

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of
Christian Heritage College
Queensland

February 2007

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OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

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

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

In 2007, it was envisaged that DEST (the predecessor of DEEWR) might agree that this authority could be taken up by other agencies, under appropriate conditions. Therefore, the Queensland Office of Higher Education sought this authority. This required a HEP to volunteer to be audited by the Office, with a monitoring process in place, and Christian Heritage College volunteered. A careful audit process was created, with AUQA auditors as a panel member and as an observer. The audit was judged to be equivalent to an AUQA audit for the purpose of CHC's audit to satisfy HESA; and QOHE was judged to have carried out the audit in such a way as to be authorised by the Federal Government to perform HEP audits in the future.

In 2009, however, the Federal Government decided not to permit other agencies to be added to the HEP Guidelines. The AUQA Board therefore considered the 2007 audit report of CHC and, in view of AUQA's involvement in the planning, execution and monitoring of this audit, agreed to endorse it as satisfying CHC's HESA requirement.

HEP audits under the HESA consider institutional actions and performance in relation to a group of criteria collectively known as 'Quality Audit Factors' (QAFs). Their primary purpose is to provide the HEPs with a framework for the review of certain aspects of institutional performance, and the auditor with a frame of reference for reporting.

As indicated on page 1, this audit was conducted as part of an integrated quality audit and re-registration process. However, in line with HESA requirements, only the quality audit findings are publicly reported on by AUQA.

Queensland Office of Higher Education

**Report of an Integrated Quality Audit and Reaccreditation
of Courses Offered by the
Christian Heritage College**

February 2007

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THE INTEGRATED PROCESS

A number of Queensland non-university higher education providers are also Higher Education Providers (HEPs) under the Commonwealth Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA). The Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) conducts approval processes for HEPs, which take as their starting point accreditation in the home jurisdiction.

A requirement of continued HEP status is for the non-university provider to agree to be audited by a quality auditing body nominated in guidelines pursuant to the HESA. In order to be listed in the Higher Education Provider Guidelines, a State or Territory accreditation agency is required to demonstrate its readiness to be listed as a quality audit body by undertaking a pilot audit of a HEP observed by a team of expert consultants commissioned by DEST for this purpose. The present audit was such a pilot audit.

DEST has developed a Handbook for Quality Audits of Higher Education Providers (the Handbook). The Handbook contains information and advice for auditing bodies and institutions being audited under the requirements of the HESA, including details of the Quality Audit Factors against which HEPs will be audited.

The QOHE conducted this HEP audit as an Integrated Quality Audit and Reaccreditation Process (the Integrated Process), that satisfies both the requirements of Quality Audits for HEPs and the Queensland reaccreditation requirements set out in the Guidelines for Accreditation of Higher Education Courses Offered by Non-University Providers (the Guidelines).

The Integrated Process aligns the Queensland reaccreditation approach with the Quality Audit Factors, with a continuous improvement and outcomes focus. The reaccreditation criteria form part of the evidence used to illustrate the effectiveness of quality assurance plans and processes in relation to nationally accepted good practice in higher education (detailed further in the Queensland Guidelines for the Accreditation of Higher Education Courses offered by Non-University Providers).

AUDIT FINDINGS

A summary of strengths and opportunities for improvement are provided below and have not been prioritised by the Panel, but in fact are listed in the order in which they appear in the report.

Strengths

(S1) The Panel observed that CHC fostered a caring academic community that was dedicated to its purpose. In particular, the aims of providing distinctively Christian higher education, developing a Christian perspective on society and culture and distinctive care for individuals were clearly understood and pursued throughout the College.

(S2) The Panel concludes the College displays a respectful and collaborative approach in all aspects of its business. The Panel received strong messages of a student centred approach.

(S3) The Panel was advised of a College initiative to improve the effectiveness of its teaching and learning in the School of Education and Humanities through the implementation of a mapping process that involved the development of a set of Christian teacher standards, mapped against CHC graduate attributes and Queensland College of Teacher requirements. These three areas were correlated against each of the CHC education units and matched to unit statements which in turn contributed to the overall outcomes and objectives. The Panel commends the College on undertaking this initiative.

