the key to success in Brisbane lies not in the transfer of HECS-funded load from Bruce Campus, but in the UCBC initiative receiving unequivocal support at all levels of the University.

After speaking to staff at the Bruce Campus during the Audit Visit therefore, the Audit Panel was re-assured to observe a growing commitment by staff based in Canberra into making the UCBC initiative a success. UC staff recognise that program ownership must pass from the founding Division (Business, Law & Information Science), to all three academic divisions. The Audit Panel agrees that responsibility for leadership, strategy, and policy must be shared between the senior management at Bruce and line management at UCBC, and responsibility for academic QA, program coordination, and communication must be achieved at the course level, as well as the level of the individual subject, and that the University's Academic Board must have a role in monitoring this.

Despite the Audit Panel having an underlying concern about the financial viability of the UCBC initiative, it acknowledged that this venture is in its very early days and concluded that the University appears to have been successful in setting up a very attractive study destination in a desirable location, but in a highly competitive market. It now needs to consolidate this promising start with some well-considered and strategic decision-making, especially how to attract viable numbers of both international and local students without compromising established academic standards, and including the best way of nourishing a suitable local research culture. Due to the very early stage of developments in Brisbane, the Audit Panel did not think it appropriate to make any specific commendation or recommendation in relation to the UCBC initiative, but made this general recommendation.

Recommendation 3

That the University of Canberra consider the implications of all the recommendations made in this Report, as they apply to the University of Canberra Brisbane Campus.

3 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The University of Canberra's Strategic Plan 1999-2003 defines its mission as:

Developing a university which is continually engaged with the needs of the community it serves through educating professionals professionally, and generating knowledge and research to address present and anticipated needs.

In pursuit of this mission, the current Strategic Plan articulates two key objectives for Teaching & Learning:

1. *To provide a learning climate in which undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education programs focus on student needs, are intellectually stimulating, are appropriate to the professions and develop the capacity for lifelong learning; and,*
2. *To create, collect, advance and disseminate knowledge and enquiry in ways which are closely linked with and enrich the University's professional focus and strengthen the knowledge and intellectual base of the professions.*

The University has also now developed the Teaching and Learning Tactical Plan, which specifies a number of strategic priorities and translates them into performance targets.

3.1 Curriculum, Accreditation, and Course Review

In the Teaching and Learning section of the Portfolio, UC states that it 'offers courses which meet the needs of students, employers and the professions'; that this 'professional focus is integrated in the course development process'; and that professional and internal accreditation provide the quality assurance that this is being achieved.

It is claimed that 'the development of capacity for lifelong learning and adaptation of learned skills and attributes is addressed through the University's identification of generic skills for all graduates' and that 'The *Procedures for the Introduction and Accreditation of New Courses, Course and Subject Change*....provides evidence of an adequate analysis of current and changing requirements in the professional employment context for graduates'. In addition, Schools are encouraged 'to obtain professional accreditation of any course for which professional accreditation is available.' (PFp11-13)

The Audit Panel saw evidence that supported most of these claims in some of the sample course documentation reviewed, and concluded that the procedures that the University has put in place for initial course approval and curriculum development are sound. With respect to generic skills, there is an 'Acquisition of Generic Skills' matrix for checking across the curriculum on a course-wide basis, the Panel also saw evidence of initial course proposals being subject to review by 'External Reference Groups' in relation to meeting the requirements of external accreditation by professional bodies.

The Audit Panel wished to learn what processes had been developed and were being implemented in-house under the imprimatur of the new QAF for the ongoing monitoring of courses, especially with respect to the University's professional education mission, to ensure the involvement of key external stakeholders in these processes. The Audit Panel asked whether accreditation and course review process require there to be a Course Advisory Committee (or similar titled body), with external industry / professional association representation on it. UC advised that it '*no longer uses Course Consultative Committees, which had tended to be large and often non-representative. The University's practices ensure that there was regular contact with the industry and professional reference groups, and the Education Committee Guidelines require evidence of such consultation*

for course approval. At the same time, the University's professional focus draws heavily on professionals and industry for sessional teaching and adjunct appointments. The Prospective Evaluation process requires representation on the Evaluation Panel for employers and the professional body.'

While externality is being addressed in the QAF through the *Prospective Evaluation* process, which works at the School level, the Audit Panel felt that the lack of *ongoing* course monitoring with an external point of reference is a deficiency, especially given the University's mission of '*educating professionals professionally*'. Furthermore, not every course is subject to external professional accreditation. The Audit Panel noted that in addition to making a number of recommendations to improve professional practice in Teacher Education courses, one of the key recommendations of the Prospective Evaluation of the School of Teacher Education was:

'We recommend the establishment of a Courses Advisory Committee to monitor the quality of existing courses and provide advice on new courses' (Prospective Evaluation of the School of Teacher Education Report, October 2002, p5 of 8), and the Panel endorses this finding.

The University's response has been to fund a project to address all of the recommendations contained in this inaugural *Prospective Evaluation* report. In addition, during its visit, the Audit Panel gained the strong impression that the University's professional education mission was taken seriously by the professional educators and by management.

Considering these findings, on balance, the Audit Panel concluded that UC is demonstrating that it is genuinely committed to its professional education mission.

Commendation 3

AUQA commends the University of Canberra for setting for itself a mission to deliver 'professional education professionally' and for achieving distinctive recognition in its chosen markets for effective performance in the pursuit of this mission.

The Panel endorses the recommendation of the *Prospective Evaluation* process to further strengthen this commitment across the curriculum. The University's professional education mission demands close liaison with industrial and professional bodies. The Audit Panel believes that this requires a more formal consultative course monitoring process to ensure external participation in the ongoing development and review of course content. This conclusion leads to the making of a linked recommendation:

Recommendation 4

That the University of Canberra ensure there is adequate external input into the monitoring of all courses, perhaps by establishing course advisory committees covering all areas of the curriculum.

3.2 Generic Skills

As indicated above, generic skill development is one of the key dimensions of the University's professional education mission, and it featured in the Portfolio by reference to a document entitled the 'Generic skills and attributes of University of Canberra graduates from undergraduate and postgraduate coursework courses' (and the companion document for 'Canberra graduates from higher degree by research' - PFpp78-81)

As noted, this emphasis on generic skills is made operational through the use of the Acquisition of Generic Skills matrix for checking that generic skills and attributes for graduates are addressed in each course. This approach provides an important foundation for the development of the sort of

generic skills required by the University's professional education mission. While this approach is admirable in its intent, the Audit Panel noted a fairly uncritical use made by UC of GCCA CEQ Generic Skills Scale (GSS) data in the Portfolio (PFp82). Ostensibly this data was included to demonstrate that the University is achieving its objectives in relation to generic skill development, as attention has been paid to the embedding of generic skills since 2001, but the results indicate that the University was achieving only average generic skill outcomes. GSS data for 2002 was not available at the time, so no trend could be seen. The treatment of GCCA CEQ data in the Portfolio, although candid, was puzzling, as it did not indicate a particularly quality-managed approach in the self-review phase of the UC Portfolio development process. A more critical evaluation of these results could have led to the identification of an opportunity for performance improvement.

