

# AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of  
Edith Cowan University

October 2004

AUQA Audit Report Number 26

ISBN 1 877090 29 8

© 2004 Australian Universities Quality Agency

Level 10, 123 Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne, VIC 3000  
Ph 03 9664 1000  
Fax 03 9639 7177

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

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

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

## CONTENTS

<b>Overview of the Audit</b> .....	<b>1</b>
Background.....	1
The Audit Process.....	1
<b>Conclusions</b> .....	<b>3</b>
Key Findings.....	3
Commendations.....	4
Affirmations.....	6
Recommendations.....	6
<b>1 ECU Context</b> .....	<b>8</b>
1.1 Mission and Defining Themes.....	8
1.2 Governance.....	8
1.3 Executive Management.....	9
1.4 Planning.....	9
1.4.1 Performance Indicators.....	10
1.4.2 Benchmarking.....	10
1.5 Budgeting and Financial Management.....	10
1.6 Quality.....	12
1.6.1 Quality Model.....	12
1.6.2 Guided Self-Assessment.....	12
1.6.3 Area of Scholarship Reviews.....	12
1.6.4 Quality Networks.....	13
1.7 Policy Management.....	13
1.8 Risk Management.....	13
1.9 Organisational Structure.....	14
1.9.1 Campuses.....	14
<b>2 Teaching &amp; Learning</b> .....	<b>16</b>
2.1 Planning for Teaching and Learning.....	16
2.2 Courses and Units.....	16
2.2.1 Course and Unit Approvals.....	16
2.2.2 Course and Unit Information.....	17
2.2.3 Consultative Committees.....	17
2.2.4 Course and Unit Reviews.....	18
2.3 Teaching.....	18
2.3.1 Teaching by Casual Staff.....	19
2.3.2 Teaching Evaluation.....	20
2.3.3 Teaching Development.....	20
2.4 Graduate Attributes.....	21
2.4.1 Work-Based Learning.....	22
2.5 External Studies Teaching Modes.....	22
2.5.1 Online Learning.....	22
2.5.2 Distance Education.....	23
<b>3 International</b> .....	<b>24</b>
3.1 Planning for Internationalisation.....	24
3.2 Support for International Students Onshore.....	25
3.3 Offshore Learning and Teaching Activities.....	25
3.3.1 Approval and Reviews of Offshore Courses.....	25

3.3.2	Admission and Advanced Standing.....	26
3.3.3	Marketing Offshore Courses.....	27
3.3.4	Equivalence.....	27
3.3.5	Plagiarism.....	28
3.3.6	Assessment, Moderation and Invigilation in Offshore Programs.....	28
3.3.7	Administrative Arrangements.....	28
3.4	Recruitment Agents.....	29
3.5	Bi-Lingual Programs.....	29
3.6	Validation.....	29
<b>4</b>	<b>Research, Creativity &amp; Research Training.....</b>	<b>32</b>
4.1	Coordinating and Planning for Research.....	32
4.2	Staff Research.....	32
4.2.1	Research Concentrations.....	32
4.2.2	Research Funding.....	33
4.2.3	Research Centres.....	33
4.2.4	Research Outputs and Reporting.....	33
4.3	Research Training.....	34
4.3.1	HDR Student Numbers.....	34
4.3.2	Research Training Management.....	35
4.3.3	Research Student Feedback.....	35
4.3.4	Supervision.....	35
4.3.5	Support for HDR Students.....	35
4.3.6	HDR Student Progress and Assessment.....	36
4.4	Research-Teaching Nexus.....	36
<b>5</b>	<b>Engaging The Community.....</b>	<b>38</b>
5.1	Planning for Engaging the Community.....	38
5.2	Precincts.....	39
5.3	Indigenous Communities.....	39
<b>6</b>	<b>Engaging The Professions.....</b>	<b>41</b>
6.1	Planning, Leadership and Coordination.....	41
6.2	Examples of Engaging the Professions.....	42
<b>7</b>	<b>Students.....</b>	<b>43</b>
7.1	Student Charter.....	43
7.2	Student Feedback.....	43
7.3	Student Representation.....	44
<b>8</b>	<b>Staffing.....</b>	<b>45</b>
8.1	Planning for Staffing.....	45
8.2	Staffing Profile.....	45
8.3	Promotions.....	46
8.4	Staff Feedback.....	47
8.5	Workload and Managing for Performance.....	47
8.6	Staff Exit.....	48
<b>9</b>	<b>Other Services.....</b>	<b>49</b>
9.1	Service Level Agreements.....	49
9.2	Knowledge and Information Technology Services Centre.....	49
9.2.1	Library.....	49
9.2.2	ECU and the Internet.....	50

9.3	Marketing.....	50
9.4	Management Information.....	50
9.5	Records Management.....	51
<b>APPENDIX A.</b>	<b>Edith Cowan University.....</b>	<b>53</b>
	History and Location.....	53
	Academic Profile.....	53
	Key Statistics 2003.....	53
<b>APPENDIX B.</b>	<b>AUQA’s Mission, Values and Objects.....</b>	<b>55</b>
	Mission.....	55
	Values.....	55
	Objects.....	55
<b>APPENDIX C.</b>	<b>The Audit Panel.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>APPENDIX D.</b>	<b>Abbreviations and Acronyms.....</b>	<b>57</b>



## OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

### *Background*

In 2003, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of Edith Cowan University (ECU) in Western Australia (WA).

This report of the audit provides an overview, and then details the Audit Panel's findings, recommendations, affirmations and commendations. A brief introduction to ECU is given in Appendix A; the mission, values and objects of AUQA are shown in Appendix B; membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix C; and a glossary of terms and abbreviations 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 Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs' (MCEETYA) National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes ([http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/mceetya\\_cop.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/mceetya_cop.htm)). The major aim of the audit is to consider and review the procedures an organisation has in place to achieve and monitor its objectives. Full details of the AUQA audit process are available in the AUQA Audit Manual (<http://www.auqa.edu.au>).

On 11 December 2003 ECU presented its submission (*ECU Performance Portfolio*) to AUQA, along with 14 Appendices and 28 Key Supporting Documents, 103 Other Supporting Documents and 24 Additional Documents. The Audit Panel met on 2 February 2004 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 University responded fully to these requests.

The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a preparatory visit to ECU on 17 February 2004. 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 audit visit.

The main audit visit took place principally at the Joondalup campus over 22 to 25 March 2004, with the second day being spent at the University's campus in Mt Lawley. The Audit Panel also decided, given the significance the University is placing on its extension activities, to send a delegation to visit a number of transnational arrangements in Singapore and Malaysia over 15-17 March 2004.

ECU operates a wholly owned subsidiary company called ECU Resources for Learning Ltd. The Audit Panel considered this entity during its preliminary deliberations and decided not to include it within the scope of this audit on the basis that it does not impact significantly on the core higher education activities of the University.

In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 250 people during the audit visit, including senior management, academic and general staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students and external stakeholders, including ECU Council Members, representatives of business, industry, and professional organisations and the community, including from secondary schools and alumni. Sessions were also available for any member of the ECU community to meet the Audit Panel and one person took advantage of this opportunity.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the audit visit, which ended on 25 March 2004 and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. It records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by ECU, as well as information gained through interviews, discussion and observation. 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.

This Report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations, recommendations and affirmations. The recommendations indicate matters in need of attention and sometimes include suggestions for action. Where such matters have already been appropriately identified by ECU, they are termed 'affirmations'. It is acknowledged that recommendations in AUQA audit reports may have resource implications and that this can pose difficulties for institutions. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise these recommendations and recognises that it is the University's responsibility to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

AUQA ordinarily seeks to base the structure of its audit reports on that of the performance portfolio submitted by the university, and to modify this structure, as necessary, in light of that university's strategic plan (given that the audit is against each university's goals and standards). Therefore, the Audit Panel designed this Report according to the *ECU Performance Portfolio* (which is aligned with the University's quality framework, *Quality@ECU*) and *The ECU Strategic Plan: A Stronger ECU*. As such, many sections are headed by reference to specific strategic priorities and objectives from ECU plans, and the Audit Panel acknowledges that most of these priorities and objectives have wider applications than the topics of the section in which they are specifically addressed.

The Audit Panel would like to extend its thanks to ECU for the highly professional and constructive manner with which it engaged in this important process.

## 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 are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

### *Key Findings*

The Audit Panel would like to thank and commend the University for submitting a well-structured portfolio, which presented each aspect of the University according to an analysis of its plans, practices, results and opportunities for improvement (in accordance with the University's Plan-Do-Results-Improve quality framework – see section 1.6.1). The Audit occurred as one strategic plan ended (1998-2002) and another (2003-2007) began. Accordingly, the Audit Panel structured its investigations around the new *ECU Strategic Plan 2003-2007: A Stronger ECU* but recognised that outcomes achieved thus far needed to be considered in light of the objectives of the previous plan.

ECU is to be applauded for the significant progress it has made on a range of fronts in recent years. It has clearly grown in stature and now offers diverse and differentiated programs which make it the second largest university in Western Australia.

Strategically, ECU has developed a strong identity as a university focusing on the service professions. This identity is firmly embedded within the University community's practices and strategic thinking and the wider public perception. The University is to be congratulated for achieving such a unity of purpose.

The history of ECU is one of strong commitment to teaching and to students. This commitment is clearly evident today, is appreciated by students, and is well supported with resources such as the valuable *Teaching@ECU* booklet, designed to mainstream best practices; and also is evident through support provided by the Learning Development Services.

Course and Unit management, including approval, planning and review processes, is well systematised. The University has recently moved to a more devolved system for course and unit approval at the faculty level, but also includes safeguards to ensure that the entire University community can contribute as appropriate. Once the University has completed implementation of these systems throughout the University, it will have a very sound quality assurance system in place.

This system includes clearly defined roles for Course Coordinators and Unit Coordinators, the full implementation of which is likely to significantly enhance the quality assurance of teaching and curriculum. Of some concern is the University's reliance on casual staff, particularly, in some cases, as Unit Coordinators. The University needs to consider carefully how the quality assurance framework can effectively address issues raised through the extensive use of casual staff.

ECU is steadily increasing enrolment of onshore international students. The University has effective systems in place for attending to the support of these students. ECU is also engaged in a number of offshore activities. Its performance in this regard includes some examples of excellent practice as well as some areas of significant deficiency. Until recently, the management of offshore activities by the University was not systematic. As a result, the effectiveness of relationship management was overly dependent on the approaches used by individual staff. ECU is now in the process of making major improvements to its overall management of these areas, and some of the new strategies, such as robust Triennial Reviews, are already generating significant improvements.

In terms of research, ECU is a relatively young university seeking to consolidate its activities in a limited number of areas while still maintaining a broad disciplinary base. It has identified key areas of strength and is supporting development in these areas through preferential internal grants schemes. Structurally, a

three-tiered system of research centres has been established which is helping to align limited resources with areas of promise and priority. The strategy appears to be working, with a number of centres successfully progressing up the tiers. External research income is increasing, as are publications in a narrow range of output categories. The University will need to ensure that it encourages research outputs across a range of output categories. Partly to that end, it has established a Creative and Performing Arts Index which helps ensure that a broad range of outputs are appropriately recognised.

One of ECU's primary foci is to engage successfully with the communities of which it is a part and which it serves. In conjunction with its partners, ECU's development of active 'precincts' is an example of good practice in community engagement. These precincts capitalise upon geographic proximity to encourage collaborative initiatives in terms of academic programs, articulation arrangements, marketing strategies and resource-sharing with partner institutions and cities.

The University, which grew historically from a number of different colleges and institutes, has paid attention to the need for rationalisation and integration of dispersed campuses and programs. Amalgamation of previously dispersed scholarship areas into 'mega Faculties' and the University's plan to consolidate campuses are designed to achieve a more unified, academically coherent and cost effective University. There is considerable evidence of these goals being achieved.

The University's South West Campus at Bunbury, however, does not appear to enjoy parity of esteem with the rest of the University. This is manifest in such inputs as a more junior staffing profile, a degree of isolation from the rest of the University which is not only geographical, and outputs such as low (but increasing) research publication rates. Conversely, it is greatly appreciated by the local community and students and employers rate the teaching and learning very highly. The University is aware of, and attending to, the opportunity for the University as a whole to benefit from giving greater attention to addressing the relationship between its campuses. The Audit Panel suggests that this attention focus on organisational cultural matters as much as resource and process issues.