(S4) The use of external points of reference obtained through professional associations was considered a strength, particularly in Education. In relation to Social Science, external stakeholders gave an example regarding university input for youth courses, which could have been considered quite threatening to the College's world view, but the College received the information very well and made significant changes to the curriculum as a result.

(S5) The Panel heard that the School of Business was working on research into 'not-for-profits' as there was currently very little research in this area. Findings were discussed in the classroom to stimulate intellectual curiosity among students. The Panel commends the College on this innovative research and its subsequent application to teaching and learning.

(S6) The Panel was advised the College intended to employ another full-time lecturer in the School of Social Sciences in 2007. The Panel endorses this action, and encourages the Council to continue with its approach to allocate time to release staff for research activities.

(S7) The rigour of the course review system was endorsed by external members of the School Advisory Committee who praised the open and collaborative review system which consisted of documentation with a high level of detail. The Panel heard that the College's greatest strength in this regard was its energy investment in networking.

(S8) The Panel commends CHC on its commitment and willingness to engage in processes for setting strategic direction and accepting the challenges of implementing quality mechanisms and processes over time.

Opportunities for Improvement

(R1) The Panel strongly recommends that the College Council seek input from external stakeholders when reviewing its strategic plan and ensures that such feedback is sought as part of any review of Council itself.

(R2) The Panel recommends that the College seek to more clearly articulate open intellectual inquiry in its course documentation, demonstrating that students are encouraged to analyse different world views. For example, the unit, “Christianity and World Views”, which is a unit common to all courses, needs to fully encompass a range of perspectives. Other units should also be reviewed for greater incorporation of non-Christian and broader denominational view points.

(R3) The Panel recommends that the College Council review funding arrangements for the College, given that a lack of resourcing has been identified by the Council itself as a key issue and that the College currently does not seem to have ready access to sufficient funds to progress its aims and objectives.

(R4) While acknowledging the Council had expanded its membership to strengthen its financial and business management expertise, the Panel recommends that the College Council increase its external academic representation to inform its educational objectives and seek greater formal engagement with a full range of relevant external stakeholders.

(R5) The Panel recommends that the College ensure that the informal processes which the School of Education and Humanities currently has in place to develop good relationships with external stakeholders are formalised and utilised throughout the entire College.

(R6) The Panel recommends that the College develop a balanced approach, incorporating both formal and informal processes for determining stakeholder satisfaction with CHC graduates.

(R7) The Panel notes that student withdrawal rates are quite high in non-counselling courses and recommends that the College monitor this data closely for all courses and investigate the reasons for such high rates.

(R8) The Panel recommends that the College adopt a more formal lecturer evaluation process and also establish a procedure to inform students of actions taken as a result of the evaluation process.

(R9) The Panel recommends that the College provide resources to develop networks and formalise arrangements for practicum placement and to ensure that adequate clinical supervision is provided.

(R10) The Panel recommends that the College ensure that written curriculum documentation always reflects what is actually being taught and recommends that further articulation be included in the curriculum documentation.

(R11) The Panel strongly recommends that the College ensures that the policies, practices and procedures currently embedded in the College’s School of Education and Humanities, be employed in all schools, including the School of Social Sciences, to assist with the development of quality assurance mechanisms. The development and implementation of these processes should be considered a high priority for the College.

(R12) With reference to the College’s ambition to become a university by 2010, the Panel recommends that CHC develop a research culture with appropriate research infrastructure and establish areas of research excellence, recruit staff with the qualifications and experience to supervise research students and develop a reputation through published research reports.

(R13) The Panel strongly recommends that the College review staff workloads, which it considers extremely high, and develop suitable risk management strategies to ensure teaching continuity.

(R14) The Panel strongly recommends that the College develop formal human resource management arrangements and underpinning policies and procedures to codify current practice, particularly with regard to the potential impact that any new courses would have on current heavy staff workloads.

