

# AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of  
Central Queensland University

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## OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

### *Background*

In 2005 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of Central Queensland University, based in Queensland, Australia.

This Report of the audit provides an overview, and then details AUQA's findings, recommendations (including affirmations) and commendations. A brief introduction to Central Queensland University (hereinafter called 'the University' or 'CQU') is given in Appendix A; the mission, objectives, values and vision of AUQA are shown in Appendix B; membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix C; and a list of abbreviations, acronyms and terms used in this Report is provided in Appendix D.

### *The Audit Process*

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

On 19 July 2005 CQU presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) to AUQA, including a number of Appendices and Supporting Documents. The Audit Panel met on 11 August 2005 to consider these materials and subsequently requested the auditee to supply additional items of information and to answer a number of questions in advance of the audit.

The Audit Panel Deputy Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to CQU on 7 September 2005. During that visit, they discussed the additional documentation and answers to questions requested of the University in advance, and reviewed the suitability of arrangements for the various onshore and offshore Audit Visits.

The full scope of the University's activities was subject to audit. The main Audit Visit took place at the Mackay campus on 17 October 2005 and at the Rockhampton campus over 18 to 21 October 2005. Prior to that, AUQA decided, given the regional and, increasingly, international nature of the University, to also send delegations to operations in Shanghai, Hong Kong, Singapore, Fiji, Sydney and Melbourne.

In all, AUQA spoke with over 380 people during the Audit Visit, including senior management, academic and general staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, CQU Council members and external stakeholders, including offshore partners, representatives of business, industry, and professional organisations and the community, including from secondary schools and alumni. In order to obtain a broad view of the University's academic activities, and yet also ensure issues were considered in sufficient depth, AUQA selected a representative sample of academic units for particular consideration in terms of materials and interviewees. Those units were Commerce, Chemical and Biochemical Sciences, Education and Innovation, and Information Technology. AUQA also selected a representative sample of research units. They were the Centre for Railway Engineering and the Centre for Environmental Management. Sessions were also available for any member of the CQU community to meet the Audit Panel and four people took advantage of this opportunity.

This Audit Report relates to the situation current at the time of the last Audit Visit, which ended on 21 October 2005, and does not take account of any changes that may have subsequently occurred. It records the conclusions reached by AUQA based on the documentation provided by CQU, as well as information gained through web resources, interviews, discussions and observations. There was rather more briefing

and de-briefing of interviewees by the University than AUQA is comfortable with. However, the Audit Panel was able to gather sufficient evidence from all sources to test the veracity of statements made in the Portfolio.

While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the University's activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

The Audit Report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A commendation refers to the achievement of a stated goal, or to some plan or activity that has led to, or appears likely to lead to, the achievement of a stated goal, and which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. A recommendation refers to an area in need of attention, whether in respect of approach, deployment or results, which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. Where such matters have already been identified by CQU, with adequate evidence, they are termed 'affirmations'. It is acknowledged that recommendations and affirmations in AUQA audit reports may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for institutions. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise recommendations and affirmations, and recognises that it is the responsibility of CQU to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

As usual, AUQA has based the structure of this Audit Report on the Performance Portfolio submitted by the University and modified to take into account the major goals of the University's Strategic Plan 2003–2007. As the University's new Strategic Plan 2006–2011 was approved during the Audit Visit, AUQA sought to incorporate this document into its deliberations, but more from a forward-looking perspective than as a set of goals against which to hold the University to account at this point in time. Other variances from the structure of the Portfolio reflect the topics selected by AUQA for audit, or are for reporting convenience (such as reporting on Student Support in a separate section, whereas the University treats this topic under Learning and Teaching).

AUQA would like to extend its thanks to CQU for its collaboration in this important process. AUQA trusts that this Report will contribute constructively to the period of major change in which the University is currently involved.

## CONCLUSIONS

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

### *Summary of Findings*

CQU is a unique university in Australia. Originally a regional university based in Rockhampton (see Appendix A for a more detailed history), it now has five regional campuses throughout the Central Queensland area, two major offshore partnerships (in Shanghai and Singapore, with diminishing operations in Hong Kong) and, through a partnership with C\_Management Services (C\_MS) Pty Ltd, which it half owns, four Australian International Campuses (AICs) (Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney and Melbourne) and a campus in Suva, Fiji.

The University is currently at a crossroads in terms of its future nature and viability. It is undergoing major organisational changes designed to respond to financial difficulties born largely of challenges in recruiting domestic students to regional campuses. The changes are also designed to better position CQU for a reformed higher education environment which provides it, as a regional, multi-campus university with private metropolitan-based operations, with distinct advantages and disadvantages. The change process has been under way for some time and this has, in itself, contributed to the difficulties the University faces. Staff turnover has been high, and morale lower than desired pending resolution of such issues as leadership teams and faculty structures. The University is aware of the need to finalise the intended changes with speed, but it will nonetheless be necessary to ensure that staff are motivated, empowered and supported to continue the business of the University in the interim.

One vital ingredient in the University's future is its relationship with C\_MS, which the University owns 50:50 with a private partner Kallawar Holdings Pty Ltd. This company has been very successful in recruiting and servicing fee-paying students – possibly more so than the University could have achieved on its own. Continued growth in the C\_MS activity has made a significant contribution to improving the University's financial position. The student enrolments facilitated through C\_MS now constitute half of CQU's total enrolments and this cohort is growing to the point where C\_MS is now essential to the University's existence. However, in the international student market, successful years provide no guarantee of future success. As indicated by CQU, the relationship between CQU, Kallawar and C\_MS (and other involved companies) needs to be strengthened and rendered more transparent and interactive in order to combine their strengths so that they may be more strategically harnessed to face an uncertain future. As the importance of C\_MS increases, so too does the necessity for robust governance and quality management systems designed to address not only corporate risks but also the academic standards of the C\_MS operations.

As a University with multiple teaching sites, CQU has developed a system for ensuring the consistency of course delivery and student participation which may be amongst best practice in the Australian sector. A distributed delivery system underpinned by common courseware, clearly defined staff responsibilities and robust internal audits for domestic and offshore operations has enabled a level of commonality across these teaching sites such that there is little tangible difference between the student learning experience at different locations (there are some exceptions to this, and these are mentioned in the Report).

While the systems for ensuring consistency are strong, a number of the academic standards themselves leave room for improvement. The University has one of the most junior academic staff profiles in the country. The scholarly culture within the University has less depth than is desirable, with the primary focus of staff being on fulfilling high teaching loads and complying with the requirements of external professional bodies. The University relies on some staff to lead distributed teaching teams, including

many staff on casual and fixed term contracts, in offering courses to students, many of whom entered the University via entrance standards which are low compared with other Australian universities.

It is the academic services of the University and C\_MS which are responding well to this context with another area of good practice. Students at risk of academic failure are identified and provided with a range of academic support mechanisms which are proving effective.

In terms of research, the University performs very well in a small number of areas of regional importance, such as railway engineering and primary industries. The quality of this research is entirely satisfactory and the associated level of engagement with relevant communities and industries is strong.

The University intends that the emphasis beyond these areas be more on scholarship than research, but there is little evidence that this focus is supported or quality assured in any tangible sense. Generally, the staff have a low level of research activity, although it is increasing. This is particularly problematic for a University claiming to foster an association between teaching and research. The niche areas of research strength do not align with the University's main teaching programs. As such, there is a gap between research and teaching which affects not only curriculum development, approval and review, but also the students' exposure to research-active staff in the classroom.

The University is responding to its overall situation through the aforementioned major changes, but the capacity-building required will mean that change will be needed in standards and processes as well as structures. Strategies that the University could consider include: greater attention to academic professional development; more interaction between, and involvement of, staff of different locations and corporate entities (CQU, C\_MS, offshore partners); increased attention to curriculum development and approval; and a systemic approach to supporting teaching-related scholarship in all disciplines.

The administration and infrastructure of the University have, as with many areas of the University, been disadvantaged by two years of uncertainty. Two examples warrant particular attention, namely the human resource management capabilities and the University's web site. Both are of crucial importance for CQU as a distributed, multimodal university. Both, however, are currently characterised by weak systems and inadequate strategic leadership, and require urgent attention.

In summary, the University's academic model could be described as efficiently commodifying courses coupled with tightly controlling the service teaching model, using distributed teaching staff who may not be housed in faculties (especially at the AICs). CQU has done this rather well, with processes for consistency that are tight, comprehensively implemented and effective. On the other hand, AUQA believes that the first National Protocol, and the generally accepted standards of the Australian university sector, implicitly expect a higher level of academic dynamism whereby teaching faculty, research activity, engaged communities, superior resources and the particular needs of student cohorts interact to contribute to the evolution (and, at times, revolution) of the curricula. The University excels at academic service but there is not the correspondingly strong academic leadership that generally exists in some other Australian universities.

Notwithstanding this concern, the future of the University holds promise. CQU itself has recognised the need for capacity building and embarked upon a journey of major change long before the audit took place. A new vice-chancellor, senior executive, organisational strategy and structure might position the University well to respond to its current challenges and opportunities. Also, revisions to the relationship with C\_MS are designed to assure that growth in international student numbers can continue and that the relationship is solid. Much of this change was very much in progress during the audit, and as such AUQA cannot predict its future effectiveness. However, this Report is issued with this context at the forefront of deliberations. Comments in this Report about the organisational culture are tempered by the understanding that a new climate was under creation.

A summary of commendations, affirmations and recommendations follows. Note that AUQA does not prioritise or weight these. They are listed below in the order in which they appear in the Report.

### ***Commendations***

Areas where AUQA commends the practices of Central Queensland University are as follows:

1. AUQA commends Central Queensland University's Division of Library Services for the development of its Teaching and Learning Plan and for effectively engaging with the academic community in the provision of information literacy training for staff and students. ....24
2. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for helping students manage the transition into university study through its successful STEPS program. ....25
3. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for its course management system, which helps to ensure the consistency of the content and delivery of the University's offerings across all locations and modes. ....29
4. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for an effective system of moderation which is implemented consistently across all teaching sites.....32
5. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for effectively managing the provision of its programs and courses across all its campuses and locations through its Multi-Campus/Teaching Site Academic Roles and Responsibilities document, which sets out clear procedures that are being implemented consistently.....33
6. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for attending to the academic progression of its students through the Student Journey project, which identifies and provides support across all campuses for students academically at risk.....38
7. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for supporting its first year students and providing leadership development opportunities to senior students through the CQU Student Mentor and Leadership Program.....38
8. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for engaging with its regional communities through dedicated research centres providing high quality research in conjunction with regional and industry partners. ....42
9. AUQA commends Central Queensland University's CQU Connections program which fosters access and success for students from rural and remote areas and disadvantaged backgrounds. ....45
10. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for its offshore international operations strategy of focusing on a few key partnerships, with robust quality assurance systems based on its ESOS manual, and strong partnership management. ....49
11. AUQA commends Central Queensland University's Nulloo Yumbah centre for establishing a concentration of expertise and energy for indigenous issues which will benefit the University and its wider stakeholders. ....53
12. AUQA commends Central Queensland University for the outcomes it achieved on a national benchmarking activity relating to Library Services. ....55

### ***Affirmations***

Areas where AUQA affirms the need identified by Central Queensland University for improvements to its practices are as follows:

1. AUQA affirms Central Queensland University's plans to improve linkages between Campus Advisory Committees and University management through a dedicated executive portfolio.....13

2. AUQA affirms Central Queensland University’s current review of its Research Strategic Plan, including the research vision, capacity and capabilities and concepts of scholarship, and the associated re-structuring that will support the teaching programs and maintain its commitment to its key communities. ....41

3. AUQA affirms Central Queensland University’s plans to develop a dedicated approach to the executive leadership of research relating to regional community needs. ....41

4. AUQA affirms the need identified by Central Queensland University to improve its branding and domestic marketing capabilities. ....55

**Recommendations**

Areas where AUQA recommends improvements to the practices of Central Queensland University are as follows:

1. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University attend to the organisational change management process, as it completes its restructuring, to ensure that staff are sufficiently informed and remain empowered in the interim to continue with the business of the University.....11

2. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University Council develop strategies to ensure it is able to inform and balance its fiduciary governance responsibilities with its academic governance responsibilities. ....13

3. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University Council develop a more comprehensive risk management framework incorporating the current legislative compliance framework and also strategic and operational risks across the spectrum of University activities. ....14

4. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University restructure the governance arrangements for its partnership with C\_MS in a manner that is sufficiently transparent and robust to enable Council to effectively exercise its governance responsibilities for the University’s entire affairs.....19

5. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop an integrated planning and reporting framework, in conjunction with the strategic plans for C\_MS, aligned to the risk management and quality assurance frameworks and incorporating appropriate external benchmarking; and that the various structural entities with quality and risk management responsibilities be integrated so as to more effectively support this framework.....22

6. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop strategies to systematically embed its generic skills and attributes into the curriculum, teaching and assessment practices of the University such that the CQU experience is of a consistent quality and is comparable with universities nationally. ....24

7. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University take greater cognisance of national higher education standards (such as the AQF and AVCC Guidelines, and benchmarks with comparable degree programs at other universities) when determining advanced standing for its degree programs. ....26

8. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University encourage a more collegial approach to curriculum development, which will both stimulate and incorporate scholarship and research and philosophical discussions about quality education. ....28

9. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop a systematic approach to encouraging and resourcing research-informed teaching.....31

10. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University review the role of course coordinator, especially with regard to its academic leadership responsibilities and the criteria by which staff are appointed as course coordinators.....34
11. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University review its student evaluations of teaching and course systems with a view to maximising their strategic benefits. ....34
12. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University increase its emphasis on academic professional development, via a variety of forms, especially focusing on such pedagogic issues as curriculum development and review, assessment practices and the teaching-research nexus. ....35
13. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University, perhaps using the Division of Library Services' teaching & learning planning approach as an exemplar, review how ICT can better support the learning and teaching activities of the University. ....36
14. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop a coordinated approach to the planning, implementation and review of its community engagement activities and intentions. ....46
15. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University establish a strategic human resource capability and capacity designed to support its new Strategic Plan. ....51
16. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University recognise the strategic importance of aligning and resourcing its information and communication technology capacity to the needs of a flexible mode, multi-campus University in which students are studying at all times. ....56
17. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University review its web site with a view to aligning its usage with the strategic directions of the University, to improving usability and consistency through common publishing standards based on benchmarked good practices, and to improving the external perception of the University.....57
18. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop campus-specific plans for coordinating, reviewing and reporting on student services and support. ....57
19. AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University improve systems for determining and ensuring operational-level service standards at the AICs.....57

## 1 THE UNIVERSITY

The origin of the University dates back to 1967 and full university status was achieved in 1992 (Appendix A). In its present form it is established by the *Central Queensland University Act 1998* ('the Act') of the Queensland Government.

In determining the basis for auditing CQU using a 'fitness for purpose' approach, AUQA took its direction from the Act and, importantly, the University's Strategic Plan 2003–2007 (as well as other key documents, most notably the Portfolio). This Plan had been in operation for most of the audit period and several years prior.

At the time of the audit, the University was developing a new Strategic Plan 2006–2011. In fact, this document was formally approved during the final Audit Visit at Rockhampton. It was not reasonable to audit the University against that document, although AUQA has taken cognisance of it in relation to the new intended directions of the University.

### 1.1 Vision

The vision of Central Queensland University (CQU) is expressed in the Portfolio as follows:

*Our vision is to be a unified university, acknowledged universally as a leader in flexible learning and teaching and well focussed research, contributing strongly to the sustainable development of the regions and communities in which we operate. We will strengthen our essence as a university while operating successfully in an increasingly commercial and competitive world.*

This is a specific vision, which notes a number of distinctive features of the University. Firstly, there is an intention to be 'unified'. Given that the activities of the University are currently bifurcated between CQU and C\_MS, AUQA considered the effectiveness of strategies in place for achieving such unification. It concludes that there is significant work to do in this regard.

Secondly is the aim for universally acknowledged leadership in flexible learning and teaching and well focused research. The 'universal' standard requires testing beyond the view of the University's internal communities. To that end, AUQA allowed into its deliberations consideration of wider web resources, media articles and Panel member's knowledge of the Australian higher education sector. It concludes that the University cannot yet claim 'leadership' in these areas. However, there are areas of performance, most notably its systems for ensuring consistent course delivery, in which its leadership may be under-recognised (sections 4.3, 5.8.1 and 9.3).

Thirdly, the University dedicates itself to the sustainable development of the regions and communities in which it operates. These span three Australian states and cities in four other countries. AUQA looked for evidence that this vision was being given effect across these loci. It concludes that the regional campuses of the University do indeed demonstrate this commitment (for examples, see sections 2.3, 7.4 & 11.1). However, the long term viability of these campuses is uncertain, while the metropolitan (section 9.4) and, to a lesser extent, offshore activities (section 9.3 and 9.5) of the University grow apace. At the metropolitan and offshore locales, an equivalent commitment to sustainable development and engagement with local communities is not apparent. As the balance of University activity shifts from regional to metropolitan and perhaps offshore locales, this aspect of the vision will be brought into new and challenging relief.