The Audit Panel reiterates its support for the considerable ground that the University has made in developing its quality assurance systems. In particular, it has a number of effective review systems in place. The next stage of enhancement may be to develop a comprehensive suite of monitoring systems so that policy compliance across the Faculties and campuses may be tracked in a timely fashion, rather than primarily via periodic reviews. The University has already made good progress in this area, developing a suite of performance indicators to help monitor institutional progress against its strategic goals.

A summary of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations follows. Note that these are not prioritised by the Audit Panel. They are listed below in the order in which they appear in this Report.

### ***Commendations***

Areas where AUQA commends the practices of Edith Cowan University are as follows:

1. AUQA commends Edith Cowan University's leaders for establishing a clear strategic focus, which provides strong guidance for the University's internal efforts and helps present a distinctive image to the University's external communities. .... 8
2. AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for developing a framework for performance indicators that will aid the governance and planning processes. .... 10
3. AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for developing a funding model which includes a performance-based element that is proving effective in driving desired behaviours. .... 11
4. AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for undertaking a useful institutional self-review (Guided Self-Assessment) which has proven instrumental in identifying the University's strengths and areas for improvement. .... 12

5.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its system of Area of Scholarship Reviews, which is comprehensive, useful and clearly leading to improvements. ....	13
6.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the effectiveness of its newly delegated course approval processes. ....	17
7.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its effective use of Unit Plans, which supplement Unit Outlines with information valued by students. ....	17
8.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the extent to which it has thoroughly embedded information from the Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument into its quality assurance processes such as Unit Reviews, Management for Performance, Promotion and Performance Funding. ....	20
9.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its strong emphasis on teaching, including its professional development opportunities and the <i>Teaching@ECU</i> publication, which is an excellent resource for all people involved in teaching ECU courses and units. ....	21
10.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for developing and providing tangible support for its Work-Based Learning programs, which are aligned with the University's strategic themes and Key Graduate Attributes. ....	22
11.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the level of support it provides to international students at its campuses in Western Australia. ....	25
12.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for establishing and implementing a system of thorough and constructive Set-up Checklists and Triennial Reviews for its teaching programs offshore. ....	26
13.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for demonstrating improvements to its quality assurance processes in relation to bilingual activities in light of its experiences in this area. ....	29
14.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for establishing pervasive and effective research linkages with communities, government, professions and industry, and for examples of research excellence fostered through a strategy of supporting concentrations that are linked to the needs of these groups. ....	32
15.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its use of external panels to pre-assess funding applications to the Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council. ....	33
16.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for developing the Creative and Performing Arts Index which helps to ensure parity across disciplines when reporting research outputs. ....	34
17.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for establishing and implementing an effective system for monitoring and supporting the progress of Higher Degree by Research students, and particularly for introducing the 'marginal' classification which ensures that potential problems are identified and addressed early. ....	36
18.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its role in implementing Precincts, a concept which demonstrates a substantial and effective commitment to community partnerships. ....	39
19.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the manner in which it analyses and uses data to plan and assess student services. ....	44
20.	AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the Management for Performance system, which is well embedded and found to be beneficial by staff and management alike. ....	47

21. AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the systematic application of a workload model that is regarded by staff as appropriate. ....	47
22. AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for thoroughly integrating the Library into the affairs of Faculties. ....	49
23. AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its clear strategic focus on improving Internet access and for reducing Internet costs via initiating and negotiating industry developments and for improving local strategies and systems. ....	50

### ***Affirmations***

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

1. AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's improvements to its system of policy management, including the recent <i>Policy on Policies</i> and the Policies Database and encourages the full implementation of these improvements which are likely to enhance the University's quality assurance framework. ....	13
2. AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's identification of the need to develop fully and implement a comprehensive risk management system. ....	14
3. AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's finding, consistent with its focus on engaging with relevant communities and professions, that it should improve its efforts regarding the establishment and utilisation of Consultative Committees. ....	18
4. AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's finding that it needs to develop a strategy for focusing research outputs in higher impact categories. ....	34
5. AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's finding that greater attention should be paid to providing overall strategic leadership in the area of professional engagement. ....	41
6. AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's finding that its use of COGNOS requires further development in order to provide users with easy access to information germane to their planning, monitoring and reviewing requirements. ....	51
7. AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's commitment to improving its management of records, in accordance with the findings of a commissioned external review. ....	51

### ***Recommendations***

Areas where AUQA recommends improvements to the practices of Edith Cowan University are as follows:

1. That Edith Cowan University augment its line management accountabilities and periodic reviews with cross-institutional methods of ongoing monitoring. ....	14
2. That Edith Cowan University establish procedures to ensure that its academic quality assurance processes apply consistently across all its campuses. ....	15
3. That Edith Cowan University ensure its Course and Unit Review system is implemented consistently throughout the University. ....	18
4. That Edith Cowan University develop and consistently implement a policy regarding the appropriate mix of the various categories of academic staff; that appropriate quality assurance arrangements be implemented for all categories, and that engagement of casual	

	staff as Unit Coordinators be restricted to those exceptional instances where there is a sound justification. ....	20
5.	That Edith Cowan University urgently develop and implement a system for evaluating the quality of its distance education activities. ....	23
6.	That Edith Cowan University ensure that its policies governing entrance and advanced standing are implemented offshore using the same standards as onshore. ....	27
7.	That Edith Cowan University develop, implement and monitor systems for effectively controlling all marketing relating to its offshore activities. ....	27
8.	That Edith Cowan University regularly conduct comparative analyses of onshore and offshore student performance in equivalent programs, with a view to ensuring equivalent student learning outcomes. ....	28
9.	That Edith Cowan University ensure that its validation of courses of other institutions is unambiguously represented in all marketing materials as meaning only that those courses qualify for credit transfer for equivalent ECU units upon enrolling with ECU. ....	31
10.	That Edith Cowan University develop a clearer focus on integrating research and teaching, including specific strategies to assist academic staff with the achievement of research-informed teaching. ....	37
11.	That Edith Cowan University take steps to increase the seniority of its academic staff profile in accordance with its academic aspirations and in a manner integrated with its other research and research training goals and strategies. ....	46
12.	That Edith Cowan University review the outcomes of its promotion process, at appropriate intervals, with a view to determining matters of strategic significance and incorporating them into Human Resources planning. ....	47

## 1 ECU CONTEXT

### 1.1 *Mission and Defining Themes*

The primary Mission of Edith Cowan University (ECU) is:

*To provide, within a diverse and dynamic learning environment, university education of recognised quality, especially for those people employed in, or seeking employment in, the service professions.*

ECU is a young university, established on 1 January 1991 from the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, itself an earlier amalgamation of a number of teachers' colleges (for a more detailed history and profile of ECU see Appendix A.). It has about 22,000 students taught through five academic Faculties operating from four metropolitan campuses, one regional campus, a number of offshore locations and via distance education and online methods.

Over the past several years the University has worked hard on consolidating its locations and activities through strengthening its corporate planning process and identity. To that end, the University centres its activities around three defining themes, namely:

- *Service;*
- *Professionalism; and*
- *Enterprise.*

The Mission gives unity of purpose to a broad spectrum of programs and activities at the University and is meant to reinforce professionalism and to spark entrepreneurial activity. The Audit Panel saw evidence that the Mission and defining themes are widely accepted in the internal community and their essence is embedded in practice. Although there is no common understanding of precisely how each of the defining themes are supposed to be interpreted in practice, they have generally helped focus the University community and calls for further elaboration have been resisted on the grounds that such elaboration may prove more of a hindrance than a help.

It appears clear that the high-level leadership, Mission, defining themes and the strategic planning process (see section 1.4 below) have been effective in providing focus both to internal efforts and to the University's external image. This is verified, for example, through both anecdotal evidence and increases in prospective students' first preference statistics (but see also section 6.1 below).

#### **Commendation 1**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University's leaders for establishing a clear strategic focus, which provides strong guidance for the University's internal efforts and helps present a distinctive image to the University's external communities.**

### 1.2 *Governance*

The Audit Panel met with the Chancellor; and, in varying capacities and fora, with nine members of the governing Council of ECU. Council Members indicated a strong awareness of quality issues and have themselves been attending to the improvement of governance processes at ECU. The Quality Advisory Committee will be making recommendations to Council about governance practices, including self-review systems and reference to external codes of practice.

### 1.3 *Executive Management*

The Council employs the Vice-Chancellor (VC) and the Council's Remuneration Committee has in place an annual performance review process for the VC based on agreed priorities. ECU has available a 360 degree feedback system for senior executives and other staff which is used quite widely and proving to be useful.

The VC convenes a Planning and Management Group comprising the Senior Executives and the Chair of Academic Board. Pro Vice-Chancellors have both faculty and portfolio responsibilities. Their performance is evaluated by the VC against the five goals in the University's strategic plan in the case of their Faculty responsibilities, and against portfolio three-year plans. The evaluation process involves performance ratings by the VC and by the Senior Executive, which are then discussed in a dedicated meeting. Performance payments have been used as part of the Senior Executives' remuneration, and have proven effective in encouraging progress towards desired outcomes. Consequently, the University has recently extended this approach to Associate Deans, Heads of Schools and Level 10 Managers.

In general, the processes for setting performance goals and evaluating performance against those goals appear appropriate.

### 1.4 *Planning*

In June 2003, the University developed a document titled *The ECU Planning Environment*. This document provides advice on the annual planning cycle at ECU and how to align strategic, operational and individual work plans. The planning framework starts with the strategic plan, and then cascades to a number of University-wide functional plans (or position statements) and then to Faculty and Centre operational plans. These form much of the basis for this audit.

The University is currently into its second five-year strategic plan. The first, covering the period from 1998 to 2002, guided the University towards a number of positive outcomes. The current plan *The ECU Strategic Plan 2003-2007: A Stronger ECU* (hereinafter *A Stronger ECU*) is a more concise document that sets out clear objectives for each of the major functions of the University.

*A Stronger ECU* is making an impact upon the University's internal community and is helping external communities better understand what the University is about. ECU recognises the need to be meaningful to its local communities and relevant professions and industries. Representatives of these areas interviewed by the Audit Panel claimed that they had no opportunity to contribute to the development of the strategic plan, yet would have appreciated such an opportunity. The Audit Panel notes that this may have been, in part, a consequence of change of office holders within the stakeholder agencies since earlier input was sought, particularly in the development of the 1998-2002 Strategic Plan and the Mid Term Review of that Plan. Nonetheless, *A Stronger ECU* is a new five-year Plan, and the Audit Panel considers that there is an opportunity for the University to engage more meaningfully with its key external stakeholder groups in this regard.

The core functional plans of the University are the *Teaching and Learning Functional Plan* (see section 2.1 below), the *Research & Research Training Management Report* (see section 4.1 below) and the *International Plan* (see section 3.1 below). These and other functional plans (e.g. the Budget, Communications & Information Technology, Marketing and Staffing) are referred to throughout this report.

At the local levels, Faculties, Schools and Units are expected to develop tailored Operational Plans. These are not tracked centrally, other than retrospectively through the Annual Review process which enables identification of achievements and areas for improvement. This lack of monitoring means that opportunities such as for checking alignment with University plans (and,

consequently, for informing resource allocations), for identifying duplication or opportunities for collaborative strategising, for developing systemic performance indicators and for sharing good practices, are limited. However, the planning process is designed in other ways to help ensure alignment. For example, each functional plan has 'Take-Aways', which are those aspects of the plan that need to be reflected in an appropriate fashion within localised operational plans. This is a good idea designed to assist with local interpretations.

#### 1.4.1 Performance Indicators

ECU has developed a suite of 17 key performance indicators (KPIs) by which the senior executive monitors the performance of the University. Six of these KPIs have been selected by the Quality and Audit Committee for reporting to Council. The externally conducted comparative analysis of the guided self-assessments commissioned by the University in 1999 and 203 recognised system improvements as being evident in regard to "KPI development with a reporting framework increasing accountability". The Audit Panel agrees that the use of performance indicators will, itself, require ongoing monitoring and attention, but it is clear that already the University is able to utilise its KPIs to good effect.

#### **Commendation 2**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for developing a framework for performance indicators that will aid the governance and planning processes.**

Given that the University finds these KPIs to be useful, there may be an opportunity now to extend this knowledge to planning at the Faculty and School levels, where more guidance on planning, particularly concerning the construction of, and access to, meaningful performance measures, would be welcomed by staff. (In part, this is compounded by constraints on the University's capacity and capability for information management – see section 9.4 below.)