(R15) Considering the College's aim of achieving university status by 2010, the Panel recommends that the College further develop the balance between teaching and learning roles, community service, and research roles, and link this to formal performance appraisal processes to ensure the integrity of its academic role.

(R16) The Panel recommends that the College implement formal processes whereby all evaluations of lecturer performance are administered by Deans so that resulting recommendations are actioned, and conduct formal staff performance reviews to provide staff with positive feedback and constructive comments to assist with any areas of improvement needed.

(R17) The Panel recommends that the College develop a formal acquisitions policy led by the College's librarian to assist with prioritising library needs as well as ensuring that a diverse range of resources are available to both students and staff.

(R18) The Panel recommends that the College rationalise its current courses and postpone the development of new courses until issues of library funding are resolved.

(R19) The Panel recommends that in order to close the quality assurance loop and codify and share best practice, the College replace its current informal practices with formal mechanisms, including a plan that specifies timelines and allocation of responsibilities. Such a plan would assist the College with prioritisation of improvements and preparing its progress report to the Queensland Office of Higher Education.

QUALITY AUDIT FACTOR 1

Institutional and Educational Objectives and Institutional Governance

The institution has clearly defined its purposes and its role in the higher education sector. It has educational objectives aligned with these purposes and its place in the sector. The institution is governed in an appropriate manner, displays academic integrity and operates according to sound business management practices. It fosters open intellectual enquiry and is committed to the promotion of student learning.

The Christian Heritage College's stated Institutional Purpose is to 'provide transformative higher education within a Christian vision of life.' This purpose is elaborated in the College's Draft Strategic Plan 2006–2010 through a set of Institutional Aims and Institutional Values, which in turn inform a number of attributes the College sees as distinctive to its graduates.

The Panel heard that work began in 2003 in developing a strategic plan for the College, involving an exhaustive iterative process that included a high level of staff input. The resulting 2004–2008 strategic plan was reviewed in 2006, following feedback that it was not sufficiently forward looking. The Panel saw the draft 2006–2010 Strategic Plan that had been approved by Council in August 2006. Areas for improvement have been identified and School Operational Plans have undergone a process of alignment to the overall College Strategic Plan. Consequently, more questions are being asked of the Principal and staff and better reporting is being sought by the Council.

The Panel noted advice that revised School Operational plans were due in February 2007. The College advised that previously there had been a bottom-up approach to planning but now the College Council had taken the lead in strategic planning. Teaching and learning and other strategic elements were now being considered together as a whole of College strategic planning process. Schools have been identified as a critical component and resourcing has been identified as a key issue. During discussion, the Panel received advice that even though the College Council had taken a lead role in strategic planning, input from external stakeholders was not planned to be a key area of focus. The College expressed the view that it was better for the Council to fully own the process, and for external input to take place at the course development and review level.

The Panel strongly recommends that the College Council seek input from external stakeholders when reviewing its strategic plan and ensures that such feedback is sought as part of any review of Council itself (R1).

During the course of interviews with staff, students and external committee members, a high level of identification within the organisation was found, demonstrating a good understanding of the institution's educational objectives throughout all levels of the organisation. The Panel observed that CHC fostered a caring academic community that was dedicated to its purpose. In particular, the aims of providing distinctively Christian higher education, developing a Christian perspective on society and culture and distinctive care for individuals were clearly understood and pursued throughout the College (S1).

In considering the level of open intellectual inquiry displayed by CHC the Panel found that there was an incongruence between the curriculum documentation for the Social Science courses up for reaccreditation and the evidence heard during interviews. The Panel heard that while the College's mission proposed a particular Christian tradition, a range of alternative world views was also accepted

at CHC. The Panel heard repeatedly throughout the day that even though the College had formal links with the Christian Outreach Centre, a narrow denominational view would not be supported by the College nor would it be viable. However, it was the view of the Panel that these assertions were not supported by the curriculum documentation.