In the last sentence of its vision, the University signals its intention to operate innovatively in a commercial environment, while remaining true to the principles of being a university. AUQA

concludes that CQU has, through its partnership with C\_MS, demonstrated an ability to operate very effectively in a commercial environment (section 3). Its key challenge is to strengthen its essence as a University (see, for examples, sections 2.2, 5 & 10).

This Report unpacks these findings in relation to the University vision in more detail as well as other issues related to various goals and objectives of the University.

## 1.2 Goals

The Strategic Plan 2003–2007 comprises the aforementioned vision, mission and values, as well as five corporate goals, each of which has a number of priority objectives and associated performance indicators and outcomes. These are reported on each year in the University's Annual Report. The ambits of the goals span the chapters in this Audit Report. As such, a brief summary of findings against the goals is presented here, and reference is then made to them as appropriate throughout the Report.

*Goal 1: CQU will have appropriate management, governance structures, quality systems and processes in place to enable corporate goals to be met.*

Governance and management emerged as a key theme during this audit largely because of the bifurcated nature of CQU operations, being managed as they are partly by the University itself and partly through partnerships. The University has not enjoyed strength in these areas, and this has brought about the need for a major restructure of many aspects of the University and its partnerships. In itself, that suggests a new energy in governance and management which bodes well for the future. These issues are explored most particularly in sections 2, 3 and 4.

*Goal 2: CQU will develop mutually beneficial partnerships with its rural, regional and international communities. There will be knowledge exchange through teaching, research and consultancy.*

CQU is a distributed university. In regional Central Queensland it has been successful in developing strong relationships with the communities it serves through teaching, research and other forms of community engagement. The multi-location and flexible delivery strategies of the University enable it to reach students in a great many ways. This comes at a cost to the University, and there is an ongoing tension between maintaining flexibility on the one hand, while requiring financial viability on the other. The fact that the University has sought to maintain its multiple regional teaching locations while it experienced severe financial difficulties, is testimony to its commitment to Central Queensland.

In the metropolitan and offshore areas in which CQU operates through partnerships, the notion of pursuing mutually beneficial partnerships with communities is less evident. The emphasis in these areas is on teaching delivery, with little other interaction with the local communities (employers, councils, industry, families etc).

These issues are explored most particularly in sections 2.3, 7.4, 7.6, 8 and 9.

*Goal 3: CQU will maintain its standing as a successful provider of programs for international students. It will emerge as a unified university in which the integration of programs for international and domestic students is a distinguishing characteristic. The whole academic and social experience of our students and staff and the fabric of our communities will be enriched by the diverse cultural mix of our students and teaching locations.*

There is no doubt that CQU, in conjunction with its partners, is one of the most successful recruiters of international students amongst Australian universities. How this equates to being a

successful education provider is explored throughout this Report (and quite specifically in section 9.1). In particular, the prospect of the social experience for students and staff being enriched by the diverse cultural mix is not to be assumed. The campus structure tends to separate domestic HECS students from international full fee students (section 9.2).

*Goal 4: CQU will respect the diversity of its student population by responding flexibly to the learning needs of students.*

A dichotomy is evident in relation to this goal. On one hand, the manner in which the University and C\_MS (the two, for purposes of this goal, cannot be considered separately) seek to respond to the learning needs of students through the teaching programs requires attention. Such features as low entrance standards for students, a junior faculty profile and low level of research activity in relation to main teaching areas all contribute to a fairly light scholarly culture.

On the other hand, and perhaps because of the above, the various learning support services of the University and C\_MS are excellent. Notably, a system for identifying, responding to and tracking the progress of students at risk is yielding good results (sections 5.3.32 and 6).

*Goal 5: CQU will have an international research reputation while contributing research-based knowledge and applications to the community it serves.*

The University does have a small number of areas in which its research more than stands up to international scrutiny. Central Queensland is well served by areas of research expertise that are directly related to local concerns. However, the extent of research activity is insufficient in the light of CQU's teaching activities (sections 5.5 and 7).

### **1.3 Institutional Context**

Universities are continually in a state of change, and AUQA must always factor the dynamic nature of universities into its audit method. In this particular case, the scale, scope and timing of change were particularly significant.

Until 2005, CQU had been experiencing a troubling financial state, which necessitated plans for a substantial restructure. A primary cause of the problem was, and continues to be, a continuing difficulty in attracting students and staff to regional campuses. A lack of clear strategic vision during that time may also have contributed to the University's performance.

The University's financial situation was considerably ameliorated during 2005 via a strong year of international student recruitment by C\_MS (section 3). However, on its own that does not guarantee the University's future. The governance and quality assurance structures and systems relating to C\_MS require updating to ensure that the University is best placed to capitalise on the longer term opportunities that C\_MS offers. Also, current public funding policy constrains the University's ability to increase its domestic full fee student recruitment numbers, and this risk needs to be more carefully managed.

At the time of the AUQA audit, the Council was being reformed in accordance with national governance protocols (section 2.1). The Vice-Chancellor was undertaking a major restructure of the executive leadership, organisational structure, regional campus activities and relationship with C\_MS.

In June 2004, independent consultants Phillips Curran released a four-volume report of their Review of Strategic Direction, Academic and Administrative Structures, and Staffing Profile. This comprehensive set of documents (which excluded from its scope C\_MS teaching activities, other than some relationship issues) laid out an agenda for major change. An Organisational Review group was established to advise the Vice-Chancellor on implementation of a major

restructure to the University in the light of the Phillips Curran review and other significant reviews (such as the West Report: section 9). This group ceased (during the Audit Visit) so that the new executive team could take responsibility for establishing the new structure. Also, a new Strategic Plan 2006–2011 was being finalised (and was approved during the Audit Visit), and enterprise bargaining negotiations were at a critical stage. In short, there was virtually no aspect of the University which was not experiencing the pressures of significant change at the time the audit occurred.

There are many examples of mission-critical activities which are in stasis pending resolution of the restructure. In some cases this is a direct result of leadership inadequacies during this time or over uncertainty as to the precise activities and structures into which people are supposed to be investing effort. In other cases, it seemed that the stasis was more a consequence of staff generally feeling powerless to act at this time. In any event, the net effect is the same, namely low morale and slow progress. Examples of issues in abeyance include: developing a governance set of key performance indicators (KPIs) (section 2); developing a new, integrated planning and reporting process (section 4.2); conducting faculty reviews (section 4); improving the human resource capabilities and processes (such as Performance Review, Planning and Development: section 10); developing IT systems (section 11.5); and developing a comprehensive strategic approach to the University's use of its web site (section 11.6).

The absence of any industrial action against the University in relation to the restructuring is one positive indicator of the open manner in which the University has dealt with a very difficult set of issues. However, the length of time that the changes are taking, along with specific issues such as the use of closed interview processes for new senior executive appointments, means that the staff retain a high level of uncertainty and doubt as to the status of their working environment. Furthermore, the University is experiencing high turnover rates and is becoming heavily reliant on casual staff. In such a climate it is difficult to make progress.

Perhaps the strongest theme emerging during the audit is an urgent need to finalise implementation of the new structure, and to communicate progress and plans to all staff using a range of communication channels. The University is aware of the need to do this. However, AUQA wishes to emphasise that the process of change must also take cognisance of the need to ensure staff are sufficiently informed, empowered and encouraged to continue, in the meantime, with the activities of the University.

### **Recommendation 1**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University attend to the organisational change management process, as it completes its restructuring, to ensure that staff are sufficiently informed and remain empowered in the interim to continue with the business of the University.**

Given the major state of change, the Audit Panel has restricted the extent of its comments on imminently redundant systems and the possible effectiveness of pending systems still being designed. Instead, the Panel has commented more than is ordinarily the case on broader and more strategic matters. This has been done non-prescriptively and with a view to making links between findings about the effectiveness of extant quality assurance systems and the possible future directions of the University.

## 2 GOVERNANCE

### 2.1 *Council*

The governing body of the University is the Council, established by the Act. It is responsible for the strategic direction of the University, appropriate financial governance and the guidance of the Vice-Chancellor.

Council members are quite clear that its vision for CQU is of a 'unified university', providing educational benefits to engaged communities. This vision is clearly shared and agreed among them. Less clear is agreement over governance strategies for achieving this vision. Some discontent was voiced over the lack of transparency in some governance processes (most notably, but not limited to, governance of the relationship with C\_MS: section 3.2.3). The precise nature and validity of these concerns was difficult to pursue because the audit occurred at a time of significant change to the governance structures of the University. The membership of the Council was being amended in accordance with National Governance Protocols for Higher Education Providers (June 2004). AUQA met various Councillors in a number of different fora during the Audit Visits. Only three positions were certain of being continued at the time of the audit, and this may have had some impact on Councillors' perspectives.

There is evidence that the Council has been seeking to improve its processes. It undertook a self-review which yielded some critical findings. In part, these are being responded to through the restructure of all its Committees, establishment of new accountability arrangements for those committees, and improvements to its risk management practices, particularly with regards to controlled entities (section 3). Also, some Councillors bring to the University highly beneficial commercial governance skills and experience, which are proving invaluable in the review of governance arrangements.

Further improvements that could be made are mentioned in the following sections.

### 2.2 *Academic Governance*

The Council is, according to the University's Act, the most senior academic body in the University. It has delegated academic governance to the Academic Board. This is different from many other universities, where the Academic Board has a statutory role as the senior academic body.

The Academic Board has not provided strong leadership to the University's academic community, and has sometimes failed to meet its quorum. To address this, the Constitution and Terms of Reference for the Academic Board were being reviewed and amended at the time of the audit. In conjunction with this, the Audit Panel was advised that Council will shortly be considering a set of performance indicators by which the Council will be able to monitor the academic performance of the institution. This is appropriate, and should result in greater attention to academic standards, and other issues identified in this Report which ought to have received greater attention by the Council via its Academic Board. There is very little systematic benchmarking of CQU's academic standards against the standards of other Australian universities.

Through interviews, a consideration of Council and Academic Board papers and an awareness of key academic issues emerging through the audit, the Audit Panel formed the view that the reporting processes in place to ensure that Council is sufficiently cognisant of these matters are not as effective as they should be. The Council must, through a robust information exchange relationship with its Academic Board, balance its strong focus on good corporate governance

with an equal emphasis of concern on what it means to be an Australian university and the associated quality standards.

### **Recommendation 2**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University Council develop strategies to ensure it is able to inform and balance its fiduciary governance responsibilities with its academic governance responsibilities.**

#### **2.3 *Campus Advisory Committees***

For each of its regional campuses the University has a Campus Advisory Committee (CAC, sometimes called a Regional Advisory Board). These were initiated upon the establishment of the University in 1992 and are advisory to the University Council. One purpose of these committees is to strengthen the links between the University and the regional communities.

The University identified that the effectiveness of CACs was limited because of the lack of systematic means for acting upon their concerns and suggestions. The Audit Panel confirmed this during its visits. It found lack of clarity over precisely whom the CACs advise and a lack of communication between CACs that could assist with the effective fulfilment of their responsibilities.

Under the new University structure, a single executive manager will have responsibility for attending all Campus Advisory Committees and ensuring that management are able to respond appropriately and consistently to the issues raised by these committees. Also, the CACs will advise management as well as Council, thereby making use of the CACs' ability to identify and comment on issues appropriate for management to address. While it is too soon to assess the effectiveness of this particular solution, it does appear to be an improvement designed to meet identified concerns and indicates a quality improvement system in action.

### **Affirmation 1**

**AUQA affirms Central Queensland University's plans to improve linkages between Campus Advisory Committees and University management through a dedicated executive portfolio.**

The Rockhampton campus, which is the University's home campus hosting the executive management, does not currently have an advisory committee. This role has typically been incorporated into the activities of Council. The University is now considering developing a Rockhampton Campus Advisory Committee. In this way all the regional campuses will benefit from a dedicated community advisory system and the Council will be able to respond similarly to each, thereby having a truly regional view.

The Australian International Campuses (AICs) and the Fiji International Campus (FIC) are managed through the University's joint venture partner (C\_MS: section 3) do not have campus advisory committees. This reflects the difference between the corporate management culture within C\_MS and the more traditional collegial practices of CQU's regional campuses. Given that AICs are in large metropolitan areas, and primarily dedicated to teaching only, the value that could be gained from advisory committees is less compelling than for regional campuses. In the case of FIC however, where the need to better align with the local community has been obvious for some time (section 9.4), there are benefits which could be gained from an advisory committee type of approach.

## 2.4 *Risk Management, Legislative Compliance & Internal Audit*

The Council has established an Audit, Compliance and Risk Committee to oversee the University's risk management activities. There are three key aspects to these activities (and a number of other specific operational processes which include a risk management focus, as will be mentioned later in the Report). Firstly, a risk management strategy has been developed, based on AS/NZ 4360, which has been used in respect of domestic, AIC and international activities. Secondly, the University operates a Compliance Unit, the purpose of which is to ensure that the University is aware of and compliant with its legislative responsibilities. Thirdly, the University employs four full-time internal auditors. The audit system is based upon an institutional risk assessment which is then translated into an audit plan. Implementation includes questionnaires to deans and directors, and meeting with executives and external auditors. Issues are assessed against nine risk factors, then prioritised and signed off by the Internal Audit Committee. From 2005, the brief will extend beyond financial matters to consider a range of operational issues. It will then be helpful if the internal audit functions and the various quality management functions (section 4) are more closely integrated.

The Audit Panel considered the effectiveness of these activities in relation to the maintenance of academic quality.

The University's concept of risk may warrant a broader scope. Council has focussed on financial risks, which thus far has been an appropriate emphasis. However, Council may not be adequately aware of other aspects of risk management.

Through its discussions with staff at all levels of the organisation, the Audit Panel concluded that there is no pervasive risk management framework which enables risks to be identified and managed at all levels in the University. Heads of various units have little involvement in systematic risk management systems. Also, many of the University's operations are conducted through partners which are separate legal entities with their own processes and accountabilities. There are some risk management practices in respect of these partnerships that are exemplary (see, for example, section 5.8.1). However, there are also areas, particularly in terms of administration and infrastructure, where there are no shared risk management processes (section 11.7.2).

### **Recommendation 3**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University Council develop a more comprehensive risk management framework incorporating the current legislative compliance framework and also strategic and operational risks across the spectrum of University activities.**

Effecting this recommendation will require a supporting organisational structure/entity capable of working across CQU and C\_MS corporate boundaries as well as effectively engaging with other partners of and suppliers to the University.

AUQA also concludes that there is a need for greater integration between the various units responsible for risk management and quality management. Multiple units focusing on similar and overlapping issues, using different processes, creates a context in which engagement by staff will be more difficult to achieve. This is addressed in section 4.

## 2.5 *Policy Framework*

The University operates an impressive online policy web site from which any interested person can access the governing statutes and policies (and, in some cases, procedures and guidelines) of the University. Each policy has controls in place including approval authorities, version controls and review dates.

Some policies (such as Teaching Scholars) appear to have exceeded their review date, indicating that the process for managing policies may require attention. Also, some policies which have been superseded and were located elsewhere on the web site remain on the portal. AUQA is mindful that this may be further evidence of the stasis engendered by the organisational restructuring. It urges the University to ensure that this valuable facility is fully maintained.

## **2.6 *Student Governance***

The University Council approved in 2003, in agreement with the CQU Students Association, a Student Charter which sets out the rights of students studying at CQU and consequently the responsibilities the University has in relation to students achieving their goals whilst studying at CQU. It also describes the behaviour and responsibilities expected of students whilst studying at CQU. This is an important and comprehensive document, developed thoroughly, including through benchmarking similar charters at other universities.

Given that voluntary student union membership legislation was pending at the time of the audit, the Audit Panel explored whether the University and current student leaders were taking necessary steps to ensure that risks to the quality of the student learning environment would be managed. It was apparent that appropriate plans were being developed and that sufficient attention was being given to this issue.

## **2.7 *Vice-Chancellor's Performance Management***

One of the most important governance functions of the Council is to attend to the performance management of the Vice-Chancellor. To that end, the Chancellor has negotiated a set of eleven clear performance objectives with and for the Vice-Chancellor. Each objective is defined in terms of superior, satisfactory or unsatisfactory outcomes. Performance against these objectives is assessed by a small committee comprising the Chancellor and two other external members of Council.

This is a robust system, although it is subject to complaints of being insufficiently transparent. It could be strengthened further by increasing the size of the evaluation committee, for example to include more external members of Council.

At the time of the audit, the Vice-Chancellor had not been through the assessment process, so it was not possible to explore its effectiveness. However, given the amount of change underway, the decision by the Council and the Vice-Chancellor to conduct the first assessment after 18 months rather than 12 months seems entirely appropriate.

### 3 C\_MANAGEMENT SERVICES PTY LTD

#### 3.1 C\_MS Campus Structure

C\_Management Services Pty Ltd (C\_MS) is a private for-profit company which operates four campuses in Australia: the Sydney International Campus (SIC), Melbourne International Campus (MIC), Brisbane International Campus and the Gold Coast International Campus. These campuses are collectively known as Australian International Campuses (AICs). Through a separate company structure, C\_MS also operates the Fiji International Campus (FIC) in Suva. From a quality assurance perspective, the arrangements for FIC are very similar to those for the AICs.