#### 1.4.2 Benchmarking

ECU has established a number of benchmarking relationships to obtain comparative information across a range of activities and processes, and has learned a significant amount about benchmarking process and difficulties. Accumulated wisdom has been distilled into *A Benchmarking Framework: Ongoing Development* (October 2002), which is a resource designed to assist staff in all parts of the University with their benchmarking activities. It was not clearly evident that this framework has made a significant impact, but the Audit Panel, recognising the complexities and difficulties in establishing effective, long term benchmarking relationships, wishes to affirm the University's continuing efforts in this regard.

ECU has joined the New Generation Universities (NGU) consortium. The NGU comprises 11 of Australia's newer universities, many of which have in common their origins from Colleges of Advanced Education. While the University's membership provides an opportunity to benchmark, the NGU is still young and the potential benchmarking benefits for ECU have yet to be realised.

### 1.5 ***Budgeting and Financial Management***

One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

*To ensure that the ECU budget continues to be an integral component of the comprehensive planning and review cycle and that resources are allocated in accordance with strategic priorities*

ECU, like other universities, is facing funding challenges and has taken a number of initiatives to try to secure its financial future with a thorough strategic planning effort, including campus

consolidation, resource sharing partnerships, commercial off-shore activities, marketing and other measures to increase first choice ratings.

The budget model is based primarily on projected weighted student taught load following strategic load allocations. There is awareness of the need for alignment between the budget and the strategic plan and the University has been working towards achieving this alignment more effectively. There are three main strategies for achieving this. The first is the consideration of plans by the senior executive during the budget round as previously discussed (see section 1.4). A second strategy is the use of Strategic Initiative Funds allocated by the VC, which provides for emerging issues to be addressed. The third and perhaps most important strategy is the use of performance-based funding components both for teaching and for research. The University allocates \$3.5M of the budget on the basis of performance in teaching and research. The Teaching Performance Funding model utilises such data as Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI – see section 2.3.2), Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) results and student retention figures. Deans report that this has been effective in focusing the attention of Faculties on important performance indicators. Similarly, the Research Performance Funding model is based on the Research Activity Index (see section 4.2.4 below). The University notes that this budget model can always be further enhanced, but there is a high level of agreement amongst the senior executive about the choice of, and weightings allocated to, the data used to make performance funding decisions.

One of the methods for achieving this is the establishment of an activity-based costing (ABC) model which will enable the financial implications of strategic decisions to be determined more accurately. This is not yet rolled out; and so its impact cannot yet be determined; but, it is indicative that the University is seeking to improve its systems.

The University's Staff Survey (see section 8.3 below) indicates that many staff are cynical about resource management. This has been responded to, in part, by 'travelling budget road shows' as a means of increasing transparency, indicating that the University does act upon survey data.

Each Faculty has discretion to modify the funding allocations in accordance with its unique profile. For example, the Faculty of Business and Public Management (BPM) allocates a greater proportion to Faculty-wide processes; the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences (CSESS) chooses to not top slice international revenue, and the Faculty of Communications and Creative Industries (CCI) makes special provisions for its Vocational Education and Training (VET) activities. For the most part, however, the same resource allocation is applied within Faculties, i.e. a teaching load allocation, performance funding and funding of strategic initiatives.

The budget process was externally reviewed in 2000 with the finding that 'ECU budgeting processes are in line with good practice across the sector, and that the construction of its Faculty funding model is robust and coherent'. The University has continued to refine its process since that time and will need to continue to monitor its processes in light of changing external conditions.

### **Commendation 3**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for developing a funding model which includes a performance-based element that is proving effective in driving desired behaviours.**

## 1.6 *Quality*

Edith Cowan University clearly has paid considerable attention to quality assurance and quality enhancement over past few years, which is bringing benefits. This is evident both from the top-down and also through ground-up efforts.

### 1.6.1 Quality Model

The University has developed a 'Plan-Do-Results-Improve' (PDRI) quality model which has, as its basis, the seven quality principles of the Australian Business Excellence Framework (ABEF). PDRI has been circulated widely throughout the institution. The Audit Panel was provided with examples of how PDRI is incorporated into planning and review activities within the University. However, with the exception of institutional guided self-assessments (see section 1.6.2 below), it appears that PDRI is not yet being practiced effectively (for example, see section 2.1 below). The University's attempts to engage in systematic quality assurance and improvement are encouraging, and further work is now required to understand better PDRI and to establish its relevance and usefulness to the University community.

### 1.6.2 Guided Self-Assessment

In 1999 the University undertook its first Guided Self-Assessment (GSA) based on the ABEF. The process involved extensive self-evaluation followed by an external review panel commissioned through the ABEF. The results are used to identify both strengths and improvement opportunities across the organisation. The University repeated this exercise in 2003. The second exercise showed improvement across a wide range of areas, and the need to simplify processes within the University.

#### **Commendation 4**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for undertaking a useful institutional self-review (Guided Self-Assessment) which has proven instrumental in identifying the University's strengths and areas for improvement.**

### 1.6.3 Area of Scholarship Reviews

In 1999, ECU introduced the concept of Areas of Scholarship, being academic sections conducting teaching and research in a field (or cognate fields) of study. There are thirty such areas within the University; they often correspond with Schools, but may include Research Centres, and some Schools include more than one Area of Scholarship.

Attending to its quality assurance responsibilities, the University developed a system of Area of Scholarship reviews. These reviews bring external scrutiny to ECU activities and have clearly resulted in improvements. Each School (or other appropriate area of scholarship scope) is required to prepare an Action Plan in response to its Review findings. After 12 months, a report is provided to Academic Board in which progress against the review findings is presented. Compliance with this system is tracked centrally through the Governance, Policy and Planning Services (GPPS).

The Audit Panel did find evidence to suggest that the full process, for example providing Schools with the opportunity to comment on draft recommendations, has not always worked effectively. However, the University is aware of this and has already taken steps to tighten the process for supporting these reviews, in part through a centrally administered schedule which ensures all stages are followed in a timely fashion through increased communication with the parties concerned.

## Commendation 5

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its system of Area of Scholarship Reviews, which is comprehensive, useful and clearly leading to improvements.**

The Area of Scholarship Reviews system is one of the most effective aspects of the University's framework for quality assurance. The only concern is that much is expected of these reviews, including attention not only to curriculum and research programs, but also to community engagement, professional engagement, and effective management. As the University's experience of these reviews increases, it will be useful to evaluate the review process with a view to determining the extent to which the process is meeting all its objectives.

### 1.6.4 Quality Networks

An informal group called the Quality Network has been established to provide a forum for people to share, discuss and ask about quality-related issues. At the time of the Audit Visit, the network had not met for six months. However, the Quality Network provides open access, as-needed, to quality discussions and was commented upon favourably by those who had taken advantage of it. Examples of sessions included discussions about the UTEI (see section 2.3 below) and the Areas of Scholarship Reviews (see section 1.6.3 above).

Additionally, the VC established, in mid-2002, a Quality Reference Group which provides 'unfiltered' advice on quality issues and acts as a sounding board for policy matters. The group includes staff from various campuses and levels of the organisation, resulting in wide representation.

## 1.7 Policy Management

The University has recently established a *Policy on Policies* which is intended to govern the manner in which policies are developed, approved, implemented, monitored and reviewed. It is supported by a website, still being developed, which provides such resources as policy templates and checklists. Concurrently, the University is migrating policies to a new, consolidated Policies Database, which is accessible via the web.

There is still some work to do in finalising the website and keeping it current, and in ensuring that all relevant staff are adequately briefed on use of the new arrangements. Nonetheless, the Audit Panel was confident that this is a significant improvement and likely to help provide assurance that University policies are robust, well disseminated and implemented consistently.

### Affirmation 1

**AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's improvements to its system of policy management, including the recent *Policy on Policies* and the Policies Database and encourages the full implementation of these improvements which are likely to enhance the University's quality assurance framework.**

The University's systems for ensuring compliance with its policies require strengthening. The Audit Panel found many instances of policy implementation either not being monitored, or being monitored in such a devolved fashion that university-wide consistency cannot be determined.

## 1.8 Risk Management

The University is in the process of implementing a risk management system. Given that the purpose of such a system is to enable the University at least to maintain the level of quality of its

activities by protecting itself from adverse possibilities, the Audit Panel explored this matter in detail.

In 2002, a new Quality and Audit Committee (QAC) of Council was established, merging the previous Quality Committee and Management Review and Audit Committee, to advise Council on quality, risk management and audit matters. A Director (Risk Management and Audit Assurance) was appointed to assist with strengthening the University's approach to risk and risk management along with the adoption of an enterprise-wide risk management policy.

Such developments take time and the Audit Panel noted through its interviews and assessment of materials that the implementation of the new risk management approach has yet to make consistent and uniform impact throughout the University community. At the time of the Audit Visit there was no systematic use of risk registers for identifying, assessing and treating risks. As a result of this, knowledge of formal risk management practices throughout the University was highly variable and generally light.

The University Council itself acknowledges that the new approach is not yet fully implemented and must remain a high priority, as indicated in *A Stronger ECU*.

### **Affirmation 2**

**AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's identification of the need to develop fully and implement a comprehensive risk management system.**

Co-located with the risk management portfolio is an internal audit function. Based on a five-year plan, this system helps provide a level of assurance through to the Vice-Chancellery Team and Council on key financial and operational risks.

## **1.9 Organisational Structure**

ECU is structured according to five Faculties and eleven Service Centres/Offices. The Faculties are Computing, Health and Science (CHS); Community Services, Education and Social Sciences (CSESS); Business and Public Management (BPM); Communications and Creative Industries (CCI); and Regional Professional Studies (RPS), which is based at the South West Campus in Bunbury. The Faculties have a considerable degree of autonomy, which has helped promote flexibility. On the other hand, the University places considerable reliance on the line management structures (and reviews – see section 1.6.3 above) for ensuring not only implementation, but also monitoring. The Audit Panel observed that ECU could benefit from more cross-institutional monitoring systems, built into its standard operating processes, which provide timely information about policy compliance (as opposed to reviews, which, by nature, are less frequent and focus more on the effectiveness of policies and strategic outcomes). Examples where lack of such monitoring has resulted in unhelpful variances in practice include planning processes, moderation practices and paid additional work.

### **Recommendation 1**

**That Edith Cowan University augment its line management accountabilities and periodic reviews with cross-institutional methods of ongoing monitoring.**

#### **1.9.1 Campuses**

ECU is a multi-campus university with metropolitan campuses at Joondalup (where the Chancellery is located), Mt Lawley, Churchlands, Claremont and a campus at the regional town of Bunbury in south-west WA. Over the past couple of years the University has been seeking to consolidate its campuses in the interests of efficiency and also greater strategic alignment of

activities. Most specifically, activities at the Churchlands metropolitan campus are being progressively relocated to other campuses, and Churchlands will eventually be sold. This development is enabling the University to focus on an innovative approach to integrating the wider community with its other campuses using an 'educational precinct' concept, which is explored further in section 5.2 below.

The Audit Panel was concerned regarding the University's Faculty of Regional Professional Studies (RPS), based at the South West Campus in Bunbury. Academic and research linkages between the Faculty and the other Faculties could be improved and strengthened. While this is partly a product of geographical distance, it is also, in large part, a consequence of the relatively recent establishment of an organisational structure in which the academic activities at Bunbury are collectively grouped into the RPS. The Audit Panel recognises current attempts to enhance links between Metropolitan Faculties and the RPS and stresses the need for these initiatives to be continued. The Audit Panel also recognises ECU's cooperative work with the South West regional community to ensure that University's presence and activities are relevant and valued.

### **Recommendation 2**

**That Edith Cowan University establish procedures to ensure that its academic quality assurance processes apply consistently across all its campuses.**

Conversely, there is strong representation of the South West community's interests at the University's governance level. Mindful of current governance reforms, it will be important that the Council ensures that it continues to remain fully apprised of issues at the South West campus (and, indeed, at all its locales of activity).

## 2 TEACHING & LEARNING

The University's strategic priority in respect of Teaching and Learning (and Research) is as follows:

*ECU will become a national leader in the education of learners for the knowledge based service professions, and will be recognised for the quality of its teaching and its learning opportunities in those fields. ECU is a teaching and research university, and research will inform its teaching. ECU will be sought out to participate in research projects and productive partnerships. This will be because of the University's excellence in collaboration and the delivery of research outcomes that contribute to policy development and improved practice in the professional fields of business, human services and education, and to advances in health, information and communication technologies and the environment.*

The University's policies and procedures in this area are coordinated primarily by the Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Committee, which includes representatives from all Faculties, and which reports to the Academic Board.