The Panel recommends that the College seek to more clearly articulate open intellectual inquiry in its course documentation, demonstrating that students are encouraged to analyse different world views. For example, the unit, “Christianity and World Views”, which is a unit common to all courses, needs to fully encompass a range of perspectives. Other units should also be reviewed for greater incorporation of non-Christian and broader denominational view points (R2).

At all levels of CHC a culture of support for students, staff and management was evidenced. The Panel concludes the College displays a respectful and collaborative approach in all aspects of its business. The Panel received strong messages of a student centred approach (S2).

The College Council advised that it received quality reports at its monthly meetings to assist with its management of the College. It had reviewed its membership to increase capabilities in the areas of business and financial expertise. Additionally, the Council has recognised the need to undertake monitoring and review processes consistent with good governance practice and, in association with the Principal, has begun researching corporate Board evaluation processes and models.

The Panel heard that the College Council worked closely with the parent company, the Christian Outreach Centre (COC), and that the financial stability of the College was underpinned by financial guarantees provided by the COC. The Performance Portfolio stated that the College achieved autonomy from the COC by maintaining a majority of external members on the College Council. Requests for any additional funding, however, needed approval from the COC. A lack of resourcing was identified by the Council itself as a key issue for the College, and members felt it had been remiss in not building relationships with potential benefactors to raise the College’s profile as a means of sourcing additional funds.

The Panel recommends that the College Council review funding arrangements for the College, given that a lack of resourcing has been identified by the Council itself as a key issue and that the College currently does not seem to have ready access to sufficient funds to progress its aims and objectives (R3).

While acknowledging the Council had expanded its membership to strengthen its financial and business management expertise, the Panel recommends that the College Council increase its external academic representation to inform its educational objectives and seek greater formal engagement with a full range of relevant external stakeholders (R4).

QUALITY AUDIT FACTOR 2

Achieving Effectiveness in Teaching, Learning and other Core Functions

The institution achieves its educational objectives through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity. It is able to demonstrate that it discharges these core functions effectively and seeks ways to do so even more effectively.

The College states in the performance portfolio that its academic programs are intended to achieve the institution's mission, aims, graduate attributes and strategic goals. Further, course delivery is a primary means of achieving aims and goals. The integration of the College's mission into the curriculum is discussed regularly at staff meetings. By way of example the College pointed to counselling units where practicum, field experience and work experience were being expanded into a range of settings, other than Christian, in an attempt to increase diversity. However, as previously established, the Panel was concerned that unit outlines did not formally contain content to ensure that a diverse range of views was covered.

The Panel was advised of a College initiative to improve the effectiveness of its teaching and learning in the School of Education and Humanities through the implementation of a mapping process that involved the development of a set of Christian teacher standards, mapped against CHC graduate attributes and Queensland College of Teacher requirements. These three areas were correlated against each of the CHC education units and matched to unit statements which in turn contributed to the overall outcomes and objectives. The Panel commends the College on undertaking this initiative **(S3)**.

Interviews with external stakeholders revealed that the College's internal course review process was very rigorous and that several meetings were held to discuss issues. The documentation provided by the College to Course Advisory Committees was very extensive and of a high quality. Committee members felt that the College was open to suggestions and keen to incorporate recommendations.

To assist with assessing the effectiveness of its teaching and learning strategies, the College collects a range of data on student academic outcomes, but has no formal processes for collecting data on graduate outcomes, employer and professional satisfaction.

The Panel recommends that the College ensure that the informal processes which the School of Education and Humanities currently has in place to develop good relationships with external stakeholders are formalised and utilised throughout the entire College (R5).

The Panel heard that the College conducted benchmarking with universities and other higher education institutions but that formal statistical evaluations were not usually conducted. Opportunities for academic improvement were achieved through constant internal communication amongst staff, ensuring a diversity of membership on course assessment panels and networking with other institutions to seek information and guidance as necessary.

The use of external points of reference obtained through professional associations was considered a strength, particularly in Education. In relation to Social Science, external stakeholders gave an example regarding university input into youth courses, which could have been considered quite threatening to the College's world view, but the College received the information very well and made significant changes to the curriculum as a result **(S4)**.