The AICs and FIC provide degree courses (up to professional doctoral level) to full-fee paying international students and a small number of full-fee paying domestic students. The students are enrolled with, and students of, CQU.

CQU has been recognised nationally as a leader in the export of higher education. At the time of the audit, about half of all CQU's students were enrolled via the C\_MS operations. These activities, mostly based in major metropolitan locations, are growing apace while the balance of CQU enrolments, based in regional locations, are static or declining. SIC and MIC are the two largest campuses, in terms of student enrolments, in the entire CQU campus network (ie CQU and C\_MS campuses combined). They are also growing at the fastest rate. Thus, the importance of C\_MS to CQU cannot be overestimated.

#### 3.2 C\_MS Corporate Structure

The University's Act permits it to form or take part in corporations whose objects include making available facilities for study, research or education; providing teaching; and exploiting commercially a facility or resource of the University, including, for example, study, research or knowledge (s61). Consistent with this permission, the University, through the AIC Trust, has entered into a partnership with a private party, Kallawar Holdings Pty Ltd (Kallawar), to establish C\_Management Services Pty Ltd.

##### 3.2.1 C\_MS Board

C\_MS is listed as a controlled entity of the University, though CQU and Kallawar are each 50% shareholders. The Board of C\_MS comprises four members, two from the University and two from Kallawar. The current University members are the Chancellor and Deputy Chancellor. The Chancellor chairs the Board and has a casting vote. However, that vote must be cast in the interests of C\_MS, which implies that CQU may be unable to direct the activities of C\_MS.

Indeed, the current Board membership gives rise to a possible conflict of interest. AUQA queries the prudence of the positions of Chancellor and Deputy Chancellor being the members of the C\_MS Board representing the ownership interest of the University. Given that they are the two most senior persons within the University, in the event that the University ever finds itself in significant dispute with C\_MS, there will be no internal possibility for escalating consideration of the dispute prior to turning to external parties. AUQA notes, however, that the current situation is an improvement on the earlier arrangement in which the university members were the VC and DVC.

The small size and overall composition of the Board are also of some concern, as one party is able to paralyse the company by abstaining from meetings, thereby rendering the Board inquorate. Three extraordinary meetings were unable to proceed in 2003 Although the positive

relationship that now exists between CQU and Kallawar renders such occurrences unlikely, C\_MS and its shareholders might be better served by a larger and more diversified Board, including more independent directors.

The University recognises that the current Board arrangements are not ideal, and is looking to make changes to the Board structure, including appointing an independent chairperson. Council itself has yet to see a business plan for these proposed changes, but has been asked to sign a 'letter of comfort' to cover the period of negotiation to change the company's constitution.

### 3.2.2 Agreements

There exist a number of agreements that discuss divisions of responsibility and finances between the parties. The main agreement states that the details are included in the attached schedules, but the schedules do not appear to exist. Consequently the actual details of the agreement are worked out in less transparent ways such as via management discretion. Therefore the full Council may not be fully informed of the nature of the relationship, such as finances (see also section 3.2.3) and the impact of the forward direction of C\_MS on CQU.

### 3.2.3 Reporting

C\_MS provide quarterly reports to Council. The Audit Panel viewed such a report and noted that it only showed revenue. This does not give the Council sufficient information with which to stay adequately informed.

Consultants provided CQU with projected revenue earnings for 2002 to 2008, differentiated by 'domestic' (ie regional campuses and distance education) vs 'international' (ie C\_MS and other offshore partnerships) activities, suggesting that the domestic activities will continue to be about twice that of international revenues. In fact, in 2005 the AICs experienced considerable growth while the regional campuses braced themselves for the adverse financial consequences of failing to meet Commonwealth-funded load targets. This implies the need for continuing financial modelling and reporting to Council in relation to the combined activities of CQU and C\_MS.

Whatever the current level of reporting by C\_MS to its controlling entity, if the University is to continue being the quality assurer, and since the University is reliant on C\_MS for its viability, then the minimum corporate reporting requirements may not be sufficient.

## 3.3 *C\_MS Risk Management*

C\_MS is essentially a cash operation with few fixed assets. The University is aware that C\_MS is very susceptible to fluctuations in the international student market. It employs three main strategies to mitigate this risk. Firstly, it seeks to diversify its revenue streams whilst taking care to work with a small number of reliable partners. Expansion into China provides a good example of this (section 9.3).

Secondly, C\_MS seeks to maximise its proportion of variable to fixed costs, in order to enable it to respond quickly and flexibly to changing demands. While the enterprise agreements of CQU academic staff and C\_MS academic staff are similar, C\_MS has taken advantage of more flexible industrial relations provision to ensure that it is able to quickly change its staffing profile to match student demand. Similarly, usage of space rental arrangements rather than property ownership provides greater flexibility to match space with teaching requirements.

Thirdly, CQU is focused on growth in the full fee market. This last option must particularly focus on the international student market, although the University offers full-fee paying places to domestic students in capital cities. This has been successful at a time when recruitment of HECS funded places has diminished in the regions. However, the strategic nature of the model used by CQU is arguably disadvantaged by public funding policies because if the University is unable to

meet its HECS places according to the allocation formula, then it forfeits not only those places but also must reduce the number of domestic full-fee places that would breach the federal limit.

Three key elements appear to be missing from this strategic approach. The first, a more stable system of governance, is already mentioned (section 3.2). The second is greater transparency in governance, management and relationships between the two enterprises. The third is a viable exit strategy. The futures of CQU and C\_MS are inextricably linked. There is no exit strategy for CQU in the event that insurmountable problems arise. In fact, it is not plausible to think that CQU could extract itself from the relationship. In the event of a serious disagreement with the partner, the University would find itself attending to the needs of half of its total students.

### **3.4 *Campus Group Holdings***

C\_MS contract Campus Group Holdings Pty Ltd (CGH), a company wholly owned by Kallawar, to provide management services. The sum paid for these services, and the implicit degree of authority that appears to be transferred to CGH via the agreement, is not insignificant. However, the precise nature of these services is largely unspecified in the documentation viewed by AUQA, leading to a lack of transparency in the nature of the overall relationship.

The Executive Director of CGH is a member of the C\_MS Board. This would appear to constitute a conflict of interest which affects the governance of CQU's controlled entity.

The formal arrangements for the relationship between C\_MS and CGH require considerable attention. The University's awareness of this issue predates the audit, although at the time of the audit the new arrangements were not finalised. Management arrangements for the AICs and FIC are being reviewed as part of the re-structuring of C\_MS.

### **3.5 *CQU Staff Perception of C\_MS***

There is a strong level of support from most quarters of CQU towards the partnership with C\_MS. The nature of this support is almost entirely related to C\_MS providing much needed revenue streams into the University. Beyond that, many CQU staff at CQU, particularly academic staff, feel disconnected from C\_MS. They find the relationship between CQU and C\_MS to be obscure both strategically and operationally, although those involved as coordinators of courses which are run at AICs or the FIC have a greater awareness of the operational relationship. Some expressed doubts as to the equivalence of the student learning environment. There was no feeling that CQU benefits academically by the relationship, although there were suggestions that there might be potential for this to occur (see, for example, section 5.4).

The University may wish to invest greater effort in communicating the benefits of C\_MS to the CQU community and to exploring with its staff the possibilities for greater interaction between C\_MS academic staff and CQU academic staff.

### **3.6 *C\_MS Corporate Summary***

Clearly, C\_MS has proven very effective in terms of marketing and management and the University has benefited from these strengths. C\_MS has helped put CQU into its strongest cash position for some time. The relationship is crucial to the University and warrants support and approbation.

It also warrants careful attention. AUQA believes that the University has insufficient governance control over the affairs of C\_MS and, thereby, over half of its educational activities. Ordinarily, it is not necessary for a university to exert effective governance control over its educational partners (as opposed to the educational operations) themselves. However, this case is unique because of the scale of the C\_MS activity in proportion to overall CQU activity. Decisions made by C\_MS,

or external factors could have a profound effect on the entire University. AUQA is mindful that, at present, the strategic interests of the two major partners, CQU and Kallawar, are much aligned and inter-dependent. However, the way those strategic interests translate into operational activity can significantly affect academic quality. More stable governance structures, greater transparency, more comprehensive risk management processes and improved communication about C\_MS to CQU staff are required. (There are also concerns regarding scholarship and equivalence and these will be addressed later in this Report.)

The University recognises that the arrangements with Kallawar in respect of C\_MS and CGH require serious and urgent attention and is working towards solutions. These were not finalised at the time of the audit. Based on what was disclosed to AUQA, the details of which will remain confidential by agreement, further work is needed on the scope and nature of the proposed solutions.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University restructure the governance arrangements for its partnership with C\_MS in a manner that is sufficiently transparent and robust to enable Council to effectively exercise its governance responsibilities for the University's entire affairs.**

Operational aspects of C\_MS are included throughout this Report as they arise.

## 4 MANAGEMENT

### 4.1 *Executive Leadership*

At the time of the audit the executive team was being completely restructured to comprise the Vice-Chancellor, a Deputy Vice-Chancellor who is the Chief Operations Officer, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research and Innovation), Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Services) and two executive directors, one for Corporate Services and the other for Resources. Only two of the executives had confirmed positions in the new structure, which comprised different executive portfolios from the current arrangement. Faculties were in the process of being restructured from five to three, with corresponding changes from five deanships to three executive deanships.

This was not a good time to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of this aspect of University leadership. Through the totality of its discussions with staff of CQU, it became clear that there is an urgent need to build a cohesive senior executive team. It was clear that this is a top priority for the Vice-Chancellor.

### 4.2 *Planning & Reporting*

At the time of the audit, the University approved a new Strategic Plan. The extent to which staff throughout the University were able to directly participate in the strategic planning process was by way of ISL (interactive video-conferencing) facilitated open fora or via meetings of the Academic Board. There were no unit-level workshops designed to contribute to environmental scanning or analyses of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. These are ways in which the level of interaction between corporate planning and unit level planning could be strengthened.

To date, systematic planning and, consequently, reporting has never permeated below the University Strategic Plan. There have been no annual university or faculty operating plans that are aligned with the strategic plan and integrated into the overall university operational plans and resource allocation plans (ie budget) of the University. At the time of the audit, new faculty and divisional plans based on the new Strategic Plan had not yet been developed. Also, the intention for faculties to provide teaching and learning plans had been suspended pending finalisation of the organisational review. In the interim, deans report regularly to the DVC (Academic & Research) and to Council on KPIs.

Nonetheless, a number of faculties and divisions have independently (and with assistance from external experts) developed substantial plans to guide their activities. They vary in form and substance, with some having no clear targets or outcome indicators against which to measure or monitor progress.

Regional campuses develop their own plans, which are approved by the Campus Advisory Committee and forwarded to Council. In effect, these can bypass University planning process and key managers (such as deans). This is a structural dilemma which can impede the vision of a “unified university”.

Another structural issue relates to the integration of strategic planning for C\_MS and CQU. There is no clear *process* for aligning the strategic and operational planning of C\_MS with that of the University proper, and the current governance arrangements alone may not provide adequate assurance of such alignment (section 3).

The Vice-Chancellor reports regularly to Council on progress against each of the goals in the Strategic Plan 2003–2007. These reports include progress and also significant contingencies, exceptions and issues to be addressed. The Audit Panel viewed these reports and found that they

provide Council with useful information to help it exercise its governance responsibilities. They would benefit from being accompanied by more formal KPI reporting (including greater use of benchmarks of institutional performance with other universities). The University has a basic suite of key performance indicators (enrolment statistics, teaching evaluations, research statistics etc). A data warehouse is in operation, although the development of a comprehensive suite of reports from this warehouse is still in early stages. To date, the focus of the University's Analysis and Planning Unit has been to ensure compliance with DEST reporting requirements. There appears to be an opportunity for this Unit to adopt a more strategic approach and to identify and provide a level of management information which will enable the University to better inform its strategic and operational decision making as well as monitor its quality assurance processes.

The University's self review indicated that there was considerable scope for improvement in the areas of planning, data and knowledge management. CQU expressed an intention to reconcile the planning, quality and risk management activities into a single strategic approach. AUQA endorses this intention, and encourages CQU to also ensure that this pervades the entire institution, and draws upon appropriate benchmarks. Given the impact of C\_MS, it is also essential that any strategic plans developed by CQU take full cognisance of the strategic plans of C\_MS (and vice-versa).

### **4.3 Corporate Quality Management**

#### **4.3.1 Quality Management Framework**

The University has a substantial document entitled the Quality Management Framework (QMF). The Audit Panel studied v1.2 Review Draft, which was developed through a series of workshops and approved in March 2005. This document seeks to align the strategic objectives of the University with corresponding strategies, measurement systems, allocated responsibilities and associated organisational structures, policies and processes. It constitutes a very comprehensive and positive effort.

However, to date the QMF has failed to make significant impact within the University. This is perhaps understandable given that it is fairly new and developed during the major restructuring. There are a number of strategies the University may wish to consider for the QMF to gain traction. It could benefit from clearly articulated high-level performance indicators and a streamlined means for access and implementation which would enable users to benefit without being overwhelmed by the totality of it.

#### **4.3.2 Faculty Quality Systems**

Within the faculties there are many different quality systems. On the one hand, this was a deliberate attempt to allow each faculty to take ownership and control of a quality system that would be best suited to its cluster of disciplines. On the other hand, this approach may not necessarily be based upon a sound assessment of the varying purposes, advantages and disadvantages of each system. The disparate approach leads to a confusing collection of quality systems which adds expense and unhelpful complexity when working across faculties.

The restructure from five faculties to three faculties will provide an opportunity for this to be addressed. AUQA suggests that a common quality system be introduced, perhaps building upon the QMF, which will provide the University with greater ability to act in an integrated fashion.

#### **4.3.3 Comments/Compliments/Complaints**

As part of its quality system the University operates a Comments/Compliments/Complaints (CCC) system across all its regional campuses and AICs. Using this system, students may register issues online or using hard copy forms, confidentially or with contact details so that their issue

may be responded to directly. This system came from the Library, which has been easily the most active in its usage. All completed CCC forms are logged and tracked by quality officers based at each campus. This helps ensure that issues are responded to in an appropriate and timely fashion. However, turnover of quality officers has been high and this constrains the effectiveness of the system.

General usage of the CCC forms by students is very low. This need not be interpreted as evidence that the system is ineffective, as there are many other reasons why students may not use it. However, given the potential value of student feedback solicited through CCC it would be useful to continually promote the system and to seek the best means of rendering it relevant to students.

#### **4.4 *Quality-related Units***

CQU established a Quality Office to assist the University in preparing for audit by AUQA. The Audit Panel was informed that the office would be dissolved after the Audit Visit. The proposed arrangements for high level responsibility for, and coordination of, quality assurance post audit were therefore not clear at the time of the audit.

Immediately prior to the Audit Visit the University had also operated a Continuous Improvement Unit. This Unit, reporting to the DVC (Resources), was staffed by people who had developed expertise in process improvement methods as a result of implementing a major system (PeopleSoft), and sought to provide this expertise to the University. The Unit is no longer operational in line with the Phillips Curran recommendation. However, based on the findings in this Report, AUQA encourages the University to consider how the capacity of the Unit can be placed in the organisation, as it may continue to serve as a useful component of a new, integrated, quality assurance framework.

There is considerable synergy between the Quality Office, Continuous Improvement Unit and other units such as the Analysis and Planning Unit and the Compliance Unit (section 2.4) and Internal Audit Office (given its expanded new focus: see section 2.4). It would be appropriate for the University to streamline these activities so as to provide better coordinated guidance to the University.

#### **4.5 *Reviews of Faculties and Schools***

The University has conducted a number of comprehensive reviews of faculties and schools. The Audit Panel had the opportunity to consider some of the review reports, such as that for the Faculty of Arts, Health and Sciences in 2004. That review panel concluded that it was not feasible to address all the detail of its terms of reference owing to a lack of information at faculty and university levels.

The process for reviewing faculties has been in abeyance during (or, perhaps more accurately, superseded by) the institutional review and restructuring process. This is understandable with the massive amount of change currently under way. Once the restructuring has bedded down, it will be important to design a new review system that is integrated into a systematic planning, reporting and reviewing framework.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop an integrated planning and reporting framework, in conjunction with the strategic plans for C\_MS, aligned to the risk management and quality assurance frameworks and incorporating appropriate external benchmarking; and that the various structural entities with quality and risk management responsibilities be integrated so as to more effectively support this framework.**

## 5 LEARNING AND TEACHING

CQU places primary importance on teaching and learning, and this is reflected in the goals of its Strategic Plan, all of which concern learning and teaching. This section provides comment on some of the key aspects of the learning and teaching quality assurance systems at CQU. They are managed by an elaborate organisational structure, with considerable overlap between position responsibilities as shown in Appendix IX of the University's Portfolio. Academic Board has established an Education Committee (ECAB) which has responsibility for developing academic policies. It includes Associate Deans (Teaching & Learning) (ADTL) from each faculty, who are responsible for the management and support of learning and teaching programs. Faculties also have subdeans (the precise structure varies between faculties) whose responsibilities include course advice and administering the teaching quality assurance processes such as moderation (section 5.7.1) and the teaching management model (section 5.8.1).