However, in the University's new Tactical Plan for Teaching and Learning there is a quite explicit requirement that all Schools will report their GSS performance against the McKinnon-Walker Course Experience Questionnaire benchmarks, which certainly indicates that UC has now developed a good mechanism for the review of generic skill performance by schools, fields of study, and courses. Although this falls far short of the claim in the Portfolio that *'It ensures the acquisition of generic skills by students to produce graduates who are life long learners'* (PFp19), it does show how the implementation of the QAF is attempting to address performance deficiencies through adoption of an integrated planning, reporting, and quality review process. The reasons for current unexceptional GSS results and how these were being addressed by adoption of the QAF was not made clear in the Portfolio.

In general, the Audit Panel concluded that the University's experience with addressing and embedding generic skills is still developing, but that an important step has been taken to make substantial progress in this area, through implementing the Tactical Plan for Teaching & Learning as an important part of the QAF.

3.3 *Teaching and Course Quality*

The University operates a range of evaluation instruments for students to evaluate teaching, courses, and the learning environment that is quite typical in Australian universities. These include: the Student Feedback Service provided by the Centre for the Enhancement of Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (CELTS); an in-house Student Experience Questionnaire (Internal CEQ); the nationwide GCCA Course Experience Questionnaire; and the 'First Year Experience' (FYE) questionnaire conducted by Planning & Resources Development.

The CELTS currently provides the Student Feedback Service to staff on request for use in evaluations of either their teaching or the subject or the course, and it assists with a variety of other evaluative methods (for example focus groups). CELTS staff and resources are also available to assist staff develop their skill in evaluation which is considered by UC to be a core aspect of what it means to teach professionally. In the light of the University's strong focus on professional education, the Audit Panel feels that there should also be a stronger emphasis on the external scrutiny of evaluation data.

The current policy position of the University is that evaluation of subjects and teaching, although encouraged, is not compulsory. Results are confidential to individual staff members, meaning that their use as a guide to improvement is dependent upon the voluntarism of individual academics. The Audit Panel noted that the new Teaching and Learning Tactical Plan has as one of its strategies that *'Schools will ensure that teaching staff regularly monitor and evaluate subjects and their own teaching performance using a variety of methods.'* But the Audit Panel was advised that *'the UC Teaching and Learning Plan does not require staff to use the CELTS Student Feedback Service'* suggesting that a 'fluid' policy development situation exists. Finally, at the end of the Audit Visit, the Panel was advised that Heads of School had agreed that student

evaluation of courses should be mandatory, and had to be made part of a new performance management system.

Comment has already been made on the use made by the University of CEQ data, and while it is acknowledged that some data from the FYE survey is now a requirement in the QAF, the Audit Panel formed the view that the data collection, dissemination, and the reporting of required improvement actions by those with prime responsibility for these processes (i.e. the ‘process owners’) were not yet well understood.

In combination with the requirements of a new performance management system, these findings prompt the Audit Panel to make the following recommendation.

Recommendation 5

That the University of Canberra pay further attention to ensuring that there is more consistent collection of student feedback data on subjects, courses, teaching effectiveness, and the quality of student support services across all areas, and that it establish a clearer identification of the responsibilities of ‘process owners’ to improve the implementation and reporting of actions in response to feedback, especially to external course stakeholders.

3.4 Flexible Learning

More flexible ways of learning are being introduced at UC as a strategic priority to provide learning environments that better meet the changing needs of its students. The approach being taken is to provide flexible learning through the flexible delivery of courses and subjects in two main ways:

- Introducing multimode teaching i.e. the implementation of, and support for, different modes (e.g. online, intensive) with subjects and courses being offered in one or more of the modes; and
- Providing more flexible access to information and services across all teaching modes.

The University’s *Learning for the Future* strategy addresses flexible learning through the establishment of a University Priority Reserve Fund, through focus on the development of priority courses, the introduction of WebCT as a platform, and the development of new structures, such as a University Flexible Learning Committee (UFLC), the Flexible Delivery Development Unit (FDDU) and the Flexible Delivery Support Unit (FDSU).

The Audit Panel spoke with a number of staff from Schools engaged in flexible learning initiatives, and specialist staff from the ‘flexible learning’ specialist groups. While recognising that the projects involving the majority of these individuals were beneficiaries of the Priority Course Development or Flexible Learning Grants programs, the Panel noted both the effectiveness of the flexible learning development strategy, and the nature of the flexible learning work being achieved through implementation of this strategy. The Panel noted favourably the innovative system developed by UC for the external peer review of learning packages to ensure the quality of the flexible learning resources from an academic perspective.

The Audit Panel concluded that a key contributor to the success of elements of this strategy was the strong academic development and coordinating role provided by CELTS and its ‘flexible learning’ sub-units. The equally important roles of CELTS in the provision of evaluation services for teachers, and the delivery of professional development programs for teaching and learning are commented on favourably elsewhere in this Report.

3.5 *The UC Learning Environment*

The first objective of the University's 1999–2003 Strategic Plan is: *'To provide a learning climate in which undergraduate, postgraduate and continuing education programs focus on student needs....and develop the capacity for lifelong learning.'* One of the University's values stated in this same document is: *'maintaining and enhancing a harmonious and collegial university community'*; while another strategic objective mentions *'practices which maintain quality and focus on student needs.'*

A key theme running through these directional statements is the importance given to the provision of a student-centred learning environment at UC.

The Audit Panel investigated the extent to which UC is meeting these objectives.

After three days of fairly intensive interviewing, preceded by a tour of campus facilities, and a careful investigation of course-specific information, and the viewing of stakeholder satisfaction data, the Audit Panel was unanimous that in the main, the University of Canberra appears to have been successful in promoting a caring and supportive student-centred learning culture. This was obvious from the general consistency of comments made by students following instructional programs, and both teaching and support staff, and from the pervading 'climate of care' detected around campus.

On the other hand, this general perception tended to highlight those particular areas where more critical comments were received from stakeholders, suggesting that there is room for improvement in the provision of some specific services. The general commendation and recommendation that follow reflect these overall findings. More specific findings in relation to particular service providers are included in the Human Resources, Student Support Services, and Information Management sections of this Report.

Commendation 4

AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the overall level of care that it displays in providing a supportive, inclusive, and nurturing learning and teaching environment for its students, both local and residential, and domestic & international.