### 2.1 *Planning for Teaching and Learning*

The University has a *Teaching and Learning Functional Plan*, which addresses in some detail the teaching-related strategic priorities from *A Stronger ECU*. This plan has been developed based upon the PDRI model (see section 1.6.1 above). It is encouraging that the University is seeking to incorporate quality consciousness into its planning. However, the Audit Panel found the linkage between PDRI and planning to be tenuous. For example, it was unclear how the specific terms of Plan, Do, Review and Improve related to their associated strategies. It was also unclear as to what value was being added through this approach. In discussion with staff from a sample of Schools, it became apparent that the plan has yet to make much impact on academic developments throughout the University, with the strategic plan *A Stronger ECU* being the better known and more relevant document.

Faculties have Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Committees (CTLCS) which provide a focal point for planning and monitoring courses, teaching and learning.

### 2.2 *Courses and Units*

The academic offerings of the University are structured by courses comprised of teaching units. The following sections comment on a number of the key quality assurance processes associated with courses and units.

#### 2.2.1 Course and Unit Approvals

The University has a policy entitled *Course and Unit Approval and Review Procedures*. This was initially approved by Academic Board in September 2001. It was reviewed and minor amendments were approved by the Academic Board in November 2003. The policy sets out delegated authorities for course and unit approvals. For example, new Areas of Scholarship and new award types require the approval of Council, and the approval of Academic Board is required for an Area of Scholarship to offer awards at a higher level or with different titles. Most significantly, under this new policy Faculty Boards have the authority to approve the introduction, re-titling, restructuring or withdrawal of courses, majors and minors, and units.

The policy includes detailed procedures for enacting these authorisations. The Audit Panel pursued this issue with a range of staff involved in the process, and found a high level of awareness of and support for the new approach. Staff of the Faculties are supported by the Academic Secretariat which communicates with them at appropriate times about process requirements. Course proposals are now better developed and can be attended to more quickly.

There are safeguards in place protecting Faculties from operating in isolation. Faculties, which have common academic structures, are required to notify each other of all proposals to ensure that appropriate attention is given to cross-institutional issues (this can also be addressed via representatives of other Faculties on Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Committee). Any disputes over proposals result in that proposal going before the full Academic Board.

### **Commendation 6**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the effectiveness of its newly delegated course approval processes.**

#### 2.2.2 Course and Unit Information

All courses and units are supposed to be managed by Course Coordinators and Unit Coordinators. The responsibilities for these roles, including, for example, the provision of Course Coordinator Reports, are clearly outlined in *Teaching@ECU*, although each Faculty has been implementing these roles in a tailored fashion and are at varying stages in their implementation of this policy. The Audit Panel found that in at least one School this policy was not fully implemented (Course-Coordinator Reports were not being produced), suggesting that there is a need for better monitoring systems. (For further information about Unit Coordinators see section 2.3.1 below.)

ECU operates a Courses and Units Database in which all official information about courses and units is stored. Each unit has a Unit Outline which provides the essential details such as short descriptions, learning outcomes, teaching and learning processes, the assessment schedule and readings. This is stored in the Courses and Units Database.

In addition, Unit Plans are used to provide further information to students about the unit. Recognising the diversity of units across the University, there is no set format for such plans. However, *Teaching@ECU* provides some suggestions including a 'frequently-asked questions' section and detailed lecture content schedules.

Unit Outlines and Unit Plans are made available to students within the first two teaching sessions. Staff and students find these plans to be very helpful, and students report that they are generally adhered to.

### **Commendation 7**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its effective use of Unit Plans, which supplement Unit Outlines with information valued by students.**

#### 2.2.3 Consultative Committees

One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

*Strengthen existing, and develop new, courses appropriate to the knowledge-based service professions*

ECU has 27 Consultative Committees in operation across the University. These comprise employers and representatives of related industries and professions. In some areas, such as the School of Nursing and Public Health, the committees are effective in contributing guidance

relating to course and unit design and content, research activity and professional engagement. In other areas, the committees are less effective. The University recognises the potential value of these committees particularly in the context of its Mission and intends to increase its efforts in this area.

### **Affirmation 3**

**AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's finding, consistent with its focus on engaging with relevant communities and professions, that it should improve its efforts regarding the establishment and utilisation of Consultative Committees.**

#### 2.2.4 Course and Unit Reviews

All Courses and Units are reviewed annually by their Coordinators. Templates are available to guide these processes, although the actual structures and preparation methods vary from School to School. The Audit Panel reviewed a sample of Course Review reports and found them to be comprehensive in their coverage of the important issues. In particular, Course Coordinators make effective and thorough use of a range of available data such as recruitment data, enrolment data, teaching evaluation, external assessors' reports and student performance results. Course Review reports are approved by the Head of School, and this process includes identification of future actions.

The quality of Unit Review reports seen by the Audit Panel varied considerably. Some reports were focused primarily on UTEI results (see section 2.3.2 below). This is a very limited scope, but it does provide the opportunity to explore and explain the results in context. Also, in some instances where UTEI results were not available, Unit Review reports were completed based on teaching journals kept by the Unit Coordinators. A number of reports, however, were simply emails with a few comments from the Unit Coordinator. While there is clearly an opportunity to improve the form and, thereby, utility of Unit Reviews, in general the reports provide a good opportunity to not only identify good practices and show recognition of good teachers, but also to identify problems (which, in the sample viewed by the Audit Panel, included staffing and other resourcing issues, and health and safety concerns).

Unit Review reports typically inform the preparation of Course Review reports, which are considered by Faculty Boards, thereby ensuring that issues are brought to the attention of senior Faculty members and management.

Course and Unit Reviews are a commendable practice. However, there are still some areas of the University that are not conducting Unit and Course Reviews. Considering the benefits that arise from this process, in terms of problem identification and resolution, the University will want to ensure that the practice is rendered systemic in the near future.

### **Recommendation 3**

**That Edith Cowan University ensure its Course and Unit Review system is implemented consistently throughout the University.**

## 2.3 *Teaching*

One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

*Encourage and reward innovation and excellence in teaching that engages students in, motivates and facilitates effective learning*

### 2.3.1 Teaching by Casual Staff

A high proportion of ECU's academic workload is undertaken by casual staff. Comparable statistics show that ECU's use of casual staff, currently at 31%, has exceeded every benchmarked group (including NGU, currently at 28%) for the past three years. This is partly explained by the academic profile of the University which includes several practice-based disciplines such as Tourism and the Western Australia Academy of Performing Arts (WAAPA).

The Audit Panel accepts the University's position that the deliberate use of casual staff promotes labour flexibility, engagement with the professions and relevant industries and provides students with access to knowledge of contemporary practices. In a number of cases these linkages were clearly demonstrated.

It is also the case, however, that many of the casual staff are postgraduate students, in which case the position does not apply (other than labour flexibility). The desire to offer promising graduate students teaching opportunities is understood, although for such teaching to be of appropriate quality to the undergraduate students concerned, and to be a meaningful developmental experience for the graduate students, such opportunities need to be embedded within a comprehensive teaching development plan.

Also, the Audit Panel noted comments made in some Course Reviews that the maintenance of quality assurance was rendered difficult by the lack of staff continuity as a result of increasing dependence on casual staff.

Casual staff are not incorporated into many aspects of the University's overall system of quality assurance. For example, the systems for recruitment and selection, probation and promotion, Management for Performance (MFP – see section 8.5 below) and professional development do not typically apply, yet these are the systems that the University places reliance upon in its *Teaching and Learning Functional Plan* (p3) to ensure teaching standards. Of course, it is not suggested that these processes should be applied to casual staff, but rather, that alternative procedures are required, appropriate to the nature of casual staffing, which can lead to a similar level of quality assurance being provided to the students who are taught by those staff.

The University advised the Audit Panel that this issue was identified by the Vice-Chancellor's Quality Reference Group (see section 1.6.4 above) and was also noted by at least one Area of Scholarship Review panel (see section 1.6.3 above) and resulted in the development of mandatory induction for casual staff, access to online workshops and a draft policy concerning the management of casual staff. The Audit Panel found corroborating evidence that casual staff are now incorporated into the University's new teacher training programs, and strongly supports this development as one of the important aspects of ensuring overall teaching quality.

One closely related matter was of particular concern to the Audit Panel. ECU engages a number of its casual staff as Unit Coordinators. The responsibilities of Unit Coordinators are set out in *Teaching@ECU* (p10). These responsibilities include, *inter alia*, preparing the Unit Outlines and Unit Plans, developing assessment strategies and supervising unit teaching staff activities and reviewing the unit. The Audit Panel formed the view that the University Unit Coordinator responsibilities are too significant to be assigned regularly to persons not in the full time employ of the University as academic staff (although the Audit Panel acknowledges the need for exceptions to this interpretation) – and particularly casual staff. Those charged with such responsibilities ought, in the main, to be embedded within the academic culture, processes and discourse of the University.

The University does not currently have a formal policy statement concerning the use of casual staff in Unit Coordinator roles, although recognises that it should occur only under exceptional circumstances. An accurate diagnosis of the magnitude and distribution of this issue is difficult

to determine. The University acknowledges a data integrity problem regarding the identification of Unit Coordinators in the database and needs to resolve this issue in order to be able to clearly identify the extent of this issue.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**That Edith Cowan University develop and consistently implement a policy regarding the appropriate mix of the various categories of academic staff; that appropriate quality assurance arrangements be implemented for all categories, and that engagement of casual staff as Unit Coordinators be restricted to those exceptional instances where there is a sound justification.**

#### 2.3.2 Teaching Evaluation

The University operates an instrument whereby students evaluate the teaching and units they experience. This system, the Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI), was reviewed in 2003 and has since become a major tool for accountability and quality enhancement. Since the second semester of 2002, it is mandated that the UTEI be conducted for every unit every semester (other than off-campus and off-shore units), and the University's timetabling system (ECUWES) is utilised to generate reports for planning the accomplishment of this policy. Although the Audit Panel found instances where UTEI was not conducted (and see section 2.5.2 below regarding external students), coverage is extensive with an average of 1263 units surveyed per semester. The University's own audit of the UTEI process focused on absolute numbers of surveys and student responses. In order to determine the extent to which its policy is being fulfilled, proportions of units surveyed against units eligible would be more useful.

Usage of UTEI results is built into many of the quality assurance systems of the University, including for MFP (see section 8.5), Unit Reviews (see section 2.2.4) and the Teaching Performance Funding model (see section 1.5). Indeed, the Audit Panel formed the view that the extent to which ECU maximises its use of the survey results constitutes a very good practice. Notably, the inclusion of UTEI results in the performance based funding model (see section 1.5) has focused not only Deans, but Heads of Schools on the UTEI and on strategies for improving results.

#### **Commendation 8**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the extent to which it has thoroughly embedded information from the Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument into its quality assurance processes such as Unit Reviews, Management for Performance, Promotion and Performance Funding.**

UTEIs are administered by staff other than those directly involved in the teaching of each unit. This process helps to ensure that confidence can be placed on the integrity of the results. As a new enhancement, the University is currently looking to make the UTEI process and results manageable online through the UTEI Online project. This will also create an opportunity to reconsider the University's position on sharing results with students. At present, there is no particular means for achieving this, although some staff have developed their own means, and the Learning and Development Services has provided training sessions to schools on this topic.

#### 2.3.3 Teaching Development

ECU demonstrates a strong and clear commitment to the quality of teaching not only through useful guidelines (*Teaching@ECU*) and evaluation systems (UTEI), but also through well-constructed professional development opportunities. Learning and Development Services (LDS) has a Service Level Agreement (see section 9 below) in place with the Faculties setting out a notional quantum of dedicated staff time based on full-time equivalent (FTE) staff numbers.

Until recently, LDS were responsible for all professional development, but as a result of a recent review, all professional development not related to teaching and learning has been relocated to Human Resource Services, enabling LDS to focus more specifically on supporting tertiary teaching, on effective use of Blackboard as a learning management system, and on other professional development specific to teaching and learning. One of the flagship services is a mandatory Teaching and Learning for Academic Staff course which provides credit towards a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching. Other services are provided through one-on-one sessions with LDS instructional designers. LDS is currently working on a university-wide professional needs analysis, but it was too early for the Audit Panel to assess this exercise or its impact.