### 5.1 *Learning and Teaching Planning*

The University operates a Management Plan for Learning and Teaching 2005–2009. The Plan contains four learning and teaching goals. Each goal is unpacked in terms of strategies, responsibilities and means for monitoring. Since none appear to have defined outcome statements, it is not clear how this Plan demonstrably provides a quality improvement path.

The Audit Panel tested the level of awareness of this document and its implications throughout the University and found it to be low. Staff have a more singular understanding of the University's academic planning: to increase the emphasis on full-fee paying places. Because of the variability in the international student market and government-imposed restrictions on domestic full fee enrolments (section 3.3) this will be sorely tested. Also, given that full-fee paying students already constitute about half the total enrolments, a further increase may alter the balance of the student body perhaps bringing implications that are not adequately explored in the Plan.

One of the priorities of the new executive team could be to revitalise this document and to ensure that it is translated into operational plans for the three new faculties.

### 5.2 *Graduate Characteristics*

#### 5.2.1 Implementation

The Management Plan for Learning and Teaching sets out CQU's Graduate Characteristics, comprising generic skills and attributes which all graduates of the University are expected to possess. These are described by University leaders as new, although they have existed in some form long enough for progress to be expected. The Audit Panel explored the level of awareness of these by staff and students, and the effectiveness of the methods in place for helping students acquire and develop them. Awareness of the Graduate Characteristics is generally low, and at offshore locations it is non-existent.

Throughout the University the terms graduate characteristics, generic skills, graduate attributes and others are used interchangeably, contributing to a general lack of clarity and focus. There may be potential to simplify the concept, at least until they are fully embedded, when more sophisticated concepts could be more successfully introduced.

There are some areas where progress is being made. All new course proposals are required to demonstrate how they address the Graduate Characteristics. DTLS provide some assistance on this matter, but insufficient to constitute a systematic approach or a strategically prioritised

approach. For existing courses, some schools are now starting to consider how they may be incorporated. Accounting, Engineering and Education and Creative Arts have mapped their academic offerings against the Graduate Characteristics with a view to assessing their coverage and addressing any gaps.

Deans advise that professional bodies check for alignment of assessment tasks with Graduate Characteristics during professional accreditation processes. This external validation is valuable, but does not exist for all courses.

### **Recommendation 6**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop strategies to systematically embed its generic skills and attributes into the curriculum, teaching and assessment practices of the University such that the CQU experience is of a consistent quality and is comparable with universities nationally.**

AUQA notes that Graduate Characteristics lacks an internal champion. CQU may wish to include this role in one of the new executive portfolios and support it through a dedicated unit (such as a revitalised Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development (LEID) Centre: section 5.8.4).

#### 5.2.2 Information Literacy

There is one Graduate Characteristic in which the University has made substantial progress. The Library has formulated a Library Teaching and Learning Plan, centred upon improving information literacy (one of the University's generic skills). In accordance with that Plan, it provides information literacy sessions to staff and students face to face and via the web. Also, it has mapped information literacy skills across program curricula and aligned them with assessment at various levels. Through its hosting of the University's Lifelong Learning Conference, the Library has enhanced the University's reputation and commitment to this concept. AUQA concludes that this is an excellent practice. It may provide a model for the rest of the University to consider when seeking to embed other generic skills.

### **Commendation 1**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University's Division of Library Services for the development of its Teaching and Learning Plan and for effectively engaging with the academic community in the provision of information literacy training for staff and students.**

## 5.3 *Admissions*

### 5.3.1 Entrance Standards

The entrance standards into CQU's programs are at the low end of the sector, partly because of the service vision of the University. A common theme arising from discussions with students, external stakeholders and staff was that many students – particularly international students – are attracted to CQU specifically because of the ease of entrance. A view commonly expressed to AUQA was that CQU course quality and entrance standards are very low, and are therefore used by international students as providing an easy route to Australian residency. Evidence for students' attention to residency requirements includes a shift in student enrolments away from IT to accounting courses when the DIMIA points structure shifted to favour accounting.

From a quality perspective, while students may indeed choose to do certain courses at a particular university because they facilitate immigration, this is not to be interpreted as an indicator of the quality of CQU courses. Conversely, low entrance scores should not be interpreted, in

themselves, as evidence of poor quality teaching or curricula. Nonetheless, there are implications which warrant careful attention.

Having relatively low standards for entrance and advanced standing is the prerogative of the University. The consequence is that, in order to achieve graduate learning outcomes equivalent to national standards (cf Recommendation 7), the teaching and learning experience must be stronger and that the University must provide a high level of student learning support (section 6). The Audit Panel sought evidence that this is the case, such as a teaching culture where, aided through active professional development opportunities and general scholarly discourse, staff are aware of and responsive to the different needs of each cohort. It looked for evidence that teachers have the capacity and authority to modify curriculum, within specified parameters, to address the particular cohort of students. In general, the University needs to strengthen these areas (see, for example, section 5.8). AUQA also explored student access to personal support (pastoral and academic) mechanisms to develop learning strategies, tailored programs aligned with discipline programs etc. In this area the University performed better (section 6).

### 5.3.2 Student Records

The University has a number of systems in place for verifying the accuracy of student enrolment records. For example, faculty student services officers have responsibility for auditing enrolment processes across all AICs at least once each semester. This is typically based on a site examination of 10-20% of the enrolments in a given course. All enrolments for offshore partnerships are sent to Rockhampton for processing. Student Administration runs variance reports to detect any anomalies for further investigation. These systems appear adequate and it is unlikely that there are significant numbers of enrolled students who have bypassed the set entrance standards.

### 5.3.3 Special Entry (Bridging) Programs

The University has a range of special entry programs for students. These include the Tertiary Entry Program, the Tertiary Initiates Program, Women in Science and Technology and Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies (STEPS). The Audit Panel selected STEPS for further consideration.

STEPS has been in place for a number of years, and was originally a means for supporting mature age students into university study. It has demonstrated strong success in this regard and is strongly endorsed by staff and students alike. STEPS clearly achieves its goals and is subject to continuous improvement efforts. Every year, a strategic retreat is held for all STEPS staff to review the program, including consideration of any evaluative data, and design improvements. STEPS is now being expanded to accommodate students from the age of 18 years, and from 2006 it will also have a distance education dimension.

## **Commendation 2**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University for helping students manage the transition into university study through its successful STEPS program.**

### 5.3.4 Advanced Standing

The *Good Universities Guide* rates CQU as being in the group that gives the most credit for TAFE courses. The University promotes this five star rating extensively in its marketing materials (section 9.1.2). The Audit Panel considered this issue from a quality perspective.

CQU has robust procedures for evaluating entering students in terms of the courses they intend to follow, and gives proportionately more advanced standing for lower standard qualifications (or

part thereof) than other universities. A number of staff and external stakeholders advised that entrance and advanced standing requirements appear to be becoming lighter. Some staff believe this has negative quality implications, while others believe that it facilitates greater access to higher education. For students, a number were clear that this was a negative quality indicator, but were content to take advantage of the shorter time to degree completion that greater advanced standing enabled.

CQU advises that some professional bodies regard Certificate IV as being at the same level as a Diploma and therefore in certain courses the University provides credit transfer for Certificate IV qualifications including, in some instances, partially completed Certificate IV. The credit transfer is usually for a level one course. In some cases (including the Bachelor of Information Systems and the Bachelor of Multimedia Studies) credit for advanced electives can also be awarded for Certificate IV study. The Audit Panel noted that up to six courses exemption may be granted in the Bachelor of Learning Design for a Certificate III course.

Standards set by professional bodies and the manner by which they are audited (which vary considerably between the professions) are extremely valuable for their purpose and should always be taken into consideration by higher education providers. However, the ambit of Australian universities is broader than serving the minimum standards of professional bodies.

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was established by MCEETYA “to provide for national articulation of awards offered in the Australian vocational education and training and higher education sectors” (*The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework*, DETYA, 2000, p5). The AQF indicates that Certificate IV is regarded as being at a level below higher education courses, so it may appropriately provide entrance to university study. The AQF does not suggest entrance with advanced standing, and particularly not for advanced electives.

The AVCC Policy Guidelines on Cross-Sector Qualification Linkages (2001), to which CQU is a signatory, states that “cross-sector qualification linkages can be established between any of the qualification titles in the AQF, not only between approximate qualifications” but that “appropriate care is to be exercised to avoid combinations of qualifications that are not justified”. These guidelines also, with the self-accrediting status of Australian universities in mind, state that decisions about qualification linkages are “a matter for individual authorised organisations.”

There is room for different interpretations on this aspect of the higher education quality framework, and AUQA must exercise its judgement about the appropriateness of an institution’s interpretation, based upon the University’s goals, all relevant available evidence, and relevant external standards – most particularly the National Protocols. These state that an Australian university will “set standards for [its] qualifications which are equivalent to Australian and international standards” (National Protocols s1.14). AUQA concludes that CQU’s advanced standing practices are not equivalent to national standards.

### **Recommendation 7**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University take greater cognisance of national higher education standards (such as the AQF and AVCC Guidelines, and benchmarks with comparable degree programs at other universities) when determining advanced standing for its degree programs.**

CQU’s Council, having delegated academic approvals to the Academic Board, was unaware of this issue. However, Council may not delegate its powers to make Statutes or Rules, and by law the Academic Board “must (a) advise the Council about teaching, scholarship and research matters concerning the university; and (b) formulate proposals for the academic policies of the University” (s40(3)). AUQA suggests that Academic Board, which itself expressed little

awareness of these issues, needs to be more involved in decisions about advanced standing and ought to bring them to the awareness of Council.

#### 5.4 *Curriculum Development, Approval and Review*

The general curriculum approval process is similar to other universities, ie consideration within the faculties, often assisted by advisory committees of various form (the Bachelor of Property Development provides an outstanding example of this), then consideration by ECAB followed by final approval from the Academic Board. However, the choice of curriculum model and the capacity and capability of the University staff to ensure the quality of student learning through this model all require close consideration.

##### 5.4.1 Curriculum Development and Approval

The University's model is to develop and approve curricula which are inherently international. The University states that its curricula have been designed this way over a period of many years. The curricula have evolved to encourage students to develop or acquire equally valuable knowledge regardless of where or how they undertake their CQU education.

The Audit Panel explored this issue in some depth. The model ensures that a course curriculum is the same wherever it is offered (see also section 5.8.1), and the processes for disseminating and maintaining consistent curricula are strong (section 5.4.4). In many instances, the program curriculum is dictated by the relevant professional accreditation body (such as Engineers Australia). However, international consistency does not necessarily make curricula 'global' from a pedagogic perspective. The notion that 'equivalence' could be considered more in terms of student learning than course content, which may carry differing connotations in different cultural contexts, has been discussed in some parts of the University but generally rejected. In fact, a number of staff interviewed by the Audit Panel directly rejected the global concept, claiming that the model was more a matter of students having to learn "the Aussie way". The University would benefit from specific curriculum development criteria and/or guidelines specifically designed to embed good practice in internationalising curricula.

More generally, AUQA believes that curriculum development is currently a high risk area for the University. The pool of academic talent on which the University can rely appears light by comparison with some other universities. A large number of teaching staff are junior and lack curriculum development expertise, or – especially at AICs and FIC – are casual/sessional staff who are not expected to contribute to the curriculum development (and research) activities of the University. AUQA learned that in some cases, where there is inadequate curriculum development expertise within the University, it has been contracted in. This is a matter for some concern (especially in conjunction with audit comment on the nexus between teaching and research: see section 5.5) as the capability and capacity to develop and approve curriculum is what distinguishes Australian self-accrediting universities.

Many course coordinators are proactive at inviting lead lecturers (for detail of the teaching model see section 5.8.1) to communicate suggestions about curriculum improvements to them. This is commendable and is an essential component of the overall curriculum development and review process. However, it will only be effective in an organisational culture in which staff have the capacity to make valuable contributions and the belief that their contributions will be given due consideration. Evidence gathered by the Audit Panel suggests that many staff are not engaged in such an academic culture conducive to effective curriculum development and review.

This view was shared at all locations visited by AUQA. It took on a particular emphasis at MIC, SIC and FIC. Being staff of C\_MS rather than CQU, there is less opportunity for involvement in staff deliberations. It was suggested to AUQA that those staff at CQU who are involved in curriculum development do so without a strong understanding of the C\_MS student cohorts.

There may be advantages in involving C\_MS academic staff in the curriculum development process, in accordance with the University's intentions to develop inherently international curricula.

DTLS provide instructional design expertise to staff involved in curriculum development. However, in general there is inadequate focus on the scholarly, pedagogic aspects of curriculum design and delivery (section 5.8.3). The focus is weighted towards application of technology rather than toward building an understanding and application of scholarship to teaching and learning. The technological skills are essential, particularly given the commitment expressed in the Management Plan for Learning and Teaching, to providing flexible learning opportunities. However, there is an opportunity to integrate the pedagogic aspects of using such technology into the curriculum design process.

The Library and information technology implications for new courses and programs are included in the proposal templates and can be considered at ECAB, which includes IT and Library representatives. However, this is late in the process and key resource providers (specifically, IT and Library) could become involved much earlier in the curriculum development process. This is especially so when a course is being prepared to be offered in a different mode (section 5.4.3).

In summary, the curriculum development process of the University requires attention. In addition to a greater use of external benchmarking, the University could involve its internal community more thoroughly in this critical process, and build greater curriculum development capacity.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University encourage a more collegial approach to curriculum development, which will both stimulate and incorporate scholarship and research and philosophical discussions about quality education.**

#### 5.4.2 Fast-Tracked Approval

In May 2005 the University introduced a formal process for fast-tracking program and course approvals. By the time of the audit, five courses had been approved using this method. No whole new programs had been approved, although the process does allow for such a possibility. Reasons for a course or program being fast tracked must be provided by the dean of the faculty, and may include, for example, changes to professional accreditation or legislative requirements for a given discipline. All fast-tracked proposals are considered by the Program Review Group and then the Executive of Academic Board. They are subsequently ratified by the Academic Board.

The fast-tracking process appears generally sound. The concerns expressed in section 5.4.1 continue to apply, and would assume an even greater significance in the event that whole new programs come to be approved through the fast-tracking process. To date, however, the University has demonstrated appropriate care in ensuring that the fast-tracking process is used appropriately and as an exception.

#### 5.4.3 Approving Changes to Mode of Study

CQU maintains that although it differentiates between domestic on-campus, domestic flexible and international student cohorts, it operates essentially a single mode of study – flexible learning. Other than where set out in agreements with educational partners, there are no particular institutionally-imposed limits upon the delivery methods used for different cohorts. For example, domestic on-campus students may find that they use online learning management systems extensively, and offshore students may have access to some direct teaching.

One consequence of this is that course approvals may not give adequate attention to the resource implications. Staff involved expressed concern that a course initially delivered through one configuration of teaching support (for example, relying largely on face to face teaching) may subsequently be delivered through another configuration (for example, relying more on a learning management system) without this change requiring further approvals. Such changes, especially in total over a year, can have major consequences for service providers (such as the Library and IT).

The University may wish to consider whether significant changes to a mode of course delivery warrant some level of formal approval which incorporates the views of affected resource and service providers.

#### 5.4.4 Course Profiles and Course Management

The most recent Student Ombudsman's report gave form to a concern that had been building throughout the University community for some time, namely that course criteria need to be evident, detailed and explicit. The University has sought to respond to this with an electronic academic content management system. All course profiles are now online and managed through the in-house course management system. While very new, this is emerging as an effective means for ensuring consistency and improving access to information for students and support units. Students (where they know of it) and staff are complimentary about this system.

One concern is that profiles are not always available in a timely fashion, particularly for distance education students who receive their material in print form. The University will need to ensure that the business processes that use the system are equally robust.

#### **Commendation 3**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University for its course management system, which helps to ensure the consistency of the content and delivery of the University's offerings across all locations and modes.**

#### 5.4.5 Course and Program Review

Students regularly evaluate their courses and course coordinators and ADTL pay considerable attention to this information. Beyond that, the processes for course reviews are not systematically pursued. Some faculties have taken advantage of professional bodies or advisory committees to comment on courses, although usually in the context of program reviews. In many courses, professional bodies conduct program accreditation processes. Where no relevant professional accreditation process exists (this is the case for about half the programs), the University operates its own review process, involving a panel of internal and external members and conducted on a five year cycle.

It appears that, where possible, CQU relies on professional bodies in lieu of providing its own educational standards and academic quality assurance. Professional accreditation fulfils a very important function in the University's quality assurance system, providing an external validation against nationally (and sometimes internationally) benchmarked standards. However, this should be seen as complementary to the University's own means for reviewing the quality of its programs.

The University maintains that program reviews address all modes and locations in which the program is offered. However, the extent to which review (or accreditation) processes explicitly include offshore activities in their deliberations is doubtful. Staff offshore had little knowledge of the University's program review processes. Also there is a risk that a review process which does not have explicit data collection and consideration of multi-campus and offshore operations in its terms of reference may give prominence to the logistical aspects of consistent delivery rather than the pedagogic aspects of equivalent student learning environments and outcomes.