The level of care and support provided is not uniform across the University, but there is a distinct 'culture of care' that can and should be built upon. During the Audit sessions that focused on Human Resources for example, the Panel observed that there is no community service or community engagement excellence award program to complement the teaching excellence awards. With respect to the nurture of students, the learning environment at UC is extremely positive in the main, but uneven across different areas of study.

Recommendation 6

That the University of Canberra more explicitly identify and reward the best practice areas of service provision in order to provide performance benchmarks and assist the promotion of a more consistent approach to student support.

3.6 *International Education*

In the Portfolio UC states that *'it seeks "internationalisation" as a strategic priority'* (PFp26), however *'internationalisation'* is not listed as a strategic objective in the University's current Strategic Plan (1999-2003), although to *'Enhance and extend the University's links with other countries'* is listed as one of that Plan's strategies, nor is it mentioned as one of the *'most important operational priorities'* approved by Council and the VCAC for 2000-2003. However,

the University has now developed the Internationalisation Tactical Plan for 2002-2005 and the Audit Panel received a copy of the Final Draft of this plan.

In relation to international students, in 2002 UC had 938 attending degree courses on-campus (up slightly from 2001), and 519 taking components of courses off-shore (down from 566 in 2001). When ELICOS and University of Canberra College Foundation Program numbers are added, there were 1,693 international students enrolled in 2002, with the projected enrolment figures for 2003 looking positive, when compared with figures for the same period last year. In terms of Study Abroad and Exchange categories, in 2003 there were 31 UC students on exchange overseas, 32 O/S students on exchange at UC, and 30 Fee-paying Study Abroad students at UC.

The final draft Internationalisation Tactical Plan for 2002-2005 sets the following specific goals:

- A 10% increase in international students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate courses by census date in 2005;
- A 100% increase in the number of UC students in international student exchange programs by 2005;
- Approximately a four-fold increase in the number of short-term, fee-paying exchange and study abroad students by 2005; and
- Approximately a 100% increase in the number of international students enrolled in UC's on-line and off-shore courses by 2005.

It is clear from these projections that internationalisation is becoming a strategic priority for the University as a consequence of the move to adopt the '*tactically planned*' approach. The Plan also covers other dimensions such as internationalising the curriculum, with plans to review the existing 'flagship international courses', MBA, the M. International Business, and MIT, and developing a new BA (International) and Diploma of Languages with specific international foci.

The University acknowledged that it is currently in transition from 'an opportunistic phase' to a more 'strategic and planned' phase in the evolution of its International Education program. Even so, the Audit Panel felt that there were areas where UC already held a competitive edge of which it could take further advantage. One such is leadership in the development of English language testing, where the University developed an English language entry test specifically for use in China, where IELTS is not readily available. The University is encouraged to explore the scope for this test's further development and application.

3.6.1 Off-Shore Teaching

The major nodes of off-shore teaching activity, in descending order of student numbers are located in Singapore, China (Hangzhou, Nanjing, and Ningbo), Hong Kong, and Vietnam. China is seen by UC as the location with the greatest potential for future growth in off-shore activity. The major programs involved in the off-shore teaching program currently are the MBA/BBA, M. Educational Leadership, and M. Public Administration.

Prior to the Audit Visit, the Audit Panel reviewed the University's off-shore teaching documentation and noted that the offerings are quite diverse, with reasonably substantial numbers at some locations (e.g. 234 EFTSU enrolled in the BBA at Singapore in 2002). Nonetheless, the Panel determined that a visit to the off-shore partner organisations was not required and instead conducted three separate sessions with a focus on International Education issues, two of which were specifically directed towards examining the quality assurance arrangements developed by UC and in place for the teaching of accredited programs off-shore. The Panel interviewed a total of eighteen members of UC staff involved in the University's International Education program, including a cross-section of staff involved directly in the teaching of UC courses off shore. In addition, there was a teleconference with a cross-section of six of UC's off shore partners, namely

the Asian Institute of Management Singapore, Hangzhou Normal University, Ho Chi Min City University, Nanjing University, East China University of Science and Technology, and Hong Kong Institute of Advanced Learning.

The Audit Panel concluded from these sessions and from the documentation reviewed that the QA arrangements for off shore teaching by the University are substantially sound. Policy is that either all subjects are taught in English by UC staff, or there are adequate arrangements for translation into Mandarin. However, the Panel did discover one instance where the University maintained that visiting UC staff taught all subjects in English, but the off shore partner was emphatic that six units are in fact taught by staff recruited locally, though whether or not in English was not determined. The Panel also noted that there are 'co-teaching' arrangements in place in at least two locations to ensure that students can experience what was described by interviewees as a 'joined-up course', with for example visiting UC staff teaching a core of 30 hours, and local staff teaching an additional 14 hours. The Panel concluded that this arrangement is working well.

The Panel noted that all off-shore partners interviewed spoke enthusiastically of the level of cooperation they receive from UC, although there was some comment that the University needs to do more to develop more appropriate study guides with customised local content to go with the UC subject outlines, to improve the facilities available to the students studying off-shore, and to have more contact between Australian and local teachers to help improve their English. On the other hand, there were some highly supportive comments about the access to UC materials via WebCT. The level of reported student satisfaction was generally good, with one of the Chinese partners claiming an 88% student satisfaction rating.

On balance the Audit Panel is satisfied that the University is taking its current responsibilities for the quality assurance of a rather scattered off shore teaching program responsibly. However, noting the future directions indicated for International Education in the new Internationalisation Tactical Plan, and the anticipated targets for growth, the Audit Panel believes that the University must be careful to proceed with a more explicitly risk-managed approach, especially in its future involvement in off-shore ventures. In this respect, the Audit Panel believes that the UCBC venture will inform the University's capability to manage and deliver its programs at a remote location more permanently. Acknowledging that UC is currently in transition from an opportunistic, to a more strategic and planned phase in the evolution of its International Education program, the following recommendation is to assist UC with this transition.

Recommendation 7

That the University of Canberra pay special attention to reviewing the financial viability and strategic directions of its existing and any new off-shore initiatives, and that the University communicate to relevant stakeholders its planned path, scale and ultimate profile for the further development of its International Education program.

4 RESEARCH, RESEARCH TRAINING, AND CONSULTANCY

The current Strategic Plan 1999-2003 has a broad objective that relates to research:

To create, collect, advance and disseminate knowledge and enquiry in ways which are closely linked with and enrich the University's professional focus and that strengthen the knowledge and intellectual base of the professions.

It also includes the following strategies with respect to Research and Research Training:

1. *Encourage academic staff to contribute to fields of knowledge through discovery, interpretation, commercial development, and dissemination of knowledge;*
2. *Ensure that the University's research focuses on areas where it can excel;*
3. *Ensure that the University's research reaches out to and is valued by the professions and the community;*
4. *Strengthen the University's research partnerships.*

Consistent with these statements, UC has set, as one of the three most important operational priorities for 2000-2003:

To be widely known and highly regarded for high-quality, focussed research that tackles the problems of industry, government and the community experience now, or expect they will experience in the future.