Heads of Schools and other academic staff are complimentary about the range and value of services provided by LDS, but note that the resources available for enabling staff to attend these professional development opportunities are scarce. The University may wish to review the manner in which resources are allocated to professional development, as the distributed buy-back system may not ensure sufficient critical mass for the services of LDS to be provided optimally.

Early in 2003, ECU published a teaching handbook entitled *Teaching@ECU*, known colloquially as the 'little red book'. This was developed by a project funded through the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) and is proving to be a valuable resource for new staff, staff at partner organisations, and longer-serving staff alike. It sets out all major policy and procedural issues, as well as defining responsibilities, giving guidance for effective teaching and identifying general resources.

#### **Commendation 9**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its strong emphasis on teaching, including its professional development opportunities and the *Teaching@ECU* publication, which is an excellent resource for all people involved in teaching ECU courses and units.**

#### **2.4 Graduate Attributes**

One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

*Improve the quality of teaching and learning at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels through the provision of an effective learning environment that will produce graduates with the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to succeed in their careers and develop as lifelong learners*

ECU has established a set of Graduate Attributes, incorporating four 'key graduate attributes' (Service, Professionalism, Enterprise and Workplace Skills) and a larger set of 'generic attributes'. The *Teaching and Learning Functional Plan* (p5) tasked all Faculties with the development of a 'course-specific Graduate Attributes Framework for each course' and to 'embed the development of these attributes in the curriculum.' To date, this is largely a mapping exercise, ensuring that all the targeted attributes will be addressed by the totality of units within each course. It is also now the case that all proposals for new courses and units are required to demonstrate how graduate attributes will be addressed. Instructional designers from LDS are available to assist academic staff with this process.

Inculcation of graduate attributes into teaching methods and assessment practices is yet to be fully addressed. However, the University appears to be making good progress. One particular area that has been developed in some detail is Work-Based Learning, and this is reported on in the following section.

### 2.4.1 Work-Based Learning

The University has determined that Work-Based Learning (WBL) is one important means for achieving the intended Key Graduate Attributes, especially Workplace Skills, which is further defined as an ECU graduate having ‘first hand experience of the workplace, or [being able to] apply learning effectively in practice’. Some disciplines have made use of various professional placements for many years (e.g. Education and Nursing). Although there is clearly opportunity to further expand the application of WBL at ECU, practicums can now be found in courses within all Faculties, and not-for-credit workplace experiences are also promoted through the Careers Advisory Service and industry-sponsored projects. The not-for-credit experiences are, in some instances (such as Engineering), a course requirement.

A Work Link Project, which was supported by the Strategic Initiatives Fund (see section 1.5), gathers research and resources to promote WBL. The resources generated, many of which are available via the website, are proving very useful to academic staff responsible for the practicums within their courses. They include, among many others, a Gaining Access to Practical Skills program and a guide to WBL that addresses such issues as placement management, evaluation of student learning, and legal and insurance implications.

#### **Commendation 10**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for developing and providing tangible support for its Work-Based Learning programs, which are aligned with the University’s strategic themes and Key Graduate Attributes.**

### 2.5 *External Studies Teaching Modes*

One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

*Enhance the flexibility of student choice of units, courses and mode of delivery.*

Teaching at ECU is predominantly face-to-face, although increasingly units are expected to ‘exploit the capabilities of the web to overcome some of the limitations of time and place’ (*A Stronger ECU*, p9). In 2003, about 12% of enrolments were external students. Some units are available wholly online and ECU also still provides education through the traditional distance education mode. The online and distance education modes are considered here in more detail.

#### 2.5.1 Online Learning

ECU utilises Blackboard as its preferred learning management system. To various extents, learning resources are made available to students in all modes of teaching using this technology, in accordance with the *Teaching & Learning Functional Plan*. Feedback from staff and students suggests that the University has successfully embraced this technology in the interests of student learning.

One area for improvement concerns the treatment of students who experience difficulties – for a wide range of reasons – in accessing or using Blackboard. The University’s current methods for addressing these issues disadvantage such students in that they are not able to access teaching materials and library resources using other modes. The University may wish to consider a ‘no fault’ approach to assisting students experiencing difficulties, by providing them with alternative means of support with minimum disadvantage.

### 2.5.2 Distance Education

Edith Cowan has been a provider of distance education for some time, although this is not seen as a major mode for the University. There are no strategic plans to develop further its Distance Education activities.

The Audit Panel noted that the UTEI does not cater for external students, meaning that there is no systematic attention to the views of these people. In Schools where there is a particularly large proportion of external students, such as Kurongkurl Katitjin, locally-developed feedback systems are being used to seek student feedback. The commitment of staff to obtain student feedback for continuous improvement purposes is commendable.

The University is intending to develop an online version of UTEI, to be rolled out once its Callista system is implemented. This shows that the University is aware of the gaps in its student feedback system. However, as long as there are students who are studying by distance using means other than online technologies, the University needs to ensure that those students are able to provide feedback that the University can use to improve its teaching.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**That Edith Cowan University urgently develop and implement a system for evaluating the quality of its distance education activities.**

There are some distance education activities in respect of which the University has other means for tracking its performance. For example, ECU identified a number of problems associated with the timeliness of getting materials and services to distance education students. These are being addressed and while there are still concerns amongst academic staff about required lead times, which they believe prohibit timely enhancements to teaching materials, there has been a marked reduction in waiting times.

### 3 INTERNATIONAL

Objectives in *A Stronger ECU* include the following:

- *Expand ECU's international activities and extend the internationalisation of curricula.*
- *Continue the drive for generating more and diverse income sources that provide a net financial return to the University, particularly from international activities.*
- *Strengthen local, national and international partnerships which are of strategic advantage.*
- *Identify and develop other local, national and international strategic partnerships to either support its service delivery or for benchmarking purposes.*

The University's policies and procedures in this area are coordinated primarily by the International Policy Committee (IPC). Recognising that international activities can involve significant risks, IPC augmented its membership, which includes the VC, Executive Deans and other executives and senior managers, with the inclusion of the Director of Risk Management and Audit Assurance and the Chair of the Academic Board. This committee, however, deliberately does not report to the Academic Board in order to ensure that it is not seen as intervening in the normal academic policies and procedures of the University, which are expected to apply to international activities. However, this assumes that the normal policies and procedures of the University will apply effectively for international activities without additional considerations being required. Given the findings that follow in this report, and given the Academic Board's overall responsibility for academic standards, it is important that the Academic Board develops a mechanism for ensuring it is fully informed of the University's international activities – particularly offshore activities – and able to intervene as necessary to ensure standards are safeguarded.

#### 3.1 *Planning for Internationalisation*

The University includes within its suite of functional plans an *ECU International Plan* (the version provided to the Audit Panel covered the period 2001-2003). Performance is reported in the *ECU International Annual Report*. Other planning issues are addressed in specific discussion papers, such as *Enhancing International Activity at ECU – A Strategic Planning Issues Paper* (2002) and another entitled *Key Principles for the Proportion of International Students* (2002).

ECU is continually improving its management of its international activities. A document entitled *Quality Assurance: Onshore Student Recruitment and Offshore Arrangements* provides an overview of quality assurance policies and processes in respect of recruitment of onshore international students, teaching programs in offshore locations with partner collaboration, agreements for the articulation of students from partner courses to ECU courses and student exchange / study abroad agreements.

The University is mindful of the risks associated with creating an increasing dependency and reliance on international students as a continuous – indeed increasing – source of revenue to help fund activities. The University has defined strategies in place including a diversified range of source countries for its revenue base and a strategy of market differentiation. It has implemented ABC which provides fully-costed data down to a unit and course level for international programs. As this is a volatile area, demonstrated by previous fluctuations in demand from international students arising from economic downturns and problems such as SARS, the Audit Panel endorses such strategies and encourages ongoing close attention to these issues.

### 3.2 *Support for International Students Onshore*

With over 2,100 international students on its campuses in WA, the provision of appropriate and effective support services is an important issue for ECU. The Audit Panel met some of the service providers as well as a number of international students. The University has a range of methods in place for supporting international students. These include School-based support officers, who are able to provide locally-tailored and accessible support. The goodwill that such support has generated amongst the students is reflected in the extent to which they become involved in a volunteer capacity to provide peer support.

#### **Commendation 11**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the level of support it provides to international students at its campuses in Western Australia.**

### 3.3 *Offshore Learning and Teaching Activities*

ECU operates a range of offshore undergraduate and postgraduate programs taught wholly offshore ('3+0' programs) or partially offshore and onshore as twinning programs ('1+2' or '2+1'). The offshore activities constitute a significant subset of ECU's overall internationalisation activities. As such, a Delegation of the Audit Panel visited two of the University's partners in Singapore (Management Development Institute of Singapore and the Academy of Human Development) as well as one recruitment agent and two partners (Unity College International and SAL College, Kuala Lumpur) in Malaysia. Within this sample are examples of good practice in offshore partnerships, as well as a problematic partnership that is damaging to the students concerned.

The University has been addressing issues of coordination and central accountability systems for its offshore teaching activities. Quality assurance systems though are not systematically applied. Over the year prior to the audit visit there had been considerable improvements made to redress this issue. Not all individual cases have yet been resolved, but the new arrangements are likely to provide greater assurance of the quality of ECU's programs and teaching.

#### 3.3.1 Approval and Reviews of Offshore Courses

The *Quality Assurance: Onshore Student Recruitment and Offshore Arrangements* document includes a subsidiary document entitled *Offshore Program Development – The ECU Quality Framework*. This is designed to ensure that equivalence of standards is upheld in offshore teaching programs, taking into consideration relevant geographic and cultural contexts.

Part of this framework is a *Set-up Checklist* for staff seeking to commence a new offshore course or activity. The checklist was developed in mid 2001 and has not been applied to agreements established prior to that date. The effectiveness of the checklist mechanism could therefore not be verified. However, the Audit Panel reviewed the checklist and found it to be comprehensive in asking about the important issues (such as partner selection, relationship management, teaching and learning support and various risks and regulatory requirements). The checklist mechanism is likely to prove helpful.

Another part of the ECU approach to quality management includes a system of internal Triennial Reviews of offshore partnerships. Where these reviews had occurred, the Audit Panel found them to be rigorous, detailed and constructive. The output of each review is a report which is then addressed by way of a detailed action plan. Such planning is supported by information generated through an Internationalisation Self-Assessment conducted using the OECD/IMHE Internationalisation Quality Review Process (IQRP).

It is clear that the University cannot (and does not) claim that the quality framework is fully embedded throughout the University's offshore teaching activities. For example, some contracts reviewed by the Delegation had expired; and, although memoranda were in place to ensure short term continuity, the scheduled contract review and renewal processes had not been implemented according to the plan. Further evidence of incomplete framework implementation is provided in the following sections. However, the framework is already leading to tangible improvements in quality and its further implementation is strongly encouraged.

### **Commendation 12**

#### **AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for establishing and implementing a system of thorough and constructive Set-up Checklists and Triennial Reviews for its teaching programs offshore.**

#### 3.3.2 Admission and Advanced Standing

The Audit Panel considered the policies and practices pertaining to admission and advanced standing in respect of offshore courses. Instances were identified in which the entrance standards of ECU and the provision of exemptions (advanced standing) were being implemented more generously offshore than the policies ordinarily allow. Most explicitly, some offshore students were being granted more exemptions than a domestic student with similar entrance criteria would have been granted. A number of explanations was provided, including admission that the University has responded to pressure from partners to grant more exemptions than that for which the policy provided. On balance, the Audit Panel concluded that the University's standards have, in some cases, been inconsistently applied (the Delegation was advised that the quantum of advanced standing in question was being reverted back to an earlier policy, but this could not be verified at the time of the Audit Visit). This raises questions about the effectiveness of ECU's policies and quality assurance arrangements, including the Faculty offices and the Admissions Subcommittee of the Academic Services Committee, which considers exemption agreements with offshore partners. Given the ease with which the varying motivations of parts of the University can result in conflicts of interest, it behoves the University to ensure that its advanced standing policies and processes for implementing the policies are robust.

The Audit Panel considered one degree which involved professional accreditation and which was marketed as such in offshore promotional materials. In the case of one program in Singapore, ECU has sometimes issued letters to students advising that too many exemptions, although approved in practice by ECU, may jeopardise their professional accreditation prospects after graduation. This is not a robust system as not all relevant students are necessarily so-advised in a timely fashion.