Lastly, the Audit Panel met representatives of various advisory groups and discussed the role of these groups in program review. Comments varied (from enthusiastically supportive to very critical) around a general consensus that usage of advisory groups, which in some cases is nascent, needs to be more systematic and more genuinely participatory. The potential for advisory groups to form a valuable element of the overall quality assurance system was widely accepted.

The University will need to ensure that its program reviews are consistent and assure the University and others of their quality, and that recommendations arising are used in a systematic and open way, so that real improvements occur and that stakeholders feel that time spent during the review has been useful.

## 5.5 *Teaching Research Nexus*

The University is committed to research-informed teaching: “The nexus between research and teaching is of fundamental importance to the continued development of the University as an institution dedicated to the delivery of quality educational experiences for students at all levels” (Portfolio, p46). The University’s Management Plan for Teaching and Learning states the following principle:

*4.5 Teaching should be informed by research and scholarship, both in the discipline itself and in the area of tertiary learning and teaching.*

This is consistent with the National Protocols, which require universities to demonstrate “teaching and learning that engage with advanced knowledge and inquiry” and “a culture of sustained scholarship extending from that which informs inquiry and basic teaching and learning, to the creation of new knowledge through research, and original creative endeavour.” The National Protocols imply not only that an institution ought to be active in both teaching and research, but that there ought to be a relationship between these two activities.

CQU’s commitment to a teaching-research nexus does not appear to be well supported in practice. There is little evidence of a systematic approach to encouraging it, and many staff acknowledge that significant improvement is required. Indeed, a number of staff at regional campuses observed that it was not a requirement or an expectation that staff’s research activity informed their teaching, especially given the consistent approach to unit materials.

Half of the University’s students – those at the AICs, FIC and offshore partners – are taught by staff who are not required in their terms of employment to be research active and through their employment conditions would find the practice of scholarship difficult. There is a view held among some CQU academic staff that the learning environment at AICs cannot, therefore, be described as equivalent. In relation to that, the University’s position is that research findings are included in the curriculum, led by course coordinators, and thereby benefit students at all campuses through a diffusion model. This concept places inadequate emphasis on the notion of research informing actual teacher-student interaction as well as the curriculum.

The strong research activity of the University is not well aligned with its core teaching activities. The majority of its teaching is in Business and Law (37% total student enrolments) and Informatics and Communication (25%). The University’s four research centres (environment management, railway engineering, social sciences and primary industries: section 7.4) are in fields of study where the University has a minority of its student enrolments. There is no requirement for them to contribute to curriculum development or review, although there were some instances suggesting that this does happen in an ad hoc fashion.

The University’s research strategy is to foster excellence in a small number of relevant fields. While other staff will be expected to maintain a research profile, there may be little or no funding

for facilitating these activities. Moreover, many staff are studying towards their own higher degrees which, while evidence of a research culture, is minimal for curriculum development and other nexus purposes (see also section 10.1). Thus these staff must turn to other means for ensuring that they are able to give effect to the nexus. This leads to the slightly different concept of 'scholarship' as a means for ensuring teaching is research-informed. AUQA found that the University has no working definition of scholarship with which to encourage academic staff in their teaching.

One frequent suggestion was that the standards set by professional accreditation bodies, such as Engineers Australia, take care of the research-teaching nexus. This is further evidence of an over-reliance on external accreditation substituting for higher education standards and academic rigour.

The poor performance of the University against its teaching-research nexus commitments lies at the heart of AUQA's overall concern about the quality of education at CQU. If the University can attend to this issue, many of the other concerns will be considerably reduced.

### **Recommendation 9**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop a systematic approach to encouraging and resourcing research-informed teaching.**

## **5.6 *Plagiarism***

The Audit Panel chose to test how well the University disseminates, implements and reviews its plagiarism policy as an example of academic policy effectiveness. It found that awareness of the University's plagiarism policy amongst students is extremely high at all locales visited. While the policy and principles of plagiarism are clear, it appears from student and staff sources that the University does not always implement the policy consistently. Treatment of plagiarism cases by academic staff tends to vary, to the dissatisfaction of interested students. There is an opportunity for the University to capitalise on the high level of plagiarism policy awareness with greater consistency of implementation.

## **5.7 *Assessment***

Since CQU has widely distributed course delivery, the effectiveness of its assessment processes is very important. CQU uses criteria-based marking rather than norm-referenced marking to reduce subjective differences between markers across the 14 teaching locations. The Audit Panel investigated the effectiveness of this. Comments about processes are made in sections 5.7.1 to 5.7.3, while comments about associated professional development issues are made in section 5.8.3.

### **5.7.1 Moderation of Assignments**

Assignments are usually marked by local staff across the various teaching sites. A key element of the University's quality assurance framework is a robust system of assignment marking moderation. AUQA examined this issue at every visited teaching location and found that the actual model of moderation employed appropriate sampling and comparative techniques and was employed consistently. Given the scale of CQU's distributed teaching operations, this was particularly impressive. Examples were provided to demonstrate that appropriate and prompt action is taken when moderation reveals problems.

#### **Commendation 4**

##### **AUQA commends Central Queensland University for an effective system of moderation which is implemented consistently across all teaching sites.**

One issue which arose numerous times during the audit was the claim by students that they do not always get their marked assignments returned prior to the due date for subsequent assessed work. The students regard feedback from teachers on their marked work as a valuable part of the teaching and learning process, and so sometimes feel disadvantaged by the late return of their work. Indeed, the provision of formative feedback to students is listed by the University in its list of principles and values (Management Plan for Learning and Teaching, s4.2.7). This is a matter that the University ought to be able to monitor and respond to more effectively once its assignment tracking system is fully operational. The assignment tracking system is being designed as part of the University's 'Managing the Student Journey' project. It is one of many issues placed on hold during the University's major restructuring, but recommenced in June 2005. A revised business case is under development and changes to user requirements and project scope are being investigated. The initiative is promising because it would greatly facilitate monitoring of student progress both administratively and academically (section 6). However, this is a longer-term project, and CQU needs to institute ways of systematically providing timely feedback in the short-term.

#### 5.7.2 Final Examinations

Final examinations are managed differently from assignments and all are marked by CQU staff. The purpose of this is to ensure that the University itself retains – and is seen to retain (by academic peers, students, the public and professional accreditation bodies) – an appropriate level of control over assessment. However, for large courses it is common practice for CQU course coordinators to contract large numbers of casual staff (who have, in many cases, never taught the course) to mark the examination. AUQA has concerns about this in terms of academic quality. It is not obvious that casual marking staff will provide a higher standard of marking than AIC or other partner staff who are experienced in teaching the course. As with curriculum development (section 5.4.1), there may be opportunity for closer collaboration and sharing of academic responsibilities between CQU and C\_MS academic staff.

The Ombudsman's annual report shows that the number of complaints over review of grades (the largest category of issues dealt with) has increased considerably from 36 in 2002 to 143 in 2004. These increases were in the Faculties of Business and Law, Informatics and Communications, and the vast majority from the AICs. At least 49 were supported, indicating that many of the complaints were not without substance. This may warrant a meta-level analysis in order to determine whether and, if so, how, the issue is systematic.

#### 5.7.3 Invigilation

The Audit Panel considered the University's invigilation processes across its global operations. It met the Manager, Examinations and contracted invigilators in other countries, including the Hong Kong Examinations Council and IDP in Shanghai. The Panel explored the potential for a conflict of interest in employing a marketing partner to provide invigilation services and found no cause for concern.

CQU runs final examinations at 250 locations worldwide. All final examinations are directed from the Rockhampton campus. An instruction manual for invigilators, viewed by the Panel, sets out their responsibilities in detail. Each location furnishes CQU Rockhampton with a report on the implementation of the process.

The robustness of the processes and, where contracted agencies are used, the strength of personal professional relations between the staff concerned, are such that AUQA is confident that the

University has effective invigilation processes in place which provide appropriate academic security.

## 5.8 *Teaching*

### 5.8.1 Teaching Management Model

CQU may be the most geographically dispersed university in Australia. With 14 teaching locations, a major challenge is ensuring the consistency of course and teaching quality. To that end, several years ago, a Multi-Campus/Teaching Site Academic Roles and Responsibilities document was developed. This document is regularly reviewed (AUQA considered v6, updated July 2005), and staff are able to contribute suggestions for this via the ADTL.

This document provides for a clear delineation of responsibilities. Course coordinators are responsible for all aspects of the course, including moderation and final results. At each site of course offering, a lead lecturer has responsibility for delivery and supervising the teaching team (other lecturers, tutors, casual markers etc). Subdeans are responsible for the staff contractual aspects of this structure and facilitating such academic quality assurance processes as moderation and granting extensions. The ADTLs (who are also often program managers) provide guidance on best practice and coordination at the program level, while heads of school have overall responsibility for standards.

While there may be some scope for streamlining the roles and responsibilities, the system works very well, recently complemented by the course management system (section 5.4.4), in ensuring consistent course delivery across multiple teaching sites. An area for improvement pertains to its application to single-campus or single-mode courses. The document was initially designed to accommodate multi-campus courses, but not all courses operate in this manner, so the design is not always a perfect fit for practice.

An especially ingenious aspect of the system is the University's strategy of distributing program managers and course coordinators across campuses – including, although less commonly, the AICs. This supports the vision of being a 'unified university'. It means that most campuses have some staff with heightened awareness of the processes for ensuring consistency, and also assists with the economic viability of regional campuses by locating key revenue-generating personnel there.

#### **Commendation 5**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University for effectively managing the provision of its programs and courses across all its campuses and locations through its Multi-Campus/Teaching Site Academic Roles and Responsibilities document, which sets out clear procedures that are being implemented consistently.**

There are opportunities for further strengthening this model, the primary one relating to the role of course coordinator (CC). The value of this role appears to be underestimated, with many staff viewing it primarily as an administrative responsibility (and sometimes quite a burdensome one). Staff are supposed to be mentored into a CC role. In some cases this clearly happens, although the Audit Panel did meet a number of staff who are CCs and have not been mentored for the role. They advised that in small schools it is not always feasible for staff to be mentored prior to assuming CC responsibilities. The Panel met some higher degree by research (HDR) students who were also contracted as casual staff with CC responsibilities. Given the significant nature of these responsibilities (administratively and, in theory, academically), this is not acceptable. It is understandable that emergency situations may arise in which, in the interests of business continuity, HDR students may be required to step into this role. However, it ought to be the

exception rather than the rule, and when it is invoked these persons ought to be provided with additional training and support prior to the commencement of their course coordinator duties. The University's human resource division does not have the capability to report on CCs by level, meaning that it is difficult to assess the extent of this issue. This under commitment to the important role of CC also constrains the development of a scholarly culture focused on pedagogy. The University should review the role of CC in this regard.

### **Recommendation 10**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University review the role of course coordinator, especially with regard to its academic leadership responsibilities and the criteria by which staff are appointed as course coordinators.**

The teaching model did receive some criticism from a number of students at different locations. They claim that there is room for greater consistency between members of the teaching (and marking) team in their interpretation of the curriculum, particularly as it relates to assessment. The University may wish to respond to these concerns through, for example, encouraging greater communication between academic staff of CQU and C\_MS and through increased emphasis on professional development for teaching staff regarding assessment practices.

#### 5.8.2 Teaching Evaluation

CQU approved its current student evaluation of teaching system in 2003, and the system is now used consistently throughout the University. Student evaluations of teaching became a policy covered by industrial relations in relation to promotion, tenure and awards. One consequence was that certain limitations were placed on the usage of this information. At present, practice in the use of the information over and above the industrial relations provisions varies considerably throughout the University. A research project is currently under way to determine effective means for using this information for quality enhancement purposes.

Student evaluations of courses, which are not covered by industrial relations, contain some questions pertaining to teaching. The University references results against institutional means, for convenience, despite being aware of the literature cautioning against this approach.

While the surveys are making an impact at the individual staff level, as staff study their individual results closely, the University is currently not maximising the potential benefits of teaching and course evaluation systems, owing to poor strategic use of these systems. It would also be helpful if student evaluation interpretation training was incorporated into the training for promotions panels. This is not currently the case, and there is a risk that the promotions process could be adversely affected by inappropriate interpretations (especially in regards to comparisons with institutional mean values).

### **Recommendation 11**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University review its student evaluations of teaching and course systems with a view to maximising their strategic benefits.**

#### 5.8.3 Professional Development

After four days at CQU campuses (and a further six days at other operations), the Audit Panel concluded that the academic culture of CQU does not sufficiently support professional development. There is a general lack of professional development courses based on such pedagogic issues as reflective teaching practice, mentoring, effective assessment of student learning outcomes etc.

There are a number of professional development opportunities available to staff, about which a number of academic staff were very positive. They have access to between \$1000 and \$2000 (more in some cases) for professional development purposes (depending on the school). DTLS provide a Monday 1–2pm seminar series on a range of teaching topics. These are usually subsequently made available via online and video technologies. DTLS also make available a teaching and learning web site. In general, professional development for teaching staff is focused on technical skills relating to flexible learning, such as using interactive systems, rather than the pedagogic aspects and implications of these technologies.

CQU recognises this and is taking steps to address the issue. It has recently established a Graduate Certificate in Flexible Learning in response to an identified need to better support its teaching staff with the University's flexible delivery systems. Participation in this program is fully subsidised by the University. This program is a positive initiative and is endorsed by staff.

There is a reflective practice group at Rockhampton which works on pedagogic issues. It may be that there is scope for such groups to be established at other teaching locations.

There are some very specific professional development opportunities which the University may wish to prioritise. One vital aspect of assessment consistency is the ability of course coordinators to develop effective marking guides and academic staff to appropriately interpret and implement those guides. It would appear that this is an area in which the University could substantially improve its performance. In general, assessment technique is an under-discussed topic and does not feature sufficiently in professional development offerings. This particularly affects HDR students who are engaged in marking activities. Although marking is based on criteria, the marking guides often leave considerable scope for interpretation, and markers find no training for and limited direct support in their marking activities.

There are some staff demonstrating superior knowledge in this area, and the University may wish to identify its assessment leaders and support them in lifting the standard of assessment practice throughout the University.

### **Recommendation 12**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University increase its emphasis on academic professional development, via a variety of forms, especially focusing on such pedagogic issues as curriculum development and review, assessment practices and the teaching-research nexus.**

#### 5.8.4 LEID Centre

The Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development (LEID) Centre of DTLS, was established in 2001 to provide services and products to staff and students at the University to support CQU's vision to be a leading, flexible teaching and learning and research institution. This is a critical role for CQU. The LEID Centre provides an electronic journal, workshops and consultancy services.

The Phillips Curran review proposed the abolition of the LEID Centre. A consequence was that the LEID Centre suffered from staff attrition and was, in effect, in abeyance at the time of the Audit Visit. AUQA considered the LEID Centre response to the Phillips Curran Review Report (August 2004) and endorses the view that it would be most unwise to abandon a major source of pedagogic expertise, drawing as it does upon teaching-related research, scholarship and evidence-based teaching practice recommendations, within the University.

## 5.9 *ICT and Learning & Teaching*

The University places considerable reliance on information communication technologies (ICT) to support its teaching activities. AUQA considered two of the more prominent technologies in use at CQU, namely interactive videoconferencing and the learning management systems.

### 5.9.1 Interactive Video Conferencing

The University makes considerable use of Interactive System-wide Learning (ISL), which is an interactive videoconferencing system. This is used for teaching purposes, staff meetings and also made available to the community for their purposes.

A number of students expressed concerns about the effectiveness of ISL as a teaching tool, and suggested that both staff and students could benefit from greater support in how to obtain maximum benefit from use of ISL. There is ISL training offered each semester linked with pedagogic support from DTLS. Indeed, it is proposed under the current restructuring to merge the IT and pedagogic support aspects of ISL into a single unit, probably within DTLS. It is estimated that 55% of academic staff currently know how to use ISL (ie have undertaken the training) and the plan is to eventually provide training to all academic staff.

In 2004 a comprehensive internal review of ISL was conducted. The resulting report contains a number of recommendations pertaining to (a) the ISL technology and (b) the use of educational technologies. Many of the recommendations of that review were sound and still require attention. However, it was conducted by those responsible for ISL, and therefore perhaps not as independent as would generally be expected of such a significant review. A more external review may have been more critical of the role of ISL within CQU, especially regarding its contribution and potential contribution to the learning environment.

#### **Recommendation 13**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University, perhaps using the Division of Library Services' teaching & learning planning approach as an exemplar, review how ICT can better support the learning and teaching activities of the University.**

### 5.9.2 Learning Management Systems

The University currently operates two learning management systems. The preferred corporate system is Blackboard. A home-grown system called Webfuse, developed by CQU commencing about 1996, is still used by the Faculty of Informatics and Communication. While a number of staff clearly prefers Webfuse, the use of a single enterprise system would provide benefits for staff and students, particularly those whose programs of study span faculties (the University has a number of multi and interdisciplinary degree programs). AUQA recognises the sensitivities of this issue, yet suggests that a common learning management system would aid the implementation of quality assurance processes for student learning.