Whilst there were no formal processes in place to determine stakeholder satisfaction with CHC graduates, the College did gain informal feedback from students and feedback from the business internship program that was held in the final year of the Bachelor of Business. The College felt that these processes kept them informed and that feedback was of a higher quality than would be gained via formal processes. The College claimed a 100 per cent graduate employment rate from the School of Education and Humanities and felt that the quality of CHC education graduates impacted on the vitality and quality of Christian schools. The Panel was unable to substantiate this claim.

The Panel recommends that the College develop a balanced approach, incorporating both formal and informal processes for determining stakeholder satisfaction with CHC graduates. (R6).

The Panel observed that student withdrawal rates from some courses in Counselling and Social Sciences were quite high. The College advised that anecdotally they were broadly aware of significant withdrawal rates." The College felt that the high withdrawal rates were based on student's own personal circumstances since Counselling courses often attract students who wish to solve their own issues.

The Panel notes that student withdrawal rates are quite high in non-counselling courses and recommends that the College monitor this data closely for all courses and investigate the reasons for such high rates (R7).

Student evaluation of individual lecturers, course and unit content was conducted regularly. Students the Panel spoke to confirmed they felt valued and supported and their comments were listened to and acted upon. The Panel notes that the lecturer evaluation process used by the College relies upon the individual lecturer to initiate discussions with the relevant Dean concerning negative feedback.

The Panel recommends that the College adopt a more formal lecturer evaluation process and also establish a procedure to inform students of actions taken as a result of the evaluation process (R8).

During the course of interviews, students commented that they were generally very satisfied with the College, although there was some concern about resourcing levels, particularly in relation to information resources. Students also commented on the availability of some subjects as some were only offered in intensive mode, which presented difficulties for students at times. Although the College published its grievance procedures, students were not all aware of formal grievance procedures although most felt that lecturers were very approachable and would be their first point of call.

The practicum placement scheme is relatively new to the College's counselling courses and the College is working on improving supervision of students and developing networks with organisations. The Panel heard that the specific approach to therapy adopted by the College was not found in all organisations and so there has been some difficulty in obtaining appropriate expertise for supervision. The majority of placements were made with church bodies although there have been attempts to arrange for placements in other organisations, but with only three practicum placement staff, this has proven difficult. The Panel noted advice that in some circumstances where the supervising capacity of the placement organisation was limited, clinical placements had been supervised by College staff to ensure that quality was maintained. This was acknowledged by CHC as less than satisfactory for an objective assessment of students' clinical capabilities. The College had also considered implementing its own clinic to try to overcome these issues.

The Panel recommends that the College provide resources to develop networks and formalise arrangements for practicum placement and to ensure that adequate clinical supervision is provided (R9).

The College advised the Panel that each School was required to organise external moderation of a minimum of two units per semester. These were typically undertaken with other higher education institutions with a Christian focus such as Tabor College and Avondale College. Depending upon the availability of staff, some units were moderated with The University of Queensland or the Queensland University of Technology. Comparability of outcomes was also supported by credit agreements for business units with the University of Southern Queensland and Griffith University. The Panel was also interested to hear that the School of Business had initiated endorsement from a National Accounting Body who found that the requisite business practices were embedded in CHC courses.

In relation to achieving academic aims through scholarship, the Panel heard that some staff were involved in research which informed teaching practices and field experience also contributed to the maintenance of scholarship. A number of staff have completed Honours degrees and some are in the process of completing PhDs. The Panel heard that the School of Business was working on research into 'not-for-profits' as there was currently very little research in this area. Findings were discussed in the classroom to stimulate intellectual curiosity among students. The Panel commends the College on this innovative research and its subsequent application to teaching and learning **(S5)**.

It was noted that the College has a policy of providing study leave for staff, however, the small numbers of permanent staff meant that there was limited opportunity for individuals to avail themselves of this support. The Panel was advised the College intended to employ another full-time lecturer in the School of Social Sciences in 2007. The Panel endorses this action, and encourages the Council to continue with its approach to allocate time to release staff for research activities **(S6)**.