Several characteristics emerge from these statements, namely the strong link with the University's professional education mission; a focus on research in areas of comparative advantage; and opportunities for commercial development.

4.1 **Research and Research Training Leadership**

Leadership in this area is provided through the University Research Committee (URC) and Divisional Research Institutes. The Audit Panel was advised that URC is chaired by the PVC (Research) and includes the Directors of the Divisional Research Institutes, a researcher nominated by each Division, one elected member from the Academic Board, and the President of the University's Postgraduate Association, or nominee. This was a little at variance to what was described in the requested documentation provided to the Audit Panel in advance. The documented Terms of Reference provided to the Audit Panel also indicate that the Chair of Academic Board is not a member of the URC, although the URC is a sub-committee of Academic Board and reports to it.

4.2 **Teaching-Research Nexus**

The Audit Panel was informed that approximately 70% of the research income at UC is generated by its Cooperative Research Centres (Freshwater Ecology, Sustainable Tourism, Landscape Evolution and Mineral Exploration Research), the two spin-off companies (see 3.10 p28), and a handful of designated in-house Research Centres. However, what might distinguish UC from some other Australian universities is that there appears to be a fairly strong nexus between the University's nine broad areas of study and the current nine 'Areas of Research Strength' (ARS – see 3.9 following). In the Portfolio, the University stated that *'the academic programs at UC are underpinned by the research and professional experience of the teaching staff, and the curriculum is informed by current research, scholarship and professional practice.'* (PFp34) The Panel's observations generally support these contentions.

As can be seen from the statements drawn from the Strategic Plan and Operational Priorities listed at the start of this section, this link makes for a certain tension between some of the stated goals being pursued by UC in the development of its research profile. Some of the implications of the University's success in achieving close alignment between teaching and research are dealt within the following sub-sections.

4.3 *Areas of Research Strength*

Despite the strong teaching / research nexus, UC states that it has recognised that not all groups had the human and physical resources to achieve research standing and has made explicit decisions to support research staff selectively rather than uniformly. The selection process involves the endorsement of self-nomination by staff, to identify research-active staff using an 'Active Researcher' classification process with a range of different 'researcher classification' (RC) levels, starting at 'Level 1' as representing the lowest level of researcher activity. Each level then has different sub-categories. Entry levels to each category appeared to be quite low. The Audit Panel was advised that the University had a target of 80% of academic staff being classified as active researchers, which prompted closer investigation of the classification scale, and this led to the following recommendation to assist the University in achieving this task.

Recommendation 8

That the 'Active Researcher' classification categories at the University of Canberra be tightened by paying closer attention to the comparability of sub-category requirements and the entry level requirements, especially at Researcher Classification Levels 1&2.

During the 1990's it was determined that the University's research should be focused on a limited number of Research Centres designated by Council. At the beginning of 2002 the University consolidated its research into nine '*Areas of Research Strength*' (ARS) on the basis of discipline themes and the following performance indicators: research income, publications, and HDR student completions. The current nine ARS are:

- Communication, Media & Cultural Studies;
- Tourism;
- Education and Innovation;
- Governance;
- Socio-Economic Policy & research
- Information Sciences and Engineering;
- Ecology, Environmental & Earth Sciences
- Medical & Health Sciences;
- Built and Cultural Environment.

When interviewees from the ARS were questioned about what factors were driving the University's research development strategy, the nexus between teaching and research was invariably mentioned at the head of the list. While this strong alignment with the University's professional education mission has enriched the teaching curriculum, and to date has proved to be an effective way of involving teaching staff in research activity, it has tended to encourage the development of commercially-oriented research on a reasonably broad front, rather than foster a concentration of research effort into niche areas of competitive advantage and capability.

The University acknowledges that it is trying to increase its research capacity in an increasingly competitive funding environment and it now appears to be in a policy dilemma between encouraging more teaching staff to become research active by inducing them to become involved (especially) in curriculum-related and commercial research and consultancy activities, and encouraging the development of niche areas of competitive research excellence. While these two

goals may not be mutually exclusive, the Audit Panel believes that the University will need to address this tension as the UC research profile matures and the Government's policy for research concentration evolves. There is a need over time to concentrate research effort into those areas where the University has a distinctive national and international competitive advantage and capability leading to the reduction of the number of active areas of Research strength.

Recommendation 9

That the University of Canberra take steps to resolve an apparent tension between its chosen developmental strategy of encouraging commercial research capacity on a relatively broad front, while simultaneously cultivating niche areas of national and international research competitiveness.

The Audit Panel notes that this recommendation is entirely consistent with the University's previously stated intention that it will '*allocate resources to areas of research strength based on performance measures*' and so '*ensure that the University's research focuses on areas where it can excel*'. Clearly there is much good research and development work currently being undertaken in the Research Centres, and across the nine current ARS. The challenge now is to ensure that there is an appropriate allocation of resources to those areas that show the greatest research potential. Part of this challenge is to more clearly differentiate between different types of research and consultancy. The following recommendation relates to the implementation of this task:

Recommendation 10

That there be a clearer definition of, and differentiation between, 'research', 'commercial research' and 'consultancy' at the University of Canberra, as distinctive categories for the prioritisation of research activity.

It will be important to ensure that the resource allocation implications of this tightening of definitions at the policy level are addressed.

4.4 *AGRECON & NATSEM*

The University of Canberra has two spin-off companies that are highly regarded both nationally and internationally. AGRECON is a company for the commercialisation of satellite forecasting technologies, described as being recognised for '*cutting edge research & development*' (PFp40). The National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling (NATSEM) is described as being '*a world leader in the development of microsimulation models and techniques*' (PFp40). When the Audit Panel challenged both these bodies to justify these claims, it was advised that AGRECON operates the largest, commercially viable, subscription-based online data-base of its type in the world; and that NATSEM operates the largest microsimulation centre in the world, and is now providing public policy leadership in several areas in addition to taxation and health (the two areas where these techniques were first developed and applied).

Between them, the two spin-off companies accounted for approximately 40% of the University's research income. NATSEM and AGRECON represent successful models for the combination of research concentration in an area of competitive advantage and commercial application, for the University to encourage, and for other parts of the University to emulate.

4.5 *Research Centres*

As indicated above, UC was invited to indicate its areas of research and consultancy strength and within the limits imposed by the strict time available, in addition to AGRECON and NATSEM, four of UC's eight Research Centres were nominated by the University to be interviewed by the

Panel. They were: the GADI Research Centre; the National Institute of Governance; the CRC for Sustainable Tourism; and the Centre for Advanced Telecommunications & Quantum Electronics Research. In addition the Scaffolding Literacy Program was included in this session for its consultancy work.