## 5.10 *Learning and Teaching Summary*

CQU's service culture is well supported by mechanisms for ensuring consistency, but this needs to be driven by an equal or stronger emphasis on scholarly activity, which may require more organic systems. The University's reliance on professional bodies for quality assurance purposes pervades most aspects of the overall quality assurance arrangements and has perhaps obscured the need for academic leadership from the University itself. Key to addressing this is greater attention to professional development and the teaching-research nexus, as well as enhancing the academic staff profile (section 10).

## 6 STUDENT SUPPORT

The University treats this topic under Learning and Teaching in its Portfolio. Its coverage in a separate section of this Report is not intended to diminish the connection between the two.

### 6.1 *Student Profile*

CQU has a unique student profile. Of its 22,660 students (using 2004 figures), 41% study by distance education, 44% study in metropolitan campuses through C\_MS (in 2005 this figure increased), and 7% study offshore at FIC or through other partners (section 9.3). Just 24% study at CQU's regional campuses in Central Queensland. 58% of domestic students are female compared with 33% of international students. Half the students are international and they are mostly located at AICs or offshore. The large distance education cohort means that CQU domestic students tend to be older than the sector average, and many study part time.

This non-homogenous profile, with the diversity of student needs it suggests, presents challenges for the University in designing and developing systems for student support. AUQA considered the systems in place for identifying and attending to these needs.

### 6.2 *Monitoring Academic Progress and Student Learning Support*

CQU has a Monitoring Academic Progress Policy which arranges for the constant monitoring of and, where necessary, intervention in student academic progress. The policy is very effective, and is now an integral component of the Student Learning Journey. This includes monitoring student progress, interviewing students if they are failing to meet certain academic standards, and then designing tailored learning support programs to address identified needs. As a comprehensive system this is fairly new and not yet fully embedded. However, by the time of the audit there were over 600 interviews logged and some segments of the program were being implemented. Students continue to state "difficulty maintaining motivation" and "a lack of connection to the University" as the main reasons for failure to succeed. The monitoring system revealed a relatively high level of failure of courses by international students at the AICs, which CQU is encouraged to investigate and resolve.

The Student Learning Journey is conducted at both CQU regional campuses and C\_MS campuses. The precise range of support services available differs, as do the student cohorts and their thematic issues, but the core concept is the same. At CQU, the Mathematics Learning Centre (MLC) and Communications Learning Centre (CLC) provide essential student learning support, whereas at the AICs this is provided by Learning Skills Units and the initial consultations conducted by client service officers.

There is little connection between the MLC and their counterparts at the AICs. This is a good opportunity for improvement. The similarities in their responsibilities and the variance in their experiences with students may provide fertile ground for knowledge sharing and collaboration. Although they are located in separate corporate entities with separate management systems and lines of accountability, the students they serve are all CQU students.

Other support that can be called upon includes personal interviews and life skills coaching (especially for international students) operated through friendly 'snack & learn' lunches.

AUQA regards the Student Journey project and the guiding policy as exemplary of well planned and well integrated student learning support.

### **Commendation 6**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University for attending to the academic progression of its students through the Student Journey project, which identifies and provides support across all campuses for students academically at risk.**

In addition to providing invaluable student assistance, this project may have other benefits in due course. Once more data has been collected, it would be helpful to conduct thematic analyses to determine whether there are more systematic impediments to student progress which warrant attention by the University, rather than the student.

#### **6.3 CQU Student Mentor and Leadership Program**

In 1996, the University first piloted its Student Mentor and Leadership Program whereby experienced students provide a variety of peer support services to first year students in order to assist with their transition into university study. A concurrent benefit is the development of leadership skills by the student mentors themselves. In 2005, over 200 mentors provided support to 91% of all first year regional campus and distance education students.

The program is coordinated by Student Services, with input from all over the University, particularly into a comprehensive one to one and a half day training program at the start of the year, and two or more mentor professional development sessions held during the year. Student mentors receive T-shirts to help identify them, and there is an annual cash prize of \$250 for the 'Mentor of the Year' awarded by each faculty and campus.

The program is subject to continuing evaluation. Additional effort will be required to obtain sufficient evaluative feedback (the 2004 survey yielded 138 responses from 5567 invitations). Nonetheless, the responses received do provide some information that can assist in improving the program.

The evaluative feedback itself from mentees is variable. Not all students find the service particularly helpful (partly due to the variable performance of mentors) but it is very clear that many students have benefited considerably from the program.

### **Commendation 7**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University for supporting its first year students and providing leadership development opportunities to senior students through the CQU Student Mentor and Leadership Program.**

The student mentor program is not operated on the AICs, which have their own mentoring, leadership and student development programs. The needs of AIC student cohorts may be quite distinct from regional campus cohorts, but it may be appropriate to test whether the concept would be equally (or more) applicable. The organisational separation of management of the AICs should not impede the University-wide implementation of such positive, student-centred initiatives.

The Panel also noted that participation as a student mentor can be recognised as a completed higher education non-credit course upon completion of two brief items of assessment, namely an online quiz and a self-reporting checklist. Enrolment in the course (MNTR40001) is optional, but it may be included on a student's official academic transcript. While it is appropriate that student participation be appropriately recognised, this particular method may require further consideration. Inclusion of this activity on the academic transcript implies that it is an internally accredited course and, therefore, that certain academic standards and University policies would apply, including for withdrawal and exclusions. In practice, mentors can be, and are, withdrawn

midstream if their performance is inadequate, but the method for doing so may not be consistent with CQU policies for withdrawal.

Also, it would be difficult to reconcile the awarding of a course (even a non-credit course) to the majority of mentors, when the evaluative feedback does not indicate an equivalent level of satisfaction from mentees. For example, program guidelines suggest that mentors ought to contact their mentees at least during 'O Week' and in weeks 3, 6 and 10. However, evaluative results suggest that about half the mentees had contact with their mentor between none and two times.

This leads to the third critical comment. In reference to the variable performance of mentors, it is probable that the provision of effective support and monitoring of 200 mentors is too large a role for the First Year Coordinator and the DE coordinator. The program is clearly valuable and worthy of support. However, if the University is to continue with MNTR40001, it may wish to ensure these issues can be satisfactorily addressed.

#### **6.4 Ombudsman**

The University employs a Student Ombudsman (0.6 FTE) to address student complaints and grievances. In 2004, 287 issues were dealt with by this office, and the trend is increasing. This amounts to about half a day of the Student Ombudsman's time per issue, and the University may wish to reconsider whether 0.6 FTE is adequate (especially as voluntary student unionism potentially undermines the ability of the students association to provide student advocacy services).

The Ombudsman reports twice-yearly to Academic Board, and publishes a comprehensive and extremely valuable annual report. The Office has been proactive in providing information through the web and otherwise, to ensure students are aware of their rights and of the processes to lodge complaints.

The four distinct student cohorts (domestic, AICs, offshore campuses and distance education) operate under the 'Workplace Grievance Policy and Procedures'. CQU needs to check that this makes appropriate provisions for *student* grievance management, and that it provides for consistency across the cohorts.

## 7 RESEARCH

The University's research intentions are set out in the document *Research@CQU: Research Strategic Plan 2003–2005*. CQU has a small number of research programs concentrated in four research centres. The University recognises that “there is much research planning and development still to occur as the University matures” (Portfolio, p37). AUQA concurs with this statement.

### 7.1 *Research Activity*

The Audit Panel tested the extent to which the University had successfully implemented the strategic goals of *Research@CQU* and established corresponding quality assurance processes. It concluded that there is no single vision of the role of research at CQU. Some contend that CQU is and will be a broad-based research institution; others state that CQU can only be focused on research in niche areas; and yet others believe that CQU is essentially a teaching and learning institution with a focus on scholarship rather than research *per se* (ie pure and strategic research).

In fact, the University intends to focus on a small number of niche research areas in which it is competitive. Academic staff will pursue scholarly activities in their teaching areas, but the University will have very limited funding to support such activity.

The level of research activity at CQU is at the low end of the Australian university sector. In terms of recent trends, publications have increased by 10% over the past year, but research income from external competitive sources is decreasing. The University agrees that the notional 20% academic staff time dedicated to research is not matched by research productivity. Some faculties, such as Education and Creative Arts, have reported in their various internal review documents that chronic under-funding of full time academic positions has constrained their research capacity for a number of years. Also, it must be borne in mind that CQU is still within a single staffing generation from its pre-university days as an institute of advanced education. A considerable proportion of long serving academic staff have never been research active and have no designs on research activity. It is clear that the University's research aspirations need to be set in a realistic time frame.

Currently, however, external stakeholders express reservations about the quality and small scale of research at the University. Also, steps must be taken to ensure that the teaching programs of the University are suitably supported by research (section 5.5) if the University is to continue to claim that the “nexus between research and teaching is of fundamental importance to the continued development of the University as an institution” (Portfolio, p46). The Audit Panel was frequently advised, and gleaned from its own observations, that generally, the emphasis is inclined to be on ‘scholarship’ rather than discovery or linkage research *per se*. However, the concept of ‘scholarship’ is not formally defined within the University and there is no shared understanding of what a commitment to scholarship means in practice. Throughout the University, the main research indicator appears to be DEST points. It is not clear how the University determines performance levels on the less tangible concept of ‘scholarship’. The dominant notion expressed by staff was that this is addressed via Performance Review, Planning and Development (PRPD), but there are doubts as to the efficacy of this method (section 10.4).

In an attempt to rejuvenate and refocus research activity, the University recently convened four ‘clusters’ with a view to determining potential new research projects and possibly curricula. The strategy had just been implemented at the time of the audit, and it was too soon to assess the effect. The Panel detected a level of uncertainty among academic staff about the precise intention of the strategy, with some believing the intention was to develop multidisciplinary teaching programs and others believing that the intention was to identify new research centres. It would

appear that there is scope for better communication of the University's strategic intentions for research.

#### **Affirmation 2**

**AUQA affirms Central Queensland University's current review of its Research Strategic Plan, including the research vision, capacity and capabilities and concepts of scholarship, and the associated re-structuring that will support the teaching programs and maintain its commitment to its key communities.**

Specific aspects of research at CQU are discussed in the following sections.

### **7.2 *Research Leadership***

Leadership has been provided through a DVC (Academic & Research), although in the new structure a more research-focused position of PVC (Research & Innovation) will be established and provide the necessary renewed emphasis on research. The University is behind in its preparations for the Research Quality Framework. A dedicated executive portfolio is an appropriate strategy for helping the University to reposition itself to operate well in the new environment. As one example, under the new organisational structure proposed in the Phillips Curran review, campus heads will report to the PVC (Research & Innovation). This is designed to reflect and emphasise the potential for campus heads to facilitate linkages with local industries in pursuit of joint research initiatives.

#### **Affirmation 3**

**AUQA affirms Central Queensland University's plans to develop a dedicated approach to the executive leadership of research relating to regional community needs.**

Research leadership is not currently well designed for a multi-campus university. For example, the Research Committee at the Mackay campus was defunct at the time of the audit visit. Most research funding and all research reports are by faculty, and there is no campus-based research reporting. This means that impediments to the establishment of campus-based research cultures, such as the high dependence on casual staff at specific campuses, may be difficult to detect and monitor.

The emphasis on the faculty rather than the campus as the coordinating unit for research may be appropriate. However, each campus endeavours to engage in research specific to their local geographical community. From a critical mass perspective, the University could benefit from looking to its campus leadership (including the campus advisory committees) to provide some assistance in generating community linkages and funding opportunities.

In terms of research culture, much of the internal leadership over the past few years has come via Women in Research, an active group providing HDR symposia and other forms of support.

### **7.3 *Internal Research Funding Arrangements***

All internal research funding schemes are administered by the Director, Office of Research. The main schemes are the Research Grants Scheme, which is used mainly to fund postdoctoral fellows, the Merit Award Scheme, which is used to provide teaching relief for established researchers and the industry collaborative grants awards schemes. Faculties have some scope to augment these schemes with local initiatives. For example, the Faculty of Arts, Health and Sciences has a distinguished visitor scheme and a publications incentives scheme. Also, specific

resourcing such as conference support and travel is managed by each faculty and may vary between them.

The effectiveness of the manner in which the University allocates funding does not appear to be well reviewed. Given the poor performance in attracting external revenue, it may be appropriate to evaluate whether the internal distribution of research funding is having the greatest impact.

#### **7.4 Research Centres**

CQU has formal processes for establishing and disestablishing research centres. At present, it has four research centres (and is involved in a number of external centres), three of which (Environmental Management, Social Science Research and Primary Industries) are associated with the Faculty of Arts, Health and Sciences, and one of which (Railway Engineering) is associated with the Faculty of Engineering and Physical Systems. There are no formal research units associated with the Faculties of Business and Law and Informatics and Communication (the University's two largest faculties in terms of student enrolments) or Education and Creative Arts.

The Centre for Environmental Management was reviewed in 2001 and filed its formal response to the review in 2003. The report was associated with a change in Centre leadership, the process for which highlighted that the University does not provide up-front financial support for the administration of research centres. Without such investment, it may be difficult for the University to make significant progress. It may wish to consider its funding strategies for establishing internal research centres.

There are good examples of regionally-relevant research and industry linkages. For example, the Centre for Family and Domestic Violence Research has a number of advisory groups throughout the state of Queensland, providing it with tangible and extensive community networks that improve its access to people, information and resources and, in turn, yield research and consultancy services directly relevant to Queensland.

The Centre for Railway Engineering is a partnership with Queensland Rail. It was last reviewed in 2003 and this proved to be a useful process. The Centre staff provided examples of constructive outcomes of this review process, such as a renewed emphasis on conference presentations which has helped raise the Centre's research outputs.

#### **Commendation 8**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University for engaging with its regional communities through dedicated research centres providing high quality research in conjunction with regional and industry partners.**

#### **7.5 Intellectual Property Ownership and Commercialisation**

AUQA tested the robustness of the University's Intellectual Property and Moral Rights Policy, which was first approved in 2001, and the preparedness of CQU for managing future commercialisation opportunities.

The University has processes in place to assess the potential commercial value of research, protect the intellectual property, pursue patents and engage venture capital partners. The Audit Panel was only able to draw upon the University's single experience with spin-off companies (HortiCal, set up in 2001 in collaboration with Colour Vision Systems) and this pre-dated some of the current processes. Nonetheless, both that experience and the design of the current processes appear sound. Staff are supportive of this policy. Some of the processes, such as the registering of all potentially commercialisable IP with the Research Services Office, are yet to be implemented.

In describing itself as a “foundation member”, the University perhaps overstated its involvement with the Australian Institute of Commercialisation (Portfolio, p46). Awareness of the University’s involvement with this institute is low.

### **7.6 *Research at C\_MS***

There is no requirement for academic staff appointed under the C\_MS Enterprise Bargaining Agreement to engage in research activities other than supervision of honours projects of postgraduate research projects. Level E staff may be required to “develop research policy” as part of their duties, although this is somewhat curious given the lack of research activity by the staff, and the application of CQU research training policies to students. However, research-active C\_MS staff could contribute to resolution of the issues outlined earlier in this report regarding curriculum development (section 5.4.1) and the teaching research nexus (section 5.5). Further development of research teams including C\_MS and CQU staff could improve both research opportunities and communication between the two entities, consistent with CQU’s vision to emerge as a “unified university”.

### **7.7 *Ethics Approvals***

The University is engaged in research which spans, or has the potential to span, a number of ethical and regulatory requirements. These include human ethics, animal ethics, genetic manipulation and biosafety, and research in the Great Barrier Reef. The Audit Panel selected the human research ethics approval processes for consideration.

The University considers a small number of human research ethics approval applications each year, and research funding cannot be obtained without the appropriate approval.

A comprehensive suite of policies and procedures for human research ethics approvals was approved by the Academic Board in March 2005, designed in accordance with the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council. These are an important precursor for a university intent on strengthening its research culture. While the new policies appear appropriate and enjoy the support of a number of staff and HDR students, they are not yet as well deployed as they could be. There is some evidence to suggest that process times are too slow, and the number of rejected applications may indicate that research students are receiving inadequate advice and support from their supervisors.

In response, the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) has been providing faculty briefings and personal consultations. There is also a dedicated web site where applicants may obtain all relevant policies, procedures and forms, and consult a number of FAQs. There is room for these activities to be further strengthened through such means as HDR induction sessions and a resource-based web site (containing, for example, model applications and more FAQs based on case experiences of the HREC as it develops over time). Benchmarking with the human research ethics approval processes at universities with more established research traditions may be useful.

### **7.8 *Higher Degree Research***

The University’s Higher Degree by Research (HDR) load is decreasing. The University advised that when it first gained university status there was a flood of HDR enrolments, particularly in relation to the further professional development of academic staff. A number of these did not progress to completion, and the new, more stringent requirements of the Research Training Scheme are such that these ‘soft’ enrolments have now disappeared, leaving a more realistic and sustainable pattern of HDR enrolments. This seems a reasonable explanation for the reduction in numbers, and means that the University may now have a more realistic performance baseline

against which to base future targets and measurements. However, the downward trend cannot yet be conclusively assessed as halted.