This also raises the question of precisely what constitutes 'equivalence' of standards. The Audit Panel agrees that the curriculum, teaching and assessment may be equivalent. However, the outcome for the student in Singapore who completes the degree with too much advanced standing to gain professional accreditation in their country is, in that manner, significantly different from the outcome for students in Australia who receive an amount of advanced standing acceptable to the profession in their country. As these degrees are taught wholly in those countries, the issue of cultural contextualisation is relevant when considering equivalency in terms of outcomes.

The University may wish to address this issue by, at least, developing a means for ensuring that students will certainly be aware of the implications of advanced standing prior to their enrolment. This might include making professional accreditation dependent on a maximum quantum of credit recognition explicit in all relevant marketing materials such as the course handbooks and brochures.

In one partnership, it appeared that the partner had enrolled students in ECU courses without ECU authorisation. These students had completed courses, marked and/or moderated by ECU academic staff, although they had not received formal acknowledgement of ECU credit. The Delegation met some of these students and it is clear that the situation is unacceptable. The University is aware of this issue and is in the process of resolving these problems. However, the problems had clearly been in place for some time, and that the University had been either unaware of this in a timely fashion or unable to prevent the occurrences is, at least, evidence of poor relationship management.

In this particular case, ECU was engaged in the process of terminating the contract at the time of the Audit Visit. The University is addressing how the interests of these students may be served whilst maintaining standards. The solutions had not been developed at the time of the Audit Visit and so could not be audited.

ECU sets enrolment targets for a number of its offshore partners in a manner which may result in disadvantage to the partners if these targets are not met. This approach, while designed to safeguard the University financially, can have the effect of exerting pressure for admission standards to be breached. The University may wish to reconsider the precise manner in which such targets are being used, or the controls in place for ensuring that standards will also be safeguarded.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**That Edith Cowan University ensure that its policies governing entrance and advanced standing are implemented offshore using the same standards as onshore.**

#### 3.3.3 Marketing Offshore Courses

The University has recently sought to exert greater control over marketing materials used to promote offshore programs with which it is associated. The Audit Panel endorses the new audit system in place. However, it is clear that there is still a considerable way to go in achieving adequate control of marketing materials.

The Delegation reviewed a range of marketing materials at each of the partners visited. In some cases, it was clear that ECU requirements had not been met. At one partner institution, it became clear that the partner had been producing and using misleading marketing materials featuring elements of the Edith Cowan University brand. One brochure presented to the Delegation by a student showed a range of programs being offered by the partner in the University's name, which were not actually being offered. Upon further investigation, it seemed likely that the University was unaware of the publication and that the partner had acted independently. However, the University has a requirement built into its agreements for overseas partners to clear any promotional material with the University prior to it being used. ECU must ensure that this requirement is monitored so that it is fully aware of the manner in which its brand is being used.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**That Edith Cowan University develop, implement and monitor systems for effectively controlling all marketing relating to its offshore activities.**

#### 3.3.4 Equivalence

ECU needs to systematically undertake comparative analyses of onshore and offshore student learning outcomes in equivalent courses. In the absence of such analyses it is difficult to be sure that students are experiencing similar learning environments that lead to equivalent student

learning outcomes. Such information could provide rich information for policy development purposes.

### **Recommendation 8**

**That Edith Cowan University regularly conduct comparative analyses of onshore and offshore student performance in equivalent programs, with a view to ensuring equivalent student learning outcomes.**

#### 3.3.5 Plagiarism

The Audit Panel tested the application of ECU policies in offshore settings. Specifically, it selected the issue of plagiarism, as set out in ECU's *Academic Misconduct* policy.

In every case visited, students were very aware of the ECU policy on plagiarism. This indicates effective implementation of the policy.

The Audit Panel was advised by ECU partners that the concept of plagiarism does not transfer easily across cultures, and that an increase in the use of problem-based assessment (as opposed to, for example, reviews of extant theories) would help to ensure that plagiarism rules were not inadvertently broken. The Audit Panel makes no judgment about this idea *per se*, except to note that the depth of discussion manifest in some of the relationships between partners and the University shows an appropriate focus on student learning.

#### 3.3.6 Assessment, Moderation and Invigilation in Offshore Programs

ECU undertakes moderation of most offshore courses either which it has 'validated' (see section 3.6 below) or for which it has contracted out the marking responsibility. The University's success with moderation has been variable, with difficulties experienced in achieving worthwhile turnaround times when using hard copy mail services. ECU has recently taken steps to improve this practice through electronic systems. While there are still instances where moderation is not occurring effectively, a demonstrable improvement is evident and the Delegation was provided with examples in which moderation was very effectively undertaken.

Some partners implemented their own systems of invigilation and advised that ECU had not checked these systems except retrospectively in the process of triennial reviews (see section 3.3.1 above). Invigilation is one of the major quality controls for student assessment and it would be more appropriate for the University to clarify invigilation procedures with partners upon commencement of the relationship, as well as checking on their implementation via the reviews.

The University has included information about its *Academic Appeals Procedures* in the *ECU Directory*, an annual publication given to all students studying at a distance (i.e. including offshore). The Audit Panel examined the 2003 issue and found it to be comprehensive in its attention to this issue. However, with one exception, there was no awareness of the procedures amongst partners' staff and students. It is important that the staff, at least, are thoroughly briefed on these procedures in order to ensure that students can receive all the assistance to which they are entitled as students of ECU.

#### 3.3.7 Administrative Arrangements

Academic staff at the partner institutions do not have access to the ECU online library resources. They believe that this limits their ability to effectively support their students (in terms of assisting students with Library access queries, and also in providing academic advice, checking assignments etc.). The University may wish to consider this issue in the light of its commitment to equivalence in student learning opportunities.

### 3.4 *Recruitment Agents*

The Delegation met with only one recruitment agent, one of the more significant of ECU's agents in South East Asia in terms of student recruitment numbers, and a number of students recruited by that agent. As such, the Audit Panel is careful not to over-generalise. However, the Audit Panel also pursued this issue through discussions with staff in Australia and by reviewing associated documentation.

The *Quality Assurance: Onshore Student Recruitment and Offshore Arrangements* document includes provisions for recruitment agents. Specifically, they undergo a recruitment process that includes a questionnaire, two referee reports and an approval process that involves the International Office and the DVC (Students, Advancement and International). A standard agreement, which includes reference to the AVCC Code of Practice for recruiting international students, applies. These processes appear appropriate.

There are several opportunities for ECU to improve its management of agents, and deficiencies could be addressed by way of additions to the abovementioned provisions. For example, it may be inappropriate to use recruitment agents as invigilators, as this may give rise to a perceived conflict of interest (the University advised that it is not normal practice for agents to also act as invigilators). Indeed, guidelines may be useful in respect of expectations about, and methods for dealing with, responsibilities incurred over and above recruitment. Also, the ability of an agent to effectively and accurately represent the University to prospective students is considerably enhanced by bringing them to the University for an orientation.

All contracts with agents are supposed to be reviewed every two years. As with offshore teaching partners, it seems that the University has not been fully diligent in ensuring compliance with this policy. Consolidation of all contracts with offshore partners – including recruitment agents – may be beneficial, at least in the short term, in order to bring all contracts up to date and establish an effective review and renewal system and schedule.

### 3.5 *Bi-Lingual Programs*

The University, as with many others in Australia, has tested the provision of degree programs in languages other than English. It has learned from its mixed successes in this regard and has recently developed a *Bi-Lingual Courses Policy* which, *inter alia*, states that all certificates and testamurs should clearly state when a degree has been taught in a language other than English. This will help ensure that employers have appropriate expectations of the language attributes of ECU graduates and, because of this closer alignment with the needs of key stakeholders, is a good practice.

#### **Commendation 13**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for demonstrating improvements to its quality assurance processes in relation to bilingual activities in light of its experiences in this area.**

### 3.6 *Validation*

ECU has been engaged in the practice of 'validating' some courses of its partner institutions. This process is formalised in its policy entitled *Validating the Academic Courses of Partner Organisations*, which was approved in February 2003.

ECU uses the term 'validation' in its policy to mean 'the process of approving the course(s) syllabus' and validation results in full credit transfer upon enrolment with ECU. The validated courses are developed, taught and assessed by the partner institutions. The assessment schedules for validated courses typically involve one test and one examination, whereas the equivalent

courses at ECU typically involve two assignments and one examination. The process of validation may also include 10% moderation (see section 3.3.6 above).

There are, ostensibly, two primary purposes of this activity. One is to provide students with an assurance that they will receive full credit transfer for those units upon enrolling with ECU. The second is to make the courses more attractive for the partner's marketing purposes, with a view to increasing the number of students who can then progress into ECU programs. The partner utilises the ECU logo on promotional materials for its courses that have been validated by ECU.

In most cases, the validated courses are undergraduate diplomas, but the Delegation found one validated course which was a postgraduate diploma.

The term 'validation' has no particular official status within the Australian higher education quality assurance framework. However, the *MCEETYA National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* (2000 – hereinafter, the *National Protocols*) provide the following definition of 'accreditation':

*"The term 'course accreditation' includes the assessment, approval, accreditation or authorisation of courses of study that lead to higher education awards, and must include consideration of a provider's capacity to deliver the course, where provider registration or approval to operate is not a separate requirement." (s3.10)*

According to minutes of the meetings in which the policy was approved, the University intended for the policy to involve validation of courses only (institutions being assessed via the separate contract negotiation and review process) and therefore, according to the minutes, ought not to be misconstrued as a form of 'accreditation'. However, it is the view of the Audit Panel, having reviewed the marketing materials and interviewed students concerned, that students (and perhaps other interested parties such as employers) could reasonably believe that 'validation' is being used in a manner that holds a meaning equivalent to 'accreditation' in respect of the courses to which it is applied.

The ECU policy includes a specific requirement that 'the validation process complies with the requirements, if any, of the government or regulating authorities in the overseas country.' This is appropriate, but ECU also needs to attend to Australian requirements. All Australian Universities are expected to abide by these *National Protocols*. Protocol 4 states, *inter alia*:

*"Universities and other self-accrediting institutions do not have the power to accredit the courses of other institutions. Where an institution makes curriculum and materials available to another institution, and the award issued following completion of the program will be issued in the name of another institution, the other institution will be subject to the accreditation requirements of the State or Territory in which it proposes to operate as if it was operating as an independent organisation. The institution in whose name the award will be issued will have full responsibility for the academic welfare of students who are enrolled in programs leading to the award." (s5.6)*

The Audit Panel takes the view that the University's validation policy and activities are ambiguous and potentially misleading.

**Recommendation 9**

**That Edith Cowan University ensure that its validation of courses of other institutions is unambiguously represented in all marketing materials as meaning only that those courses qualify for credit transfer for equivalent ECU units upon enrolling with ECU.**

## 4 RESEARCH, CREATIVITY & RESEARCH TRAINING

The University's strategic priority in respect of Research and Research Training (and Teaching and Learning) is as follows:

*ECU will become a national leader in the education of learners for the knowledge based service professions, and will be recognised for the quality of its teaching and its learning opportunities in those fields. ECU is a teaching and research university, and research will inform its teaching. ECU will be sought out to participate in research projects and productive partnerships. This will be because of the University's excellence in collaboration and the delivery of research outcomes that contribute to policy development and improved practice in the professional fields of business, human services and education, and to advances in health, information and communication technologies and the environment.*

### 4.1 Coordinating and Planning for Research

The functional plan for research is the *Research and Research Training Management Report* (RRTMR). Each Faculty has its own version of this plan. These plans are very well structured (and could be used to help guide the development of other plans within ECU) and do appear to help guide research activity within the University. The University's policies and procedures in this area are coordinated primarily by the Research and Higher Degrees (R&HD) Committee, which includes representatives from all Faculties and reports to the Academic Board.

### 4.2 Staff Research

#### 4.2.1 Research Concentrations

One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

- *Build ECU's research enterprise in selected areas of excellence*

The University has a very well-designed approach to identifying its research strengths. 75% of research activity aligns with the identified research concentrations. A number of multidisciplinary areas are now providing the University with direction and linkages. ECU has developed support mechanisms to build these areas further, and these are addressed in the sections that follow. There is acceptance of this approach within the University and staff feel they were involved in the identification of the areas. There are also mechanisms to review the decisions made and to identify new/emerging areas of strength.

#### Commendation 14

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for establishing pervasive and effective research linkages with communities, government, professions and industry, and for examples of research excellence fostered through a strategy of supporting concentrations that are linked to the needs of these groups.**

Research performance and outputs are uneven across the University. It is not clear that the University is specifically targeting this issue in its research planning.