Clearly there is much good work being done, but the UC research profile is still relatively modest by national standards and if the University is to become as highly regarded for its research profile as for its commitment to professional education, it needs further development. One UC researcher characterised the University's research culture as going through a process of evolution from a CAE to a university - from 'an era of creativity' through 'an era of commercialisation' and now onto one of 'concentrated research focus'. The Audit Panel concurs that there is a need for the University to continue to develop a concentrated research focus.

4.6 Research & Research Training Management

Parallel to the URC and DRCs, there is a similar system of the University Higher Degrees Committee (HDC) and Divisional Higher Degrees Committees. The University HDC advises both Academic Board and VCAC on postgraduate and graduate studies policy. It is chaired by the PVC (Research) or nominee, and has the Directors of the Divisional Research Institutes (or nominees), and the Chairs of the Divisional HDCs, an elected member of Academic Board and the President of the Postgraduate Association or nominee among its members.

Thus within the Divisions, and at the University level, the Directors of the Divisional Research Institute Executive (DRIE) are the prime link in the dual research committee structure. This is appropriate given that their stated purpose and function is: *'To provide a co-ordinating point for research leadership, support, training, infrastructure, funding recommendations, management, accountability and reporting within the Division.'* (DRIE Policy & Procedure)

The Audit Panel found this structure to be well-developed and robust, and not dissimilar to research and research training management structures existing in most Australian universities. The distinguishing feature is the linking role of the DRIEs.

A key document already providing future direction for the management of research and research training is the Tactical Plan for Research and Research Training Management. In addition to the objectives and priorities already examined above, the Plan contains a number of strategies and tasks that focus on research training and support.

4.7 Research Training and Support

Given the nature of the research-related issues confronting UC that have been discussed above, research training and support are clearly important areas of activity. The Audit Panel acknowledges that this is an area where UC is already doing very well. In particular, the Audit Panel noted the importance UC gives to encouraging its early career researchers.

Commendation 5

AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the importance it gives to activities designed to support and to encourage early researchers.

Another research training and support development is the introduction of Information Packs for HDR students containing Research Learning Plans. The Audit Panel found this to be a well-developed initiative and worthy of commendation.

Commendation 6

AUQA commends the University of Canberra for being sensitive to the needs of its higher degree students and for responding to concerns expressed by students about the need to improve research training, and in particular for developing Research Learning Plans.

However, despite an overall picture of cooperation and goodwill, the Audit Panel detected in its discussions with students that there was some concern about the processes currently available to them for resolving issues to do with supervision. The University had attempted to address these concerns through the revised version of the Higher Degrees by Research: Policy and Procedures (the revised 'Gold Book'). Group or co-supervision was proving insufficient to address these issues. A wide range of views was expressed by doctoral research students which would imply inconsistency in the implementation of policy and a need to revisit some policies and consider upgrading standards, e.g. of facilities and support. As one of the key priorities for improvement in research performance nominated by the University was to improve HDR completions, the Audit Panel makes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 11

That the University of Canberra use its surveys, learning plans, and its revised version of the 'Gold Book' to signal clear, consistent and confidential complaint reporting pathways for research students, which will allow them to report issues confidently and without fear of prejudice to any future study opportunities; and use its revised version of the 'Gold Book' to assure consistency in the quality of supervision and consider upgrading the standards of facilities and support for doctoral researchers.

Recommendation 12

That the University of Canberra ensure there is greater transparency in the allocation of resources across categories and areas of research, especially by more clearly differentiating between honours and HDR student entitlements.

On the other hand, the Audit Panel heard nothing but praise for the Beginning Postgraduate Supervision program conducted by CELTS to assist supervisors, and formed the view that this was worthy of commendation. The value of the work of CELTS to the University is commented on in the Human Resources section of this Report (p33).

5 COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The Strategic Plan 1999-2003 includes the following objective with respect to Community Relations:

To provide intellectual leadership and service to the professions, industry, governments and to the wider society, particularly Canberra and the Capital Region.

With respect to the pursuit of this objective, it then lists the following strategies:

1. *Continue to develop linkages and cooperation with industry, other Canberra and Canberra Region education institutions, Capital Region and Commonwealth public sectors, and with local and national professional associations.*
2. *Enhance and extend the University's links with other countries as a means of extending Australia's role in the world.*
3. *Form closer ties with other Canberra and Capital Region cultural institutions, contribute to the economic, cultural and social development of the region.*

5.1 **Community Relations Leadership**

It is clear from the above that the University's community relations mission is linked inextricably to its professional education mission. The other distinctive feature comes from the unique relationship with the 'Capital Region' that UC inherited as a result of being originally established as the local CAE in a city with a 'National' university, and later, as a university with a formal link to the ACT Government. An aspect of this relationship has already been commended in the section dealing with Council and Quality (p12).

To address these various strands, the University developed the Capital Region Strategy, the major objective of which was to 'increase awareness of the University of Canberra, its activities and programs within the Region through a concerted and sustained media campaign.' (PFp44) The Audit Panel also reviewed copies of a Capital Region Media: Communications Strategy; an International, and a Domestic Marketing Plan for 2002-2004; and, an Interim Corporate Communication Strategy (2003). These indicate that the University has been actively promoting itself to the various communities it serves on a number of fronts.

The University has yet to establish a new Community Relations Tactical Plan, but if it is similar in kind to the others already in place, the Audit Panel expects that it will bring a number of these various plans and strategies together into a single comprehensive planning document.

5.2 **Community Linkages**

During the Audit Visit, in addition to hearing from external Councillors and UC senior management, the Panel had opportunity to hear from two other sources about the success or otherwise of the University's community relations mission, namely a cross-section of staff involved in community relations activities and discussions with a range of external stakeholders.

Staff from areas of the University interviewed included Educational Leadership & Professional Development; the National Institute of Governance; Nursing & Health Sciences; CRC for Freshwater Ecology; Special Education & Teacher Education; Resources & Environmental Science; and the Centre for Developing Cities. This 'community relations cross-section' provided evidence to the Panel that the University is indeed addressing its professional education, research and consultancy, and 'special relationship' agendas through the range of community linkages it has established. All interviewees thought that the community-outreach dimension of their work

means that the University's educational mission is intrinsically valuable, contributes something of extrinsic worth to the Capital Region, or local community, and opens up possibilities for commercial consultancy opportunities.

The views of external stakeholders were gathered from employers of recent ACT graduates; Principals, Career Guidance Counsellors and Course Coordinators from local educational institutions; Community Organisations; Professional Associations; and recent UC alumni now in the workforce.

Career Guidance Counsellors were unanimous in their praise for the professional and responsive relationship they have enjoyed with the University over many years. In particular, they commented positively on the feedback they receive from the University on progress by students from their schools.