The University's capacity to maintain and increase its HDR activity is in tension with its research standards. CQU has maintained the standard of requiring supervisors to have an equivalent or higher degree to that being supervised. Given its staffing profile (section 10.1), this limits the number of PhD students it can take. All students have, at least, a principal supervisor and an associate supervisor, although to manage this extensive use is made of ISL. Principal supervisors may not take on HDR students unless their employment contracts are long enough to see the student through to completion (assuming a normal progression rate). Supervisor training has recently become mandatory.

HDR student performance is monitored through six-monthly reports to the Office of Research, signed by their supervisor and the faculty's associate dean (research). The University is revising this with a view to establishing a confidential process whereby students may express concerns about supervisors.

The University believes that, based on the narrative PREQ results (response rates are too low for the quantitative results to be conclusive) and other student surveys, the research environment is satisfactory for students. The Audit Panel met HDR students who were satisfied, and some who were delighted, with their resources and supervision, but some were critical of the low level of general research activities. For example, in a number of schools there were no seminar programs or visiting scholars.

The Postgraduate Research Advisory Panel was reviewing all HDR policies at the time of the audit. AUQA believes that the current policies are sound. Given the tension between maintaining these policies and relaxing them to admit more HDR students, the committee should maintain these good standards. Furthermore, emphasis could be placed on addressing school-based and faculty-based research cultures, perhaps developing guidelines for best practice that would include, for example, regular HDR and staff research seminars, guest lectures, visiting scholars and opportunities for inter-disciplinary interaction.

## 8 COMMUNITY AND EXTERNAL RELATIONS

### 8.1 *Planning for Community and External Relations*

CQU is committed to the communities it serves. These communities are varied and dispersed which dilutes the attention that can be put into any one of them. There is a sense in the communities of Central Queensland that the University's emphasis in their regions has waned as the AICs become more successful. This is a useful prompt for the University to formalise its approach to community and external relations.

The Council has recently established a University External Relations Committee to further develop this area. One of its first tasks will be to conduct a formal needs analysis survey with community leaders. There is no community relations plan (or similarly titled document), and the needs analysis may feed into the development of such a plan.

### 8.2 *Community and External Relations in Practice*

While a systematic approach to community engagement is lacking, there are some excellent examples of innovative arrangements with external communities which are yielding positive results for both the University and the communities concerned. One example is COIN, a community informatics group set up with the Rockhampton City Council, an excellent relationship with the ABC and the well known 10,000 Steps program, initiated by CQU, which tackles obesity.

Notable is the CQU Connections program, which through such means as personal advice, financial assistance and residential programs to introduce people to the University, fosters greater access, participation and success in higher education for students from regional, rural, isolated and disadvantaged backgrounds, and mature age groups. CQU Connections has been running since 1997. Students involved with CQU Connections currently have a retention rate of 75%. CQU Connections is reviewed regularly. The last report, released November 2002, shows a method that included surveys and interviews with key stakeholder groups, trend data and benchmark information. It concluded that CQU Connections is a successful and valuable program, and this was reinforced by AUQA's own findings.

#### **Commendation 9**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University's CQU Connections program which fosters access and success for students from rural and remote areas and disadvantaged backgrounds.**

External stakeholders believe that the 'town-gown' relationship is very good. Some community members praised the University for its responsiveness, good communication, good graduates (especially teachers) and could identify very little they wished to improve. The Vice-Chancellor sits on the Central Queensland regional development committee, demonstrating top-level commitment to the region.

The University recognises that, although it has considerable community engagement, there is scope for a more coordinated approach which would take maximum advantage of the University's resources. An improved approach would include, at least, a dedicated senior executive and a comprehensive community engagement plan.

**Recommendation 14**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop a coordinated approach to the planning, implementation and review of its community engagement activities and intentions.**

## 9 INTERNATIONAL OPERATIONS

CQU has a number of approaches to education internationalisation. They include offshore partnerships, the Fiji International Campus, the Australian International Campuses and internationalising their curricula more generally in order to make it globally applicable.

CQU commissioned Professor Leo West to conduct an independent review which resulted in a number of recommendations for the improvement of international operations and structures. This is an insightful report which could result in stronger reporting structures and relationship management with commercial partners. The University has been slow in responding to the issues raised and the recommendations made in the report. AUQA encourages the University to attend to it as the recommendations still have currency.

### 9.1 *Marketing and Recruitment*

#### 9.1.1 Quality Assurance Arrangements

CQU is recognised nationally (and is an IDP award winner) as a leader in its international marketing and recruitment activities. In terms of student numbers it has certainly been very successful, particularly in association with C\_MS.

The Audit Panel considered the quality assurance arrangements in terms of marketing and recruitment, and in terms of the maintenance of academic standards throughout these processes. It met a wide range of staff responsible for planning and implementing marketing and recruitment practices for CQU, C\_MS and offshore partners.

The recruiting practices have been successful, due to an alignment of strategic intent and practice. There is a major document which is followed by CQU through CQUI and C\_MS in planning and implementing practices. There may be some scope for enhancing the communication and coordination between these parties, both to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the processes, and to send clear messages to prospective students.

The University, through the Division of University Relations, participated in an Australian trial of the MaXemize benchmarking project. This assesses the marketing performance of the University against 22 UK universities, and raised a number of serious issues for the University to attend to. The Audit Panel was surprised to be advised that this project did not include the international recruitment activities in its scope, because the design did appear to be all inclusive. At least, this suggests a lack of communication between those responsible for domestic marketing and those responsible for international marketing, and this compromised an otherwise promising attempt at international process benchmarking.

#### 9.1.2 Five Star Ratings

The University makes considerable use of the phrase '5 Star Education' in its international marketing materials. This refers to the awarding of five star ratings in the *Good Universities Guide* (2005 Edition). These high ratings were for the categories of: non-government earnings; Indigenous participation; proportion given credit for TAFE studies; proportion of students 25 years and over; number of students from abroad; proportion external students; cultural diversity; and positive graduate outcomes (referring to progression by graduates to employment or further study).

The extent to which many of these categories may be considered positive assessments of the quality of *education* at CQU is debatable (with the exception of 'positive graduate outcomes'). In

AUQA's view, CQU must take care to ensure that its use of the phrase '5 Star Education' alone or taking prominence as part of its recruitment strategy could not be interpreted as misleading to prospective students. CQU ensures that the precise categories in which it obtained five star ratings are listed on any such promotional material. AUQA deems this clarity to be a good practice that other universities could usefully emulate.

## 9.2 *Students' Cultural Experience*

The University claims that its students (and staff) benefit from the cultural diversity of the student body. In fact, domestic students mostly attend the University's regional campuses, whereas international students mostly attend the metropolitan campuses. Clearly, therefore, there is less scope for interaction than could be the case.

AUQA discussed this with students at a number of locations. Domestic students in Central Queensland were largely unconcerned about the lack of interaction. However, this may be indicative of precisely the area in which the University could exercise values-based leadership.

The international students expressed a higher level of disappointment over the lack of interaction. This is perhaps to be expected from people who have already made a deliberate decision to change country for the purpose of study. However, they benefited from mixing at their campuses with students from many other cultures and, by virtue of living in Australia, citizens of Australia. They also expressed appreciation of being in a class of largely foreign students.

The University ought to either explore means by which the cultural interaction between domestic and international students could be enhanced, or reduce the claims of such a benefit in its public discourse.

## 9.3 *Offshore Partnerships*

### 9.3.1 Partnership Planning

CQU has been involved in offshore partnerships for a number of years, starting in Singapore in 1994. A delegation of the AUQA Audit Panel visited the three major partners.

The International Strategy Group is responsible for conducting risk assessments in relation to prospective new partners. It has determined to engage with a small number of high quality partners, rather than a large number of variable partners.

In Singapore, the University has a long standing partnership with the Hartford Institute, a subsidiary of Raffles Education Corporation (a listed group comprising art, design and business education colleges in twelve Asian locations).

In Shanghai, the University is partnered with LaSalle-DHU International Design College, which is also a subsidiary of Raffles Education Corporation. This partner is owned by the Raffles College Group of Singapore. It is a start-up venture for CQU, providing AUQA with an opportunity to investigate how the University establishes and operates offshore activities using its most current policies and processes.

In Hong Kong the University has a partnership with the Hong Kong College of Technology. This partnership has been in place for a number of years, although it is currently being wound up due to diverging future directions of the partners. This provided AUQA with an opportunity to investigate the processes by which CQU exits such arrangements. It found that the arrangements for attending to the students were sound, and that goodwill is being maintained with the partner.

These partnerships operate very smoothly. Central Queensland University International (CQUI) is the division responsible for ensuring the quality of international activities is maintained through the application of appropriate regulatory processes. As part of this responsibility, CQUI has developed an audit model based on the requirements of the ESOS Act, which it applies not only to international activities within Australia, but also offshore. The scope of the ESOS Act applies to international students studying in Australia. However, CQU has developed an audit model that is equally applicable to its international student activities at its offshore partnerships. This is a good practice which helps ensure the equivalence of service standards offshore and onshore.

CQU is one of the more successful Australian universities operating internationally. Its strategy of focusing on a few key partnerships – a strategy that has evolved over time through experience – is proving effective. These are supported with robust quality assurance systems and partnership management. There are issues to be addressed, but the University demonstrates notable successes in this area.

### **Commendation 10**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University for its offshore international operations strategy of focusing on a few key partnerships, with robust quality assurance systems based on its ESOS manual, and strong partnership management.**

#### 9.3.2 Laboratory Courses

On the initiative of CQUI, the University now offers a Bachelor of Biomedical Science degree through its partner in Singapore. The program is a top-up degree specifically for students who have completed an appropriate three year diploma program (preferably involving laboratory work).

The Bachelor of Biomedical Science includes some courses which require laboratory experiments. The student cohort in Singapore is unable to do this part of the coursework owing to lack of laboratory resources provided by CQU or its partner. Rather, the experiments are conducted by the students in Rockhampton, and the results are shared with the students in Singapore for analysis.

In recognition of this issue, the University has entered into an arrangement with Singapore Polytechnic to provide the Biomedical Science students with a laboratory course designed to augment their degree program.

It is the position of the University that students enter the program with sufficient laboratory manipulation skills, particularly once augmented by the Singapore Polytechnic block course. However, the Audit Panel heard concerns about this issue from a range of involved stakeholders (including academic staff). AUQA recognises that reaching a definitive position on the extent to which these arrangements are satisfactory is a matter for a specialist audit of the curriculum. CQU advises that a professor from another Australian university will perform such a review in due course. However, as one of the first Australian universities to provide laboratory-based courses offshore, it would have been prudent for CQU to ensure that this issue was transparently satisfactory prior to the commencement of the program.

#### 9.4 *Australian International Campuses*

As mentioned (section 3.1), C\_MS operates four AICs; Brisbane, Gold Coast, Sydney and Melbourne. Delegations of the Audit Panel visited the largest two of these: Sydney and Melbourne.

The campuses themselves are located in downtown high rise buildings. The facilities, such as computer laboratories and teaching spaces, are of good standard (for comment on the libraries see section 11.2). Indeed, the ratio of computers to students at the AICs is significantly better than at the regional campuses. The downtown locations means that students have ample access to the resources each city has to offer, although students nonetheless observed that an improved emphasis on 'student life' would be welcomed.

A large proportion of academic staff at the AICs are under contract. Some work (often under contract) at other universities as well, or in professional employment. This high dependency on contract and casual staff has an effect on the student learning environment, in terms of continuity over time and across the University, that is largely disregarded by C\_MS and CQU.

It is not the calibre of these staff that is in question but rather the extent of their involvement in the total teaching process. Teaching in the classroom and marking assignments is part of a broader commitment to the student which ought to include research-informed curriculum development and review, availability for consultation, active reflection on the overall teaching process and constant engagement with the subject matter. To that extent, the AIC model requires further refinement, and as they grow to become the majority of CQU activities this will doubtless come into sharper relief (and this has been discussed elsewhere – see sections 5.4, 5.5, 5.8 and 7.6).

### **9.5 *Fiji International Campus***

FIC is based in Suva, Fiji, and although run through a separate company arrangement is essentially operated like the AICs. One significant difference is that in Fiji the campus nature of FIC generates expectations among the local community about the capability and capacity of that campus to respond to local needs. This imposes extra pressures on CQU.

There is no curriculum development or research capacity at FIC, and there is only one full time academic staff member, with the rest being contracted casual staff. This means that the opportunities for the community to connect with FIC are few and far between. Although a similar point could be made in respect of the AICs, they are each located in a city where there are other well-established universities which can be drawn on by the community for curriculum development or research capabilities.

The history of FIC has been entangled with difficult local politics and until a short time before the Audit Visit its future was extremely uncertain. The University managed to negotiate new premises and, for now, a viable niche role in Fiji's higher education context. This demonstrates a commitment to Suva that should now be backed up with the capabilities and capacity expected of a university campus in a small country.

## 10 STAFFING

### 10.1 *Staffing Profile*

The University participated in the Universities' HR Benchmarking Program 2005 conducted by the Queensland University of Technology. This highlighted that CQU has a comparatively junior staffing profile. It has amongst the lowest rate of academic staff with doctoral qualifications across almost all levels, with Levels A and B being at about half the national averages.

Benchmarked statistics for 2004 show that voluntary employee-initiated turnover is considerably higher for every academic and general level compared with other Australian universities. In 2004 the total staffing turnover was 22%. The University has difficulties recruiting staff. Applicant interest levels are among the lowest in the country. This may be a consequence of location as well as reputation. Unscheduled absences, typically a measure of low productivity and morale and high stress, are also higher. This can, in part, be explained by the high state of uncertainty within the University.

The number of staff on fixed term contracts is increasing. Staff may be recruited for terms of less than 12 months on the decision of individual faculties. While this is normal practice throughout Australian universities, it may need particular attention here for CQU to successfully introduce its new strategic approach.

### 10.2 *Human Resource Management*

The human resource management (HRM) capability and capacity of the University are weak. Staff and management's perception of the value provided by HRM is low. The University recognises this and is in the process of shifting from an operational personnel focus to a more strategic human resource focus. This is requiring a significant restructuring of the current HR planning and management. Indeed, thus far there has been no university-wide Human Resources Plan. At present, the HR data management system is inadequate for the intended new strategic purposes. For example, it is incapable of providing appropriate data for workforce planning and analysis.

The Division of Staff and Student Services (DSSS) claims in the Portfolio that it has adopted the Australian Business Excellence Framework as its preferred quality framework. Thus far, it has completed development of a quality manual but has yet to undertake an assessment, with its current effort being taken up by the enterprise bargaining and restructuring.

#### **Recommendation 15**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University establish a strategic human resource capability and capacity designed to support its new Strategic Plan.**

### 10.3 *Induction*

For a university with a high turnover rate, induction is crucial. Responsibility for induction programs is dispersed (across such entities as DSSS, DTLs and the Health and Safety Unit) and additional resources on the CQU Introduction web site. At the time of the audit, this web site was in pilot mode and included information which was out of date. The establishment of a coordinated and effective induction process is an important issue which the University will need to attend to urgently. Again, given the high turnover and junior staff profile, induction may also need to be followed-up with a mentoring system, which at present is not systematic at CQU.

#### **10.4 Performance Planning, Review and Development**

CQU operates a system known as Performance Review, Planning and Development (PRPD). This provides the opportunity for staff and their supervisors to review past performance and to set objectives for the forthcoming year. The University places considerable reliance on the PRPD as a means for addressing a wide range of issues, such as workload management, professional development needs analysis and performance assessment (including of the teaching-research nexus: see section 5.5). This method is used for staff at all levels, including heads of school and deans.

Staff are reasonably supportive of PRPD. However, an audit of uptake suggests that participation is highly variable. Human Resources are aware of the low effectiveness of PRPD and recognise that it would benefit from being championed at the executive level. This is another issue in abeyance pending resolution of the new executive group and University structure.

The University has drafted a Staff Development Policy and Plan. While this is needed, it may be premature in the absence of a comprehensive HRM Plan and ahead of the new Strategic Plan.

(For comment on professional development relating to academic responsibilities see section 5.8.3 and 5.8.4.)

## 11 SERVICES AND OTHER ISSUES

CQU incorporated consideration of these issues into the core chapters of the Portfolio, such as Learning and Teaching. The issues are dealt with separately in this Report for clarity of reporting.

### 11.1 *Indigenous*

Central Queensland is home to a large Indigenous population. Over three hundred Indigenous students attend CQU. In 2002 representatives from CQU and the Darumbal people signed a Reconciliation Statement, “setting a course for CQU to be a leader in the reconciliation process for the CQU communities and in the higher education sector”. It is not clear that there is evidence to support CQU’s attainment of a sectoral leadership position on this matter.

Nulloo Yumbah is perhaps the most tangible means by which the University gives effect to its Reconciliation Statement. The Nulloo Yumbah centre is described in the Portfolio as CQU’s Indigenous learning, spirituality and research centre. In fact, under the proposed new structure Nulloo Yumbah will be more aligned with teaching and learning activities.

The centre is still in the stages of consolidating a critical mass of staff focused on matters of importance for Indigenous peoples, and building up the capability and capacity to design and deliver effective teaching, support and research programs. That said there has been considerable progress made over the past four years. The centre currently exhibits energy of extraordinary teamwork and optimism about their potential contribution.