Overall the Panel concluded the College has a commitment to life-long learning which was encouraged and supported by academic staff, and that teaching and learning processes were validated by students, who feel valued and supported by the College.

The Panel recommends that the College ensure that written curriculum documentation always reflects what is actually being taught and recommends that further articulation be included in the curriculum documentation (R10).

Notwithstanding the areas of improvement that have been identified, CHC graduates are highly regarded in the sector, particularly in the area of teacher education. The CHC has formed close relationships with the Queensland College of Teachers and many Christian schools, resulting in a one hundred percent employment rate.

The Panel strongly recommends that the College ensures that the policies, practices and procedures currently embedded in the College's School of Education and Humanities, be employed in all schools, including the School of Social Sciences, to assist with the development of quality assurance mechanisms. The development and implementation of these processes should be considered a high priority for the College (R11).

The Performance Portfolio stated that a major goal of the CHC was to become a university by 2010, and claimed a small level of research activity as a step in this direction. The Academic Board is to develop a working paper for 2007 with the aim of offering a professional doctorate in the future to align with this aim. During interviews the College acknowledged that the development of a reasonable research profile would be costly and its current budget allocation would need to be increased by a factor of 10. Since the CHC has no access to sources of public funding for research, the Panel confirms the Council's plan to identify people who might support a Christian higher education institution, as adequate funding will be imperative to the College realising its goal of becoming a university.

With reference to the College's ambition to become a university by 2010, the Panel recommends that CHC develop a research culture with appropriate research infrastructure and establish areas of research excellence, recruit staff with the qualifications and experience to supervise research students and develop a reputation through published research reports (R12).

QUALITY AUDIT FACTOR 3

Organisational Structures, Decision-making Processes and Resources to Support Teaching and Learning

The institution supports the achievement of its institutional purposes and educational objectives through an appropriate and effective set of organisational structures and decision-making processes, including the resolution of grievances, provision and development of academic staff, student support processes and information resources. These arrangements promote the achievement of its institutional purposes and educational objectives.

The Panel heard from the College Council that there were policies and procedures in place relating to work conditions and leave entitlements, however, additional information supplied in the Performance Portfolio stated that there were no formal policies and procedures relating to performance review, staff development, workload etc. The College Council seemed unaware that there were deficiencies in some human resource policies.

The Panel also heard that staff induction processes were not formal, but conducted on a personal ad hoc basis since the College was only small. A comprehensive letter was sent to new staff providing induction information, and for example, advice about the procedures for writing unit outlines and processes for examiners meetings. Regular staff meetings were also held to discuss any issues.

Staff development funding was provided for conferences and other programs. \$1000 was available for each full-time staff member per year, and one person was able to travel overseas each year. Part-time staff could access development funds on a pro-rata basis.

The Panel did not observe any issues arising from the apparent lack of formal underpinning policies and procedures in human resource management. Nonetheless, during the interview process, the Panel heard that staff workloads were high, although staff admitted that in some cases high workloads were self induced. Whilst staff were committed and happy to undertake such heavy workloads as they felt their work was 'a calling', the size of the College and the number of courses on offer means that the College is highly dependent on a small number of knowledgeable and highly committed staff, placing CHC in a position of high risk.

College management acknowledged this risk and was concerned at the inevitable fatigue such workloads and commitment could lead to. The Panel was informed that staff were instructed that they must take holidays to prevent "burn-out". Even though CHC claimed that it had benchmarked its staff workload against other higher education institutions and found them to be comparable, the Panel felt staff workloads were extremely high.

The Panel strongly recommends that the College review staff workloads, which it considers extremely high, and develop suitable risk management strategies to ensure teaching continuity (R13).

The Panel strongly recommends that the College develop formal human resource management arrangements and underpinning policies and procedures to codify current practice, particularly with regard to the potential impact that any new courses would have on current heavy staff workloads (R14).