Overall, the Audit Panel felt that the University is successful in pursuing its special community relations mission, due in no small part to the commitment that external members of the University of Canberra Council have made by nurturing these links, and to the extensive commitment from UC to networking and supporting a range of community-focused initiatives.

Commendation 7

AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the harmonious and mutually beneficial community relationships it has developed with the ACT and rural NSW.

As already observed on p. 23 of this Report, the Audit Panel felt that the introduction of excellence awards for community service or community engagement could further assist the University to acknowledge and celebrate good practice in community relations.

6 HUMAN RESOURCES

The Strategic Plan 1999-2003 does not have a specific objective with respect to Human Resources, which possibly explains why there was not a separate section in the Portfolio dedicated to HR. Instead, 'Staff' was treated as a sub-section of Teaching and Learning. This in itself, the Audit Panel concluded, told something of the University's approach to human resource management: that the primary focus of HR policy is on the core 'academic' business of the University. However, the Audit Panel considered whether in the process general staff might become marginalised. On the other hand, in interviews senior staff from the Corporate Divisions stressed the recent importance that had been attached to the development of general staff.

The current Strategic Plan specifies the following HR strategies and actions:

1. *Encourage the development of transparent management processes which enhance consultative and participatory communications.*
2. *Provide coordinated staff development to enhance the intellectual capacity and operational efficiency of the University.*
3. *Ensure that the University's staff recruitment, development and support systems reflect the importance to the University of attracting and retaining staff of the highest quality.*

It is also worth noting that the Panel was advised that there was no overarching predecessor plan prior to the drafting of the Human Resources Tactical Plan, and received a copy of the draft Human Resources Tactical Plan (undated). The draft had not yet been approved.

6.1 Human Resource Management

Responsibility for human resource management rests with University line management and as such is widely distributed across the University. Accountability for agreement with strategic direction and corporate policy with respect to human resources at the University wide level, and for ensuring the quality of Human Resources service delivery, rests with the Director Human Resources (Corporate Division).

As already indicated at pp21-22 of this Report, the Audit Panel had been advised that there was no formal University performance appraisal system in place as it was not in the most recent Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA). Some managers thought existing provisions were sufficient for proper HR management. There is, however, a performance appraisal system in place for senior staff and there are plans to develop this further to cover all staffing levels. The decision-making for this lies with the Vice-Chancellor. It is not at this stage intended to link this process explicitly with the EBA.

The Audit Panel heard concerns expressed by students about apparent lack of action in response to feedback about poorly performing teaching staff.

During the Audit Visit, the Panel was informed that Heads of School had recently agreed that evaluations of teaching for course reviews should be made mandatory and be part of a formal performance appraisal system to be used to inform management of professional development. It was noted that there was no target for a formal performance appraisal system in the current Human Resources Plan, but that it was consistent with the general thrust of emerging policy direction. Now that this decision has been taken it will be important to ensure that appropriate targets are set in the planning processes. The Audit Panel believes that this proposed development conforms to the feedback received from students about the need for the University to adopt a stronger approach with respect to performance management.

Recommendation 13

That the University of Canberra identify a consistent way of addressing poor performance as the current way of dealing with performance management appears not to be consistent across the University, across all courses, and across all forms of academic work generally.

The Audit Panel also noted that according to the implementation schedule provided by the University, the Human Resources Tactical Plan is to be developed and approved by August 2003. The Audit Panel anticipates that the performance management issue will be addressed in this new Tactical Plan.

6.2 Induction and Staff Development

Induction is handled at two levels – University-wide and organisational unit. Implementation of the Induction Program for staff is uneven. Some new staff stated that they had undertaken a formal Induction Program run by CELTS; others had attended a ‘welcome to the University’ session by the Vice-Chancellor, and some had participated in an individual meeting with their Head of School or manager. There was no consistent message about the orientation experience of new staff, suggesting that University policy regarding induction is not consistent, or not systemically implemented. Staff that had participated in the formal CELTS University-wide Induction Program found it to be a very worthwhile experience. A number of new teachers pointed out that they only arrived at UC or reported for duty after the CELTS program had been run, suggesting that some re-scheduling might be in order. In addition, new staff who received the support of a mentor assigned by their organisational unit commented most favourably on their induction experience.

Recommendation 14

That the induction process with general and academic staff at the University of Canberra be improved and made more consistent at the organisational unit level, and that consideration be given to offering the CELTS university-wide Induction Program more frequently, at least each semester.

The Panel also believes that more continuous mentoring for new staff also deserves to be seriously considered, post induction at the organisational unit level.

Apart from the mixed induction experience, newly recruited staff spoke positively about their experiences since joining the University. They find other UC staff very supportive, and there appears to be a good sense of camaraderie on campus, even if primarily experienced through contacts within organisational units. This observation is consistent with the Audit Panel’s earlier finding that UC exhibits a ‘climate of care’ for its students.

All Schools have a line budget for HR training and development, and the University’s corporate area allocates 2% of its budget for staff development. A ‘training needs analysis’ has been conducted, a Training and Development Plan 2001-2004 produced, and overview by management is designed to ensure that every staff member receives some training. In 2003 for example, all staff are to undertake Effective Negotiation and Conflict Resolution Skills training, while managers, directors and team leaders will undertake People Management Skills and Managing Change training, although it was not clear to the Panel how decisions about the appropriateness of these particular training programs was made, or judgments made about how effective they were in achieving their intended purpose.

In the academic area, the valuable work performed by CELTS across a whole range of academic and professional development areas merits further comment. The Student Feedback Service, Staff Induction and Beginning Postgraduate Supervision programs have already been mentioned earlier

in the Report. In addition there is a Graduate Diploma in Higher Education, which is highly regarded by participating staff, and the introductory program, *An Introduction to Tertiary Teaching*, which is now mandatory for all new staff with little background in teaching at the university level. There are also workshops on diverse aspects of professional development, such as applying for promotion and writing for academic publication, as well as teaching support programs relating to flexible learning, on-line resource development, teaching techniques, and student assessment and evaluation. The Audit Panel obtained consistent and convincing evidence that through these programs, and by acting as a coordinating body across a number of different pedagogical applications, CELTS is contributing significantly to the quality of the education provided by the University.

Commendation 8

AUQA commends the University of Canberra's Centre for the Enhancement of Learning Teaching and Scholarship and its support of academic development, research supervision, innovative teaching & learning, using flexible learning, the use of WebCT for online development, and, for its induction programs for newly appointed academic staff.

6.3 Workforce Management

The Audit Panel noted that the following indicator is listed in the Draft Human Resources Tactical Plan: *'Increasing use of the following policies that promote employment flexibility, equity and work/non-work balance: Recreation Leave Enhancement; Part-Time employment; UniSuper – Half Contributions; Parental Leave.'* The Panel sees these intentions as being admirable.