#### **Commendation 11**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University’s Nulloo Yumbah centre for establishing a concentration of expertise and energy for indigenous issues which will benefit the University and its wider stakeholders.**

Nulloo Yumbah is well supported financially. However, AUQA formed the opinion that the University has not yet fully embraced the potential contribution the centre could make to its overall ability to fulfil the promises embedded in the Reconciliation Statement. The activities of Nulloo Yumbah tend to stand alone, and beyond Nulloo Yumbah it is not clear that the University invests energy in attending to the Reconciliation Statement.

At the Mackay campus there is no specific strategy, nor campus-based discussions, about how to give effect to the University’s Reconciliation Statement. The University could expand its reconciliation efforts into its regional locations.

### 11.2 *Library*

The Division of Library Services (DLS) operates under its own Strategic Plan 2003. It operates a quality system, supported by monitoring of key performance indicators using a balanced scorecard-type approach.

Challenges for DLS include ensuring that the services provided to all students including those at regional and international campuses are of consistently high quality, and enabling equitable access to information resources for all students, so that none are disadvantaged due to the location of their chosen campus. DLS must identify resources to develop flexible learning services to support the University’s strategic direction. These must be achieved while managing the growth in student numbers on some of these campuses (notably SIC and MIC).

The DLS has developed collaborative and consultative processes with various units on campus. The University should ensure that the Division continues to be positioned to respond to strategic development, perhaps by including library representation on key planning groups, particularly those considering developments in flexible and online delivery (section 5.4.3). The DLS has a robust strategic planning process, based on University plans, SWOT analysis, environmental scanning and involving consultation with staff and stakeholders. The Plan would benefit from the addition of measurable performance indicators and targets to underpin its use of the Balanced Scorecard and to supplement completion of actions which is currently the main measure of progress.

Library services at the AICs are managed in terms of a comprehensive Service Level Agreement which includes review processes and service standards. AIC campus librarians can request resources and improvements through the AIC Library Advisory Committee. Planning meetings and the Campus Librarians Conference involving the AICs and the regional campuses are held annually. Campus librarians report good support from Rockhampton, especially in the development of information literacy programs.

Focus groups at the AICs indicate that space and collection size are major issues. These have been reported to the University, but there appears to be no effective mechanism for addressing these concerns. Cuts to the DLS budget in recent years have inhibited progress in several areas, notably in the development of flexible study spaces, for example the proposed Information Commons, although the Panel heard that the project would be implemented at the Mackay campus.

DLS has responded to collection limitations through innovative practices such as the Floating Collection Policy which enables the best possible use of information resources amongst the various regional campuses.

The recent development of a Marketing Plan is one response to client feedback which has mandated improved targeting of client segments and increased promotion of services and resources. At the time of the audit this Plan was too new for its effectiveness to be determined.

The Audit Panel heard concerns about the timeliness of academic processes for library stock ordering. This is particularly important for a multi-campus library, where stock distribution may take a little longer, and it is difficult to provide access to backup and other contingency provisions.

The Library was widely supported by staff and students, although the relatively small hard copy collection was commented on a number of times. This is reinforced by the CAUL statistics, which indicate that CQU library is comparatively poorly resourced, and the Rodski Library Client Survey, which suggest that staff and students nonetheless are supportive and positive about the services they receive. The DLS supplements feedback from the Rodski survey with its analysis of Comments/Compliments/Complaints (CCC) forms (section 4.3.3) and the use of focus groups to provide detailed feedback. Key themes emerging from the Division's CCC forms also pertain to inadequate hard copy collections and computers.

CQU Division of Library Services was ranked in the top five libraries across all five major survey categories in the 2003 Rodski survey. Although there has been a slight decrease in the category scores in the most recent survey, perhaps as a consequence of current funding constraints, CQU is still within the top quartile of all university libraries contributing to the benchmarking database and is almost certainly still in the top five in most categories.

## **Commendation 12**

**AUQA commends Central Queensland University for the outcomes it achieved on a national benchmarking activity relating to Library Services.**

### **11.3 Copyright**

As a University with widely dispersed activities in a variety of modes, copyright is a crucial policy and compliance issue. AUQA considered the CQU's systems for ensuring that it remained fully compliant with its copyright obligations.

There are two key aspects to this issue. Firstly, the University has a Copyright Officer, who is responsible for ensuring that this multimodal, multi-campus University is appropriately aware of and complying with its legal obligations in respect of copyright. To that end, the University uses AVCC licensing agreements broadly and focuses on awareness-raising as well as compliance. Voluntary professional training sessions are provided, with modest attendance rates, and the Copyright Officer attends school meetings to promote awareness and compliance processes.

Secondly, the Library is responsible for a centralised registration system for online communications. All online access to resources must go via the Library in order to ensure compliance with copyright.

The evidence suggests that the University is acting appropriately in disseminating information and ensuring compliance with copyright legislation.

### **11.4 CQU Brand**

The University is in the process of re-establishing its corporate brand. Central to this will be a shift from a university relations model to a market-driven model. Some would contend that the University is already very much dominated by a market-driven model. A number of internal and external stakeholders expressed the view that the University has lost its regional focus (section 8), though conversely some stakeholders describe CQU as the 'hope of the region'. This is an issue for the University to attend to during its rebranding exercise.

AUQA notes that although the University is officially titled Central Queensland University, ostensibly to reflect its commitment to the region, there is nothing in the CQU Act that requires the University to give any prominence to the Central Queensland area. Indeed, the Act specifically permits the University to use its powers inside and outside Queensland and Australia. That said, the Council is aware that it has a moral obligation, expressed in its mission, to serve the Central Queensland area through growth in provision of education to domestic students.

#### **Affirmation 4**

**AUQA affirms the need identified by Central Queensland University to improve its branding and domestic marketing capabilities.**

### **11.5 IT Services**

#### **11.5.1 Support Levels**

CQU provides out-of-hours IT support for the AICs. Otherwise, provision of out-of-hours IT support is restricted by industrial relations provisions. This is not appropriate for a university operating in many different time zones and with a high reliance upon Internet-based technologies, especially as CQU aspires to being recognised for its flexible learning.

## Recommendation 16

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University recognise the strategic importance of aligning and resourcing its information and communication technology capacity to the needs of a flexible mode, multi-campus University in which students are studying at all times.**

The Audit Panel was informed that the network connections drop out too often for the purposes of smooth business continuity. CQU advises that this may be an issue to do with the supplier. In any event, given the University's heavy dependence on connectivity for distance students, ISL and general communication between its 14 teaching locations, this service needs improving.

The University reported that implementation of its major systems, such as student administration, was a major challenge. The implementation of new systems and major upgrades have not always gone smoothly, and that the University needed to attend to its project governance and project management methodology. However, these are slowly becoming resolved. Notably, CQU has submitted its first HEIMS reports on time and without problems.

### 11.5.2 IT Internal Audit

The University has a dedicated internal auditor for IT. This function has assisted with the identification of key areas for attention, and with sources of possible best practice. In relation to IT, CQU acknowledges that support is not available outside of office hours, and that the ISP does not provide adequate redundancy provisions to ensure that connectivity is maintained at acceptable levels. It may be that a broader perspective on IT risk management is required.

## 11.6 University Web site

As a multi-campus and flexible mode institution the web site is of vital importance. Many of the University's policies and procedures are communicated via the web, and it is also one of the main tools by which the University connects generally with its various stakeholders.

AUQA explored the University's web site at length. The corporate pages are controlled by the University's Web Master, with local sites being the responsibility of the manager for that area (eg head of school). The total site comprises over 110,000 web pages grouped in a large number of subsites which are not well connected through search and navigational tools, making use of the site (such as the Research subsite at <http://www.research.cqu.edu.au/index.htm>) very difficult.

The University has Web Technical Standards which were approved through the IT Standards Committee. They were last reviewed three years ago (2 October 2002). In a fast-changing technical environment, this is a long time for such an important document to remain static. In any event, it is clear that the University has had limited success in ensuring the standards are consistently applied.

Also, the University's brand (section 11.4) is not consistently represented through the various subsites. The University has yet to reach agreement on a common 'look and feel' for the web. This, too, adds to the difficulties in web site usage. It is proposed that all content will be managed through a common content management system, thereby enabling consistency, quality assurance and easier usage.

AUQA was advised that general management of and major improvements to the corporate and faculty and divisional web sites are in a holding pattern pending resolution of the new University structure. This is understandable, given that the web site reflect, in large part, the structural arrangements of the University.

AUQA concluded that the web is underestimated within the University in terms of its potential to contribute significantly to the marketing and community engagement activities of the University as well as general external perception of the University. Broken links, highly variable appearance, inconsistent content structure, outdated content and inadequate searching trails are all evident, making the web site a frustrating tool for those seeking information about the University. The University will benefit from a comprehensive approach to managing its web presence and functionality. This will require senior executive sponsorship.

#### **Recommendation 17**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University review its web site with a view to aligning its usage with the strategic directions of the University, to improving usability and consistency through common publishing standards based on benchmarked good practices, and to improving the external perception of the University.**

### **11.7 Campus Management**

#### **11.7.1 Regional Campus Services**

Services are primarily planned and directed from Rockhampton. The extent to which services operate well across campuses is highly variable. Campuses do not have campus-wide student service plans, even though attending to student life has many campus-specific issues. Also, there is no systematic means for determining student opinions about campus life. For example, there is no student survey or staff/student consultative body at Mackay, and the student association does not appear to have made significant impact in this area. Many of these services have no formal means for determining or reviewing effectiveness or success.

#### **Recommendation 18**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University develop campus-specific plans for coordinating, reviewing and reporting on student services and support.**

A notable exception to this is the STEPS program and other services run by MLC and CLC. Staff from these services across all campuses gather annually for a three day retreat to review and plan service design and delivery methods. These services are reported on in section 6.

#### **11.7.2 Services to C\_MS**

AUQA considered the nature of the interaction of services between CQU and C\_MS. The absence of schedules to the governing agreements means that in some cases these are not transparent or are negotiated independently of the 'big picture'. AUQA particularly considered IT connectivity, student records, student learning support (section 6.2) and the library (section 11.2). It found that corporate divisions of responsibility sometimes meant that CQU was unable to either know of, or influence, service standards within the AICs (and, perhaps, vice-versa).

A common, centralised, process for negotiating and reviewing service level agreements between CQU and C\_MS would help ensure that the knowledge and expertise and resources of both parties are combined in the best interests of the students.

#### **Recommendation 19**

**AUQA recommends that Central Queensland University improve systems for determining and ensuring operational-level service standards at the AICs.**



## APPENDIX A. CENTRAL QUEENSLAND UNIVERSITY

### History

(This text has been taken from Appendix A of the University's Performance Portfolio.)

The Central Queensland Advancement League had, from the early 1940s, been pressing the State Government for a College of the University of Queensland in Rockhampton. The University of Queensland had other priorities at the time. In 1958 the Central Queensland University Development Association was set up to push for Rockhampton's own tertiary education presence. The establishment in 1961 of a University College in Townsville by the University of Queensland was a spur to their activities. The Development Association's representations to the Martin Committee in 1964 were successful to the extent that the Committee recommended that one of the new Colleges of Advanced Education be sited in Rockhampton. Thus in 1967, the Queensland Institute of Technology (Capricornia) was established in Rockhampton.

The major issues and challenges faced by senior managers were the initial establishment, the purpose and location of the QIT (Capricornia) and how this institute would be governed, managed and staffed, also, the disciplines, teaching and learning modes, and services and facilities required in support of the institute. Local archives suggest that the level of community engagement and support strengthened the success of the Institute.

In 1971 the Institution was redesignated as the Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education with its own Council. In order to boost student numbers, and given the distributed population it was trying to serve, the Institution moved into distance education in 1974 and soon had more distance students than internal students.

Between 1978 and 1989 the campuses at Gladstone, Mackay, Bundaberg and Emerald were added. The Conservatorium of Music at Mackay was added in 1996.

University status was achieved in January 1992 as the University of Central Queensland, with the subsequent change of name to Central Queensland University in order to stress our unique partnership with our region.

Central Queensland University was officially proclaimed during a session of the Queensland Parliament and the new name and corporate identity were officially launched on 20 May, 1994.

1967 – First intake of students to the Queensland Institute of Technology (Capricornia) at Rockhampton

1969 – Capricornia College founded as the residential college of Queensland Institute of Technology (Capricornia) at Rockhampton

1971 – Capricornia Institute of Advanced Education established

1974 – First distance education course offered

1987 – First use of TVI (Tutored Video Instructions) allowing lectures to be taped at one campus and viewed at another

1990 – Redesignated as the University College of Central Queensland

1992 – Full university status attained

1994 – Adopted name (Central Queensland University) and corporate identity

1994 – First 'international' on-shore teaching site for international students (Sydney)

1997 – Opening of Melbourne International Campus

1998 – Opening of Brisbane and Fiji International Campuses  
 1998 – Proclamation of new Central Queensland University Act  
 2001 – Opening of Gold Coast International Campus

**Statistics**

The Audit occurred during a time of major change and so many of the statistics here will change considerably in a short period.

Faculties:     Arts, Health and Sciences  
                   Business and Law  
                   Education and Creative Arts  
                   Informatics and Communication  
                   Engineering and Physical Systems

Campuses	Wholly operated by CQU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rockhampton</li> <li>• Mackay</li> <li>• Gladstone</li> <li>• Bundaberg</li> </ul>
	Operated in association with other HE institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emerald</li> <li>• Noosa Hub</li> </ul>
	Operated in association with C_MS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sydney</li> <li>• Melbourne</li> <li>• Brisbane</li> <li>• Gold Coast</li> <li>• Fiji (with Campus Group Fiji)</li> </ul>
	Multifunction delivery sites	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hong Kong (with Hong Kong College of Technology)</li> <li>• Singapore (with Hartford Institute, a subsidiary of Raffles Education Corporation)</li> <li>• Shanghai (with LaSalle-DHU International Design College, also a subsidiary of Raffles Education Corporation)</li> </ul>

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

### Mission

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

### Objectives

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

### Values

AUQA will be:

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

## Vision

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

## **APPENDIX C. THE AUQA AUDIT PANEL**

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### ***For part of the audit:***

Dr David Woodhouse, Executive Director, AUQA, Melbourne, Victoria

### ***Observer:***

Dr Antony Stella, Audit Director, AUQA, Melbourne, Victoria

## APPENDIX D. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The following abbreviations, acronyms and terms are used in this Report. As necessary, they are explained in context. In some cases, URLs are provided to facilitate further enquiries about these acronyms and terms.

ABC.....	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
Act, the .....	<i>Central Queensland University Act 1998</i>
ADTL .....	Associate Deans (Teaching & Learning)
AIC .....	Australian International Campus
AQF .....	Australian Qualifications Framework
AUQA .....	Australian Universities Quality Agency ( <a href="http://www.auqa.edu.au">http://www.auqa.edu.au</a> )
AVCC.....	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
CAC.....	Campus Advisory Committee
CAUL .....	Council of Australian University Librarians
C_MS.....	C_Management Services Pty Ltd
CC.....	Course coordinators
CCC.....	Comments/Compliments/Complaints
CGH.....	Campus Group Holdings Pty Ltd
CLC .....	Communications Learning Centre
COIN .....	Community Informatics Academy
CQU.....	Central Queensland University
CQUI .....	Central Queensland University International
DEST .....	(Australian) Department of Education, Science and Training ( <a href="http://www.dest.gov.au">http://www.dest.gov.au</a> )
DIMIA .....	Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs
DLS .....	Division of Library Services
DSSS .....	Division of Staff and Student Services
DTLS .....	Division of Teaching and Learning Services
DVC.....	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
ECAB .....	Education Committee of Academic Board
ESOS Act .....	<i>Educational Services for Overseas Students Act 2000</i>
FAQs .....	Frequently Asked Questions
FIC.....	Fiji International Campus
FTE.....	Full-time equivalence
HDR.....	Higher Degree by Research
HECS .....	Higher Education Contributions Scheme
HEIMS.....	Higher Education Information Management System
HR .....	Human resources
HREC .....	Human Research Ethics Committee
HRM.....	Human resource management
ICT.....	Information communication technologies
IP .....	Intellectual property

ISL.....	Interactive System-wide Learning (interactive video conferencing)
ISP.....	Internet Service Provider
Kallawar.....	Kallawar Holdings Pty Ltd
KPIs.....	Key performance indicators
LEID.....	Learning, Evaluation, Innovation and Development
MCEETYA.....	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs ( <a href="http://www.mceetya.edu.au/">http://www.mceetya.edu.au/</a> )
MIC.....	Melbourne International Campus
MLC.....	Mathematics Learning Centre
National Protocols.....	MCEETYA <i>National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes</i> ( <a href="http://www.mceetya.edu.au/">http://www.mceetya.edu.au/</a> )
Performance Portfolio,	
Portfolio.....	Central Queensland University Performance Portfolio 2005
PRPD.....	Performance Review, Planning and Development
PVC.....	Pro Vice-Chancellor
QMF.....	Quality Management Framework
SIC.....	Sydney International Campus
STEPS.....	Skills for Tertiary Education Preparatory Studies
SWOT.....	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
TAFE.....	Technical and Further Education