Research administration and commercialisation at ECU is handled through the Office of Research Services (ORS). The commercialisation of research function is external to ORS and is currently a

key support function in the Management Services Centre. A Commercialisation Committee was formed in March 2003 and an ECU Intellectual Property (IP) Commercialisation Strategy was implemented in September 2003. The IP policy has recently been revised in anticipation of an increase in commercial opportunities. The new policy has yet to be tested, but indicates a desire to ensure that the University will be well-placed to manage such opportunities as they arise.

#### 4.2.2 Research Funding

About 5% of the University's budget is allocated to Faculties through the Research Performance Fund, which is based on the Research Activity Index (RAI – see section 4.2.4). Additionally, the University has a number of internal research funding schemes. These include an Early Career Researchers Scheme (\$100k) and \$400k to support industry linkage research. Faculties may have additional funding schemes. Internal research funding is allocated preferentially to research in the Key Areas.

In terms of external research funding, the Audit Panel was advised that staff applying for external grants such as Australian Research Council (ARC) and National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) may have their applications assessed by an external panel organised through ECU prior to submission to the granting authority. This provides a valuable pre-submission assessment and an opportunity to improve the applications.

#### **Commendation 15**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its use of external panels to pre-assess funding applications to the Australian Research Council and National Health and Medical Research Council.**

#### 4.2.3 Research Centres

ECU operates a three-tiered system of Research Centres. At Level I are Faculty designated research groups/Centres; Level II comprises University designated Research Centres; and Level III are University designated Research Institutes. There are minimum criteria for being designated to each level. This system enables limited resources to be appropriately targeted. For example, Level III Research Institutes, all of which receive substantial external funding, are supported with a \$100k grant from the hosting Faculty; Level II Research Centres receive \$30k from their Faculty; and Level I Research Centres, which are designed to test emerging research areas, may not necessarily receive support funding but may capitalise on having a Research Centre's brand/identity.

The Audit Panel met staff and external stakeholders from a sample of these Research Centres, and found that the system appears to be working well. Indeed, there have been notable successes such as the Centre for Very High Speed Microelectronic Systems, and the Audit Panel was impressed to note the extent to which such centres are continuing to engage in shared projects with other parts of the University.

One exception to this finding is the Centre for Regional Development and Research (CRDR), based at the South West Campus. The CRDR is active in identifying and responding to the research needs of its region, but is largely isolated from the broader research culture and capabilities of the University. The CRDR would benefit from further interaction with staff at other campuses, as well as from additional support – specifically in terms of more senior research staff – in order to raise its overall research capability and capacity, and thereby contribute more effectively to the research aspirations of the University.

#### 4.2.4 Research Outputs and Reporting

One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

*Generate research outcomes that have a significant impact on policy and practice*

ECU has developed a Research Activity Index (RAI) for reporting and monitoring research activity. The RAI may be reported on at the individual staff level and various aggregate levels throughout the University. At the individual staff level, it is incorporated into the workload model (see section 8.5). At aggregate levels it is incorporated into the budgeting model (see section 1.5).

ECU has a number of disciplines, such as within WAAPA and SOCA, for which normal methods of reporting research outputs are not adequate. To that end, it has developed a Creative and Performing Arts Index which is designed to achieve parity of recognition for non-traditional forms of research output. This has helped the University to acknowledge research in the Creative Arts as an emerging area of research strength.

#### **Commendation 16**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for developing the Creative and Performing Arts Index which helps to ensure parity across disciplines when reporting research outputs.**

The Audit Panel accepts the University's claim that it is a young research University; and that its research income and publications are increasing significantly. The University's publications doubled from 1998 to 2002. This is almost entirely attributable to an increase in refereed conference papers. Growth in books, book chapters, refereed journal articles and major creative works has been more or less static. The Audit Panel suggests that a more balanced growth in research outcomes would be more appropriate in light of the University's strategic priority and objectives.

*A Stronger ECU* calls for an increase in publications of 25% over the 2003-2007 period. The Audit Panel affirms the strategies in the University's RRTMR to ensure that this is achieved through a diverse portfolio of publications rather than over-reliance on a single category.

#### **Affirmation 4**

**AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's finding that it needs to develop a strategy for focusing research outputs in higher impact categories.**

### **4.3 Research Training**

One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

*Enhance the quality of research training and increase higher degree research completions.*

#### **4.3.1 HDR Student Numbers**

As at the end of 2002, ECU had a Higher Degree by Research (HDR) student load of 426. Student completions rose from 58 in 1998 to 74 in 2002. Interestingly, the University has set a completions target of 75 students by 2007. DEST's current Research Training Scheme, which appears to favour Universities with stronger research records, is likely to mean that Federal funding for growth in HDR student numbers will be difficult to obtain and that alternative means of funding growth may be required (such as scholarships and full fee-paying enrolments). The University has responded by developing professional doctorates as a growth area. However, the Audit Panel could not see how the implications of  $\approx 0\%$  targeted growth in HDR numbers from

2002 to 2007 were being explicitly incorporated into the wider research planning of the University. For example, the relationship of this target with the appointment of ten new professors appears to be unexplored (see section 8.2 below).

#### 4.3.2 Research Training Management

Oversight of HDR students is the responsibility of the Research Students and Scholarships Committee (RSSC), which is a subcommittee of the R&HD Committee. Research training at ECU is supported by the Graduate School, a central service that manages doctoral admissions and HDR enrolments, monitoring of student progress, thesis examinations, guidelines for minimum support for students and general assistance to supervisors and HDR students. Because of the limited number of places, admittance into HDR places is competitive and Faculties rank each candidate.

#### 4.3.3 Research Student Feedback

ECU participated in the Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) in 1999, 2000 and 2002. PREQ produces reports which seek to provide an appropriate comparative analysis of the University's results against national results, and to report these in terms of strengths and areas for improvement. Overall, in 2002, 81% of students are satisfied with their research training experience at ECU, which is about average for Australian Universities. ECU has used PREQ results to identify students' perceptions of areas in which the University is strong. These include supervision (see below), goals and expectations and skill development. It has also identified areas with the greatest opportunity for improvement, and these include thesis examination, infrastructure and intellectual climate (which is also the most improved item over the three iterations of the survey).

#### 4.3.4 Supervision

The University operates a *Supervision of Honours and Postgraduate Research Students Policy*. All PhD candidates have two supervisors (indeed, some have more). Training programs are available for supervisors, and new supervisors are typically partnered with experienced supervisors. In addition, a range of codes and published materials are available to assist supervisors with their responsibilities.

ECU's own review found that all Faculties now have highly developed research supervision arrangements. Students interviewed by the Audit Panel are positive about their supervision experience. This corroborated high PREQ results which showed 79% agreement (a national ranking of 6<sup>th</sup> – or 5<sup>th</sup> by means) with the quality of supervision.

#### 4.3.5 Support for HDR Students

The University operates a policy for the resourcing of HDR students. Students are allocated an amount, governed by policy, which takes into account the course being studied and whether the student is a Masters or PhD student. This policy is adhered to rigidly, although the manner of controlling the expenditure varies considerably from School to School. This is an issue that the RSSC will need to continue to monitor.

In addition to support from their supervisors, students are also provided assistance with research design, data analysis, and academic writing from the Graduate School.

#### 4.3.6 HDR Student Progress and Assessment

Student progress is thoroughly monitored and quality standards assured. All PhD and Masters by research proposals are refereed, exposing students to high professional standards early in their degrees.

The Graduate School maintains a database of all HDR students. This records all key milestones such as submission of a research proposal and each six-monthly progress report. Reports are produced to assist with the management of student progress. For example, Associate Deans conduct interviews with research students who have been enrolled for two and a half years or longer so that they may meet with them and discuss any impediments to their successful completion.

ECU requires students and their supervisors to submit progress reports every six months. These reports are assessed and given a status grade of either 'Satisfactory Progress', 'Marginal Progress' or 'Fail'. In the event of a 'Marginal Progress' status, a process is invoked to increase monitoring through a negotiated Progress Contract and for the Graduate School to have discussions with the student about any difficulties. A second marginal progress status may result in the student's enrolment being terminated.

#### **Commendation 17**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for establishing and implementing an effective system for monitoring and supporting the progress of Higher Degree by Research students, and particularly for introducing the 'marginal' classification which ensures that potential problems are identified and addressed early.**

The Graduate School is seeking to improve the management of HDR students by considering other data that may have useful diagnostic value. Such data includes completion rates by level of pass.

#### **4.4 Research-Teaching Nexus**

ECU's first strategic priority states that 'research will inform its teaching'. One objective in *A Stronger ECU* is as follows:

*Generate new knowledge that will enrich teaching and scholarship, and which will serve the needs of the community*

The Audit Panel looked for evidence of a systematic approach to achieving this.

There is support for research-informed teaching by all academic staff, and a level of anecdotal evidence to support its accomplishment. However, there was little clarity among those interviewed about what this stated intention means in practice and no systematic strategy for its implementation. While most teaching is done by staff who are also expected to undertake research (although see section 2.3.1 above), reliance on this situation as necessarily leading to research-informed teaching does not provide a strong level of assurance. The *Teaching and Learning Functional Plan*, which provides the operational strategies for the strategic priority, does not include any strategies specific to enhancing the research-teaching nexus. There is an opportunity for the University to develop a source of leadership in this area and to use that to encourage progress towards the intention of fostering research-informed teaching.

**Recommendation 10**

**That Edith Cowan University develop a clearer focus on integrating research and teaching, including specific strategies to assist academic staff with the achievement of research-informed teaching.**

## 5 ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY

The University's strategic priority in respect of "Building Partnerships, Pathways and Precincts" is as follows:

*ECU will strengthen partnerships, pathways and precincts in ways which are consistent with its strategic direction and mission. This will enhance benefits to students and meet increased expectations from students and other stakeholders for cross-sectoral arrangements, facilitate articulation between the different sectors of education and training, and improve the University's market share and general positioning.*

Specific objectives for 2003-2007 are as follows:

- *Clarify, strengthen and deepen its relationship with the VET sector*
- *Strengthen local, national and international partnerships which are of strategic advantage*
- *Identify and develop other local, national and international strategic partnerships to either support its service delivery or for benchmarking purposes*
- *Maintain and enhance efforts to make the University accessible to those from diverse educational backgrounds*
- *Enhance the profile of ECU's educational precincts developments.*

### 5.1 Planning for Engaging the Community

The concept of engaging with the community means different things to different parts of the University. To an extent, this is entirely appropriate. Moreover, there is no doubt that the general intent is widely supported and encouraged. The Audit Panel was exposed to a great many examples of effective community engagement at all levels of the University. Some Schools, such as the School of Contemporary Arts (SOCA), are fundamentally based upon close relationships with the local and regional arts communities. At the institutional level, the establishment of a campus at Bunbury which services the South West Region of Western Australia (see section 1.8 above) is a clear example of tangible support for community needs.

Within the Marketing & Development Office a stakeholder management relationship group system is used. Two new groups are focusing on academics and suppliers. In this way the Office can ensure that the design and delivery of its activities are closely aligned to important stakeholder groups. This appears to be a good practice, although the groups were too new at the time of the audit for their effectiveness to be determined.

While the extent of community engagement is considerable, perhaps less evident is an integrated system for incorporating community engagement into the regular work of academic staff. Engagement is recognised as an academic endeavour for the purposes of workload management, but there is little leadership for the praxis of community engagement. Indeed, amongst academic staff there is a perception that engaging the community is driven largely through the *Marketing and Development Plan*, with the consequence that such engagement is viewed and supported as a corporate activity rather than as an academic endeavour.

## 5.2 *Precincts*

ECU is involved in a number of 'precinct' arrangements. These are designed to encourage each campus to develop mutually beneficial relationships within their local communities. There are currently precinct arrangements at the Joondalup, Mt Lawley and South West Campuses.

Most notable amongst these is the Joondalup Learning Precinct. It is a partnership between the University, Western Australian Policy Academy and West Coast College of TAFE, formed by Memorandum of Understanding in 1999. The City of Joondalup participates as a significant observer. At its most fundamental level, the relationship involved a shared campus. However, it has progressed to include a range of joint marketing activities, events and innovative pathways for students. The management committee meets regularly and continues to explore ways of strengthening the relationship. A number of working parties (the Professional Development Working Party, the Marketing Working Party and the Resources Sharing Working Party) have been established to pursue specific issues of joint interest.