All Australian universities are under increasing pressure to achieve greater levels of efficiency and effectiveness in the way that they allocate their resources and since the largest proportion of resource goes into staff salaries and wages, this pressure invariably expresses itself through the need to achieve economies in staffing. Statistics provided by UC show that in 2001 it employed 372 full-time and fractional-full-time Academic staff; 568 full-time and fractional-full-time General staff; and 172 Casual staff, approximately 130 of these in the academic area. The Panel noted in addition to the usual use of sessional staff in teaching, instances of research staff being 'bought out' of teaching positions and of permanently employed staff teaching offshore being replaced by sessionally employed staff. The Audit Panel detected that there was concern in some quarters of UC that some of the workforce management practices adopted by the University could be contributing to increased academic workforce casualisation, as a quite unintended consequence of the pursuit of entirely legitimate strategic goals and priorities.

The University has set for itself an ambitious target to simultaneously pursue a more flexible approach to the delivery of its courses, increase substantially its International Education profile, and improve its Research standing by increasing research output, while having just opened a second campus in another capital city. All these require the exercise of *'employment flexibility'*. The Audit Panel notes that the development of the new HR Tactical Plan provides the University of Canberra a timely opportunity to monitor its approach to workforce management issues of this nature.

Recommendation 15

That the University of Canberra exercise caution that it is not inadvertently encouraging excessive workforce casualisation through its workforce management practices.

7 STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES AND INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

The Strategic Plan 1999-2003 includes the following objective and strategies with respect to Student Support and Information Management:

To maintain and develop support systems which will improve and enhance the work of the University.

1. *Strategy – Maintain and develop the University’s student support systems.*
2. *Strategy – Develop campus facilities to enhance the University’s programs and cultural life.*
3. *Strategy – Ensure that communications and information technology support the University’s mission and goals.*

In addition, at the time of the Audit Visit the Student Services Tactical Plan had been approved, but the Information Management Tactical Plan was still undergoing development and was anticipated to be developed and approved by September / October 2003.

There are many aspects of student support and information management within a university. The Audit Panel chose to focus on just a few, namely managing service relationships in general; Student Support Services; and the Library and Information Management.

7.1 *Student Support and Information Management Leadership*

Leadership in these areas is split between the Client & Corporate Services Divisions, and the three Academic Divisions. For example, the University of Canberra Library and IT Services are part of Client Services, but the three Learning Resource Centres (LRCs) are an Academic Division responsibility. The University has put in place what is essentially a matrix management structure that works along the following lines:

- Each Academic Division has a ‘Divisional Business Team’ (DBT);
- The DBTs are considered an ‘out-posted section’ of the Corporate Services Division, and while DBT managers and Business Team members are located in each Academic Division they ‘belong’ to Corporate Services. DBT managers are also members of the senior management group of their ‘host’ Division.

The University claims that this arrangement ‘enables the Business Team to provide a quality assurance role that links the three Academic Divisions to the other sections of the University and assists the work of the Academic Division (and its entities such as Schools and University Research Centres) within the strategic policy framework of the University.’

In terms of Student Affairs, the DBT is a focal point for student advice relating to courses and enrolment enquiries, and is ‘the primary area for dispute resolution within the Academic Division’. Typical student administration functions handled by the DBTs are admissions, progress, graduations; reporting; and examinations. They are also responsible for budget preparation; expenditure monitoring and control; management information reporting; training and development; staff administration; purchasing; travel; building security and maintenance; timetabling; secretariat; and marketing and publicity.

This exhaustive list of functions prompted the Audit Panel to consider whether the University of Canberra was in fact running three ‘mini-universities’ rather than one consolidated organisation, to which the response was that the parallel, horizontal and vertical reporting required by a matrix management structure provided ‘the organisational glue’ that helps to meld the Divisions together into the corporate entity that is the University. The Audit Panel concluded, because of the lack of compelling evidence to the contrary, that from an administrative perspective, the DBT system

was operating satisfactorily. However, the Audit Panel cautions that Divisional structures can invite procedural variation, and a tendency to duplicate and/or re-invent systems and processes, unless there is strong communication and policy direction from the centre. While the Audit Panel received positive comments about the support provided by the Divisional Learning Resource Centres, on the basis of its observations during the Audit Visit, the Panel makes the following recommendation with respect to the three LRCs as specialist Divisional units that have primarily an educational role, not an administrative one.

Recommendation 16

That all student service providers at the University of Canberra continue exploring opportunities for greater synergy and complementarity between their efforts; and that in particular there be improved collaboration between the Divisional Learning Resource Centres and other student support services.

7.2 Student Services

The following student support services were included in the Student Services section of the Performance Portfolio with commentary identifying them as contributing significantly to the quality of the UC student experience:

- Divisional Learning Resource Centres – including the Curriculum Resource Centre;
- The *Ngunnawal* Centre – for the support of Indigenous students, including coordination of the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS);
- The Academic Skills Program (ASP) – originally set up to provide academic student support for NESB students, but evolved into a single learning resource for all students. In 1998 the ASP won the Australian Universities Award for Support of the Needs of international students;
- International Office – providing academic, personal, and financial support to international students, for example a very well-received ‘International Buddy Program’ to orientate new International students to the Bruce Campus;
- Halls of Residences Academic Support Program – complementary to the ASP for non-residential students; and
- Dean of Students – dealing with student welfare, grievances, complaints, and appeals. The Portfolio stated that in 2001 the position had been increased to full-time and since March that year had dealt with ‘over 400 student issues’. However, the Audit Panel was informed during the Audit Visit that the time fraction for the Dean of Students had recently been reduced.

Other service areas mentioned in the Portfolio include Orientation, Scholarships, ‘Support for High Achievers’, Careers and Employment, Disabilities, ICT Support, Security Services, Wiradjuri Pre School and Child Care Centre, the Students Association and the UC Union.

AUQA encourages all student support areas to exhibit a student-centred approach in the provision of service, through responding to feedback received from students. The commendations and recommendations that follow result from the conclusions that the Audit Panel formed from its review of documentation, speaking with the staff of the service areas concerned during the Audit Visit, and from feedback provided by clients of the service providers, and other stakeholders.

Commendation 9

AUQA commends the University of Canberra’s Academic Skills Program, for the consistently high regard in which its services are held by students.

The Audit Panel also commends the specialist support available to the University's Indigenous students and to their community.

Commendation 10

AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the services provided to Indigenous students through the *Ngunnawal* Centre.

The orientation support-program and the general level of support for International students have already been commented on favourably above, and in the section on Teaching & Learning. However where criticism occurred there was a consistent pattern of adverse comment from International students about their dealings with the International Office. A particular source of irritation was the delay in gaining access to appropriate over-the-counter service, due to excessive demand.