Considering the College's aim of achieving university status by 2010, the Panel recommends that the College further develop the balance between teaching and learning roles, community service, and research roles, and link this to formal performance appraisal processes to ensure the integrity of its academic role (R15).

Student evaluations of lecturer performance were usually sent to the relevant Dean to disseminate to lecturing staff and initiate any subsequent discussions with staff, although in some schools evaluations were sent directly to staff themselves to action. The Panel was told staff performance was assessed in a voluntary informal manner as there were no formal processes in place. Staff commented that they would be happy to embrace a formal practice, but only on the grounds that it did not inhibit collegiality amongst staff.

In the Performance Portfolio, the College claims that 'academic staff act with integrity and quality'. In the absence of a formal performance review process, the Panel did not see how this assertion could be substantiated by the College.

The Panel recommends that the College implement formal processes whereby all evaluations of lecturer performance are administered by Deans so that resulting recommendations are actioned, and conduct formal staff performance reviews to provide staff with positive feedback and constructive comments to assist with any areas of improvement needed (R16).

Support for student learning was considered to be equal across the various delivery modes by students. Students felt there were advantages and disadvantages to each of the delivery modes. The Panel heard from the College Council that resourcing decisions had been intuitive in the past, but recently the Council had recognised that decisions needed to be planned and much more explicit. The College Council was aware that resourcing levels needed improvement. To honour its commitment to equity of access, fee levels had been kept low, and this had contributed to the tight funding situation. Previously annual budgets had been set after fee levels for the coming year. The Council has changed its strategy and intends to set budgets first, then consider fee levels in this context.

The Panel heard from several sources that the library, in particular, was in urgent need of additional resources. The Panel heard of ingenious ways the College had used to provide additional texts and that Council was aware of this issue and supportive of sourcing additional funds. The Panel supports the College's direction and affirms that sources for substantial additional funds must be found as a matter of urgency, particularly with the planned introduction of new courses which will further strain an already limited resource. CHC's aim to become a research-focused institution will provide a further impost on library resources to support the needs of higher degree students and staff who will be required to undertake more research.

Library and Information Technology services are pivotal in supporting the quality of higher education courses. The Panel is strongly of the view that the current practice of Deans being the decision-makers for library purchases should be discouraged.

The Panel recommends that the College develop a formal acquisitions policy led by the College's librarian to assist with prioritising library needs as well as ensuring that a diverse range of resources are available to both students and staff (R17).

The Panel recommends that the College rationalise its current courses and postpone the development of new courses until issues of library funding are resolved (R18).

QUALITY AUDIT FACTOR 4

Maintaining a Commitment to Quality Improvement

The institution considers evidence about how effectively it is accomplishing its institutional purposes and educational objectives. Such considerations inform the institution's strategic planning and its establishment of priorities within its component units, and may lead to the revision of institutional and educational objectives, approaches to teaching and learning, and planning and budgeting priorities.

The CHC is currently approved to run its own "modified process" for accreditation of its courses, whereby the College manages the course assessment process with a Panel that has been approved by the Queensland Minister for Education, Training and the Arts, with the Minister remaining the final decision-maker.

As a non-self accrediting institution, the formal CHC course review process is aligned with five yearly reaccreditation cycles, but annual reviews of curriculum are also undertaken. The College told the Panel that they used a collegial approach of talking through reviews at all levels of the College that included staff and students, and that different view points were embraced. The College felt that the balance of full-time and part-time staff complemented this process.

The Panel heard from the Academic Board of a cultural shift at the College in embracing quality improvement and assurance which would be monitored in terms of academic programs over the next year. The rigour of the course review system was endorsed by external members of the School Advisory Committee who praised the open and collaborative review system which consisted of documentation with a high level of detail. The Panel heard that the College's greatest strength in this regard was its energy investment in networking **(S7)**.

Stakeholder satisfaction was not formally evaluated, however, there were many informal processes in place, particularly in the School of Education and Humanities. Members of external committees did comment that suggestions were always well received and acted upon. It was noted that a large number of new courses had been developed in the past few years, and whilst these new courses expanded the College's offerings, the Panel felt that this was placing further strain on resources that were already limited, particularly the library and staff.