Recommendation 17

That the University of Canberra's International Office consult more closely with existing and new International students to enhance the responsiveness of its services to meet the expressed needs of students. The University should ensure that it has the capacity to meet student needs should International student numbers continue to grow.

As described above, the Academic Skills Program is highly regarded by both students and staff. It was originally implemented to address the study needs of NESB students and hence provides a valuable level of support for International students. Its success means that its services are now in even greater demand by students in general.

Recommendation 18

That ways be developed at the University of Canberra to provide a level of service to meet both the needs of domestic students, and the expected increase in the number of International students at both the Bruce and UCBC campuses.

When the Portfolio was written, the Dean of Students was a full-time position. Since the time that the Portfolio was developed, the full-time position of Dean of Students has been given detailed consideration and, in order that responsibility was located with Heads of Schools, the position was redefined to allow a half-time Dean to undertake the work. However, the Panel noted a lack of awareness among students about the role of the Dean of Students. The Panel was satisfied that, within the time available, the current Dean of Students is in fact making a very valuable contribution to student welfare at UC and that the lack of awareness is due to the part-time nature of the position.

Recommendation 19

That the University of Canberra consider restoring the Dean of Students to a full-time position, to ensure that student issues can be dealt with proactively.

7.3 *Library and Information Management*

The Library does not feature prominently in the Performance Portfolio, and in contrast to the LRCs, is not mentioned in the section on Student Services, except as an area requiring improvement. The Library is treated under Information Management. Nonetheless, the University has nominated the following as priority areas for improving service, based on its own analysis of '*student opinion about the effectiveness of services using a variety of measures*':

- Library resources and services; and
- Quality of access to computer facilities and the reliability of printing facilities and services in the Computer Centre. (PFp56)

The Audit Panel strongly endorses these self-review findings.

In relation to the Library, while acknowledging that the University is moving forward with plans to improve access to resources held in electronic form, from the consistency of comments made by students the Audit Panel believes it to be equally important that the Library still pay attention to providing timely access to its more traditional paper-based learning resources, while the University is moving forward with this strategy. The University is urged to ensure that required reading monographs and articles listed in the catalogue, but missing, or not locatable in the collection, are monitored and replaced in a timely manner.

Recommendation 20

That further consideration be given to the adequacy of the match of the University of Canberra's Library collection to the courses taught, and the catalogue, and to access issues associated with increased downloading by students, especially doctoral researchers, of electronic resources and that these be attended to by the University as a priority.

The Information Management section of the Portfolio refers to multiple plans, policy reviews, and special investigations into the University's ICT systems and processes. These excerpts are indicative:

'Since 1998 there has been continuing discussion and consultation within the University on these issues, as well as feedback from surveys, focus groups and meetings on specific issues.....Review processes to identify areas in need of improvement include the following:

- *At the strategic planning level*
- *At the policy making level.....*
- *At the operational level.....*

The University has also used formal review processes, for example.....

- *1994: Student Needs for IS at the University of Canberra*
- *1996: Communications and Information Needs of Undergraduates at UC*
- *1998: Computer Centre Survey*
- *1996-1998: Review of Student Experiences of Client Services*
- *1999: Postgraduate Students' IS Report*
- *2002: ICT survey for University Staff'..... (PFp62)*

Despite this impressive commitment to internal review to achieve service improvement, the Portfolio concluded with the following candid statement:

'Acknowledging the need for improvement across information Management within the University, changes in structures and processes are under consideration for 2003. A consultant has been employed to assist the process and to refine the Information Management Tactical Plan.' (Ibid)

The Audit Panel concurs with this finding and proposed course of action and acknowledges the University's candour in identifying and addressing areas in need of improvement in its self-review. There is evidence that the University's perseverance with improving ICT appears to be yielding dividends. For example, a number of students commented on the ease of on-line administrative procedures and the informative and easy way to navigate the University's website.

Commendation 11

AUQA commends the University of Canberra for the effective use it is making on a relatively limited budget of information and communication technology.

A similar situation exists with ICT, as with the Library. The Audit Panel was advised that there was work underway to improve ICT. The Panel is satisfied that the University accepts the need for improved ICT infrastructure and service provision, and is doing what it can within the resources available. However, it is important that the University consider the ICT resource allocation implications from a risk management perspective and in so doing require that some information management issues receive priority attention.

Recommendation 21

That the University of Canberra's plans to provide back up for ICT system security and disaster recovery be addressed as a matter of urgency.

APPENDIX A: THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

The University of Canberra was established by the Commonwealth Government in 1967 as the Canberra College of Advanced Education. Part-time students were enrolled in 1968 and full-time teaching began the following year. *The University of Canberra Act 1989* came into effect on 1 January 1990 replacing the earlier 1967 Act. On 1 December 1997 jurisdiction of the University passed to the Australian Capital Territory. The University is a member of the Unified National system, and of the Commonwealth Association of Universities.

The University of Canberra occupies a site of 119 hectares in the suburb of Bruce, adjacent to the Belconnen Town Centre and about eight km from the central business district of Canberra. The Bruce precinct includes a technology park, the Australian Institute of Sport, a campus of the Canberra Institute of Technology, a major hospital and several government departments.

In 2003, the University of Canberra opened a second campus located in Brisbane in the South Bank Arts & Entertainment precinct.

The current total enrolment is just over 9000 EFTE students with about 17.5 per cent enrolled in postgraduate courses. Part-time student enrolments account for about 34 per cent of the total student body. At present about 57 per cent of the student population are below 25 years of age, and 56 per cent are female.

Residential accommodation on campus caters for about 1050 students, while some off-campus accommodation for students is available nearby. College House, a separate building accommodating 28 persons in en suite rooms, is available for visiting academic staff and for use by short course participants.

The University's mission is 'to develop a university which is continuously engaged with the needs of the community it serves through educating professionals professionally, and generating knowledge and research to address present and anticipated needs'.

To achieve this mission, the University is organised into three academic Divisions: Communications and Education, Management and Technology, and Science and Design, and two administrative Divisions: Client Services, and Corporate Services, containing some fourteen schools, nine different areas of research strength, and a number of other specialist organisational units. University governance is by a Council of 27 elected and appointed members, with the Vice-Chancellor an ex-officio member.

APPENDIX B: THE OBJECTS OF AUQA

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

APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL

Mr. Robert Carmichael, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency

Professor George Gordon, Director, Centre for Academic Practice, University of Strathclyde, UK

Professor Robin McTaggart (Panel Chair), Pro Vice-Chancellor, Staff Development & Student affairs, James Cook University, Queensland

Professor Alex Radloff, Associate Dean (Academic), Life Sciences, RMIT University, Victoria

Mr. Lyndon Rowe, Chief Executive, Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Western Australia