The Panel heard from a number of sources that the School of Education and Humanities had well established course review and monitoring systems in place that involved School Advisory Committees and the Academic Board. Unit evaluations were conducted at the end of each semester with a formal report being provided to the Dean of the School of Education and Humanities at CHC for any relevant action. The Queensland Office of Higher Education annual reporting was cited as a means of ensuring courses were scrutinised each year, and as a result of this process, recommendations were often sent to Academic Board for review.

Members of the Academic Board stated that whilst they operated in a collegial environment, healthy debate was the norm and that School recommendations were not always accepted. Part of the Academic Board's role was also to scrutinise School Reports and their progress towards goals.

The CHC Performance Portfolio acknowledged a long list of issues (55) needing attention over the next 5 years. This was refined to a short listing of 38 and further refined to 12 hot spots as a priority for the next 12 months. During the interview process, management and staff acknowledged that this self-

review process had allowed them the opportunity to formally identify areas of need and the consequent documentation would ensure that the focus remained on the issues requiring attention. The College plans to spread the workload for such improvements by identifying and allocating issues to the relevant areas of the College.

CHC is currently actively seeking ways to improve their quality assurance processes and determine ways of progressing their aims. The Panel noted that in a large number of instances, many of the issues had already been identified by the College and had been placed on their improvement agenda in an informal sense for some time, but had not been fully effected. The high level of recent activity in this current planning phase meant that the Panel quite often endorsed the College's own intentions. However, since options were still being considered by the College, the Panel cannot comment on the soundness of the proposed direction nor verify current quality assurance practices.

The Panel recommends that in order to close the quality assurance loop and codify and share best practice, the College replace its current informal practices with formal mechanisms, including a plan that specifies timelines and allocation of responsibilities. Such a plan would assist the College with prioritisation of improvements and preparing its progress report to the Queensland Office of Higher Education (R19).

The Panel commends CHC on its commitment and willingness to engage in processes for setting strategic direction and accepting the challenges of implementing quality mechanisms and processes over time **(S8)**.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CHRISTIAN HERITAGE COLLEGE

The Christian Heritage College (CHC) is a small college operating in a niche market that presents itself as Christian. The College has been operating since 1986 and has been approved to offer higher education courses by the Minister for Education since 1988. CHC offers courses in education, business, social sciences and ministry, from undergraduate to postgraduate. It currently has a student population of around 800. In 2005, the College was approved by the Commonwealth as a Higher Education Provider under the Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA).

A comprehensive Performance Portfolio was prepared by the College as a dual purpose document: (a) to meet the requirements of the HESA for the periodic quality audit of approved HEPs under the HESA and (b) to seek approval for the reaccreditation of seven postgraduate social science courses. This Performance Portfolio was a candid analysis of the College's processes which clearly identified many areas that required improvement, particularly in the overall quality management of CHC. As noted by the College in the Portfolio, self-review is concerned with making judgements about specific aspects of achievement which are publicly defensible.

APPENDIX B: THE AUDIT PANEL

Chair:

Professor Elizabeth Davies
Head of School
School of Nursing and Midwifery
The University of Queensland

Panel Members:

Emeritus Professor Philip Almond
Member, Queensland Ministerial Advisory Panel
Queensland Department of Education, Training, and the Arts

Emeritus Professor Phil Meade
AUQA Auditor
Member of Council, University of the Sunshine Coast

Dr John Schmuttermaier
Lecturer, Behavioural Sciences and Social Work
Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences
The University of Queensland

Professor Margot Schofield
Professor of Counselling and Psychotherapy
School of Public Health
La Trobe University

Secretariat:

Mr Ian Kimber
Director
Office of Higher Education
Queensland Department of Education, Training, and the Arts

Ms Helen Lawrance
Manager Accreditation
Office of Higher Education
Queensland Department of Education, Training, and the Arts