A second precinct is emerging around the Mt Lawley campus. The University and Mt Lawley Senior High School are collaborating on a number of resource projects, such as a \$7M recreation centre and a \$2M parking project, and there is potential to develop joint academic initiatives.

A third developing precinct is the Southwest Centre for Learning and Healthcare involving the local hospital, TAFE and ECU.

The Audit Panel finds that this concept, particularly as implemented at Joondalup, and also at Mt Lawley, is an outstanding concept that gives strong and tangible support to the University's partnerships with the communities it serves and with which it resides.

### **Commendation 18**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its role in implementing Precincts, a concept which demonstrates a substantial and effective commitment to community partnerships.**

The Audit Panel did receive views that central to the ongoing success of the precincts will be continued effort, and parity of esteem amongst the partners. Some concerns were raised about these issues. The Audit Panel conveys these thoughts to the University.

## 5.3 *Indigenous Communities*

ECU has a strong history of commitment to Indigenous communities. This is reflected in, *inter alia*, its *Statement of Reconciliation* (1998) and its *Indigenous Education Strategic Plan*. However, important indicators suggest that the University still has some work to do in addressing its access, participation and retention performance. According to DEST statistics, ECU's Indigenous retention and success rates are the lowest in WA; and its Indigenous access and participation rates, although the highest in the state, have more than halved from 1999 to 2003. ECU advises that the low retention and success rates are exacerbated by a high percentage of external Indigenous students enrolled in enabling courses, a matter which the University is endeavouring to address.

The *ECU Performance Portfolio* states that an Aboriginal Course Advisory Committee provides input into course development and an Aboriginal Consultative Council provides advice on all Indigenous activities at ECU. In practice, it appears that this Council is not operating as effectively as it might. ECU has foreshadowed the need to revisit arrangements relating to the Aboriginal Consultative Committee, particularly in light of recent changes to other equity arrangements. Furthermore, a combined WA universities strategy involving the four Indigenous Higher Education Centres has received support from WA's Vice-Chancellors. An innovative

series of forums on key Indigenous Higher Education issues is planned by each Centre. These steps show appropriate responses by ECU, although it was too soon for the Audit Panel to assess their effectiveness.

## 6 ENGAGING THE PROFESSIONS

The University's strategic priority in respect of 'Engaging with the Professions and Professional Life' is as follows:

*ECU will achieve a position of leadership in professional education, especially in the services sector. The level and nature of ECU's engagement with the formally recognised professions and with areas of professional practice more broadly conceived will distinguish ECU from other universities with professional schools.*

Specific objectives for 2003-2007 are as follows:

- *Develop an academic profile that reflects the changing requirements of the modern knowledge economy and the emerging needs of the professional workplace and which will further differentiate ECU within the higher education sector.*
- *Increase demand for the University's programs from students seeking a relevant and challenging preparation for a professional career, and from employers, professional organisations and government agencies wishing to access its services*
- *Strengthen effective links with the professions, employers of professionals and with professional groups without a formal accrediting body (eg, creative arts, communications, multimedia)*
- *Enhance understanding of how knowledge for the professions is developed and transmitted, through a research focus on policy and practice in areas of professional education, and ongoing dialogue between teaching programs and the professions they support.*

### 6.1 *Planning, Leadership and Coordination*

Engaging with the Professions is not only a strategic priority for the University, but is also more broadly embedded within the three 'defining themes' of ECU, which are Service, Professionalism and Enterprise. The University seeks to promote these concepts via a variety of means (such as brochures with exemplar cases). However, in as much as they relate specifically to engaging with the professions, some staff report a lack of overall leadership and coordination. While most (perhaps all) agree with the sentiment and intention, the Audit Panel was advised that staff would appreciate greater guidance as to how the University envisages the three defining themes being put into practical effect in relation of engaging with the Professions.

Learning how to engage with the Professions is mainly reliant on individuals or groups within Schools/Faculties rather than part of a systematic approach across the University. ECU certainly has the potential to provide leadership in professional education but cannot currently claim such status. The University may wish to attempt to define what is 'special' about professional education and then develop a framework for engagement that could set ECU apart from other universities.

#### **Affirmation 5**

**AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's finding that greater attention should be paid to providing overall strategic leadership in the area of professional engagement.**

## 6.2 *Examples of Engaging the Professions*

Notwithstanding the opportunities to strengthen coordination in this area at the institutional level, there are some excellent examples within Schools of professional engagement. For example, joint ‘Practitioner Scholar’ appointments between Schools and industry help link industry with the activities of the School and vice-versa.

Feedback from students in the SOCA indicates that the plan to improve student learning outcomes and students’ identification with their future professions in the challenging field of the creative arts by bringing in professionals from the field to work with students is highly successful. This achieves a double purpose. It connects the School with practising professionals and gives the students practical experience from role models.

Other examples permeate this report (for example, see section 2.4.1 above on ‘Work-Based Learning’).

## 7 STUDENTS

The University's strategic priority in respect of "Improving Outcomes for Students" (and Staff) is as follows:

*ECU will provide a challenging and supportive environment suited to the students and staff that work and study at the University, so they can realise their potential and develop the skills and flexibility needed to succeed in their careers. It will shape policies, programs, services and infrastructure to foster the active engagement of students and staff in support of ECU's strategic positioning as a leader in education for the service professions. This priority will be outcomes focused.*

Specific objectives for 2003-2007 are as follows:

- *Position the University's teaching, social and built environments competitively to attract and retain students*
- *Build an information and communication technology infrastructure to support teaching, learning and research, and which is capable of providing local, national and international access to the University and its programs*
- *Provide a safe, healthy and inclusive environment, free from harassment or discrimination, for all students*
- *Offer students the opportunity to accelerate the progress of their studies through a focus on outcomes based education, flexible teaching periods and improved skills support and development*

### 7.1 *Student Charter*

The University developed in conjunction with its staff and students a *Student Charter* that outlines the rights and obligations of these three parties in respect of students. The document is readily available to the University community through leaflets and the website. The Audit Panel spoke with a wide range of students and found awareness of the *Student Charter* to be high. While this was enhanced by preparation for the AUQA Audit, the effective implementation of the *Student Charter* was corroborated through the genuinely high level of regard in which students hold the University. The Audit Panel believes that the formation of the *Student Charter* is a tangible and genuine manifestation of a commitment between the University, its staff and students – a commitment which pervades the institution.

It was less clear that the *Student Charter* is actively used by staff throughout the University for such purposes as school/unit planning, staff development or designing student services. Given that the *Student Charter* makes a number of strong commitments (for example, to keeping within published timelines for distribution of marked results), which may subsequently form the basis for student appeals, it behoves the University to ensure that the *Student Charter* is regularly promoted to the University community and that its efficacy is periodically reviewed.

### 7.2 *Student Feedback*

In 2002 the University introduced a *Student Feedback Policy* designed to coordinate annual student feedback activities. One of the outcomes of this policy is the ability of the University to prioritise the top ten issues identified by students that require attention.

The main student feedback systems are the UTEI (see section 2.3.2 above), an ECU Student Experience Survey (SES), and student representation on committees throughout the institution, including on the Council and participation in a specially established Vice-Chancellor's Student Advisory Forum. Other student feedback mechanisms include, for example, the Library Survey and the IT Survey.

The Audit Panel found numerous instances in which data from and about students are incorporated into plans, service development, funding models and other processes. It was encouraging to see the data being put to appropriate use. It also noted the high level of sophistication used to analyse the SES, including a Rasch analysis designed to enhance the accuracy of interpretation placed upon the data. This indicates that students are mostly satisfied in those issues that are important to them (such as their courses), and provides helpful information about the areas in which students believe further attention is required (such as handling of complaints, the Library and teaching and learning spaces).

### **Commendation 19**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the manner in which it analyses and uses data to plan and assess student services.**

### **7.3 *Student Representation***

AUQA Audit Panels ordinarily take into consideration the views of elected student representatives. The audit occurred at a time of significant dispute between the Student Guild and the University concerning electoral processes for the Guild and the establishment and implementation of an Amenities Levy in a voluntary union membership context. In the event, the opportunity to consider such input was not available. AUQA recognises that elected student representative systems can play an important role in the quality assurance framework of a university. As such, the speedy and effective resolution of such issues is important. The Audit Panel looked for evidence that the dispute was being appropriately handled and was informed of formal processes in place to address the situation. As such, the Audit Panel makes no further comment on the matter.

## 8 STAFFING

The University's strategic priority in respect of "Improving Outcomes for Staff" (and students) is as follows:

*ECU will provide a challenging and supportive environment suited to the students and staff that work and study at the University, so they can realise their potential and develop the skills and flexibility needed to succeed in their careers. It will shape policies, programs, services and infrastructure to foster the active engagement of students and staff in support of ECU's strategic positioning as a leader in education for the service professions. This priority will be outcomes focused.*

Specific objectives for 2003-2007, as they relate to staff, are as follows:

- *Position the University's teaching, social and built environments competitively to attract and retain staff*
- *Build an information and communication technology infrastructure to support teaching, learning and research, and which is capable of providing local, national and international access to the University and its programs*
- *Provide a safe, healthy and inclusive environment, free from harassment or discrimination, for all staff*
- *Align the staffing profile and recruitment policies to support the University's strategic priorities, as well as to respond to the emergent context, particularly by maintaining flexibility in staffing arrangements*
- *Build a cohesive and shared work culture around Service, Professionalism and Enterprise.*

### 8.1 Planning for Staffing

Detailed operational planning for human resources is set out in the *ECU Staffing Functional Plan* (the version provided to the Audit Panel covered the period 2003-2006).

### 8.2 Staffing Profile

ECU has a junior academic staffing profile compared with the profiles for other NGU, WA universities and Australian universities in general. The University is making attempts to address this and has a staffing renewal strategy, funded through the Strategic Initiatives Fund. The numbers of staff at Levels C and D is slowly increasing, and ten new professorial positions have been approved, designed to help bring the overall profile more in line with comparator universities. This is a significant investment that may address the issue at least from a statistical perspective. It will also be necessary to ensure that this development is part of an overall, integrated strategy connecting some of the issues raised earlier in this report, such as plans to hold HDR enrolments constant (see section 4.3 above) and the need to address strategically the low research output at Bunbury, where the staffing profile is particularly junior.

Over the past few years, the staffing profile trends indicate a consistency in the numbers of staff at Level A and a minor decrease at Level B. However, such statistics can be misleading without also taking into consideration the increase in the use of casual staff (see section 2.3.1 above), who undertake much of this teaching load.

## **Recommendation 11**

**That Edith Cowan University take steps to increase the seniority of its academic staff profile in accordance with its academic aspirations and in a manner integrated with its other research and research training goals and strategies.**

The current staffing profile indicates that ECU has a greater representation of women in both its overall academic staff profile and at senior academic levels than sector averages (although Levels C, D and E are aggregated, and disaggregation to Level C and Levels D+E) may help with more refined benchmarking). In spite of these statistics, the University's Staff Satisfaction Survey suggested that this is still a matter warranting the University's attention. The Audit Panel explored this matter further by considering an external review of 'Equity and Diversity in Employment' at ECU which found that the University needs to set more explicit targets, based on more detailed data (including more equity fields than gender), to guide efforts in this area. The report also said, however, that the culture at the University is strongly supportive of equity and diversity principles and that the profile trends suggest that the University's equity and diversity strategies are having a positive impact.

### **8.3 Promotions**

The Audit Panel considered the criteria for academic promotions and the process by which promotions take place. Academic promotions are managed through a two-stage process. Faculties initially assess applications and make recommendations to the University Promotions Advisory Committee. This Committee reviews Faculty recommendations, with particular emphasis on level C to D promotions and forwards recommendations to the Vice-Chancellor. Human Resources Services provide training to promotion panels and participate in all panels. The criteria are clear and staff observe that the process is effective and fair. A dedicated web site provides useful information and guidance for applicants.

ECU recently introduced e-Promotions, whereby promotion applications are submitted through the intranet. This is designed to make the process more efficient and considerable personal support was provided to assist applicants. Although a new initiative, feedback thus far suggests that e-Promotions will enhance the overall promotions process.

In as much as staff indicated broad satisfaction with the promotions process, it could be described as effective. However, on a more strategic level there may be an opportunity for improvement. The Audit Panel considered in detail the results of promotions processes for the past four years, particularly for junior staff given the overall academic profile of the University (see section 8.2 above). In both absolute and proportional terms the number of promotion applications is low. For example, the number of applications for promotion to Level B, after discounting postdoctoral students and other staff who might not be expected to apply for promotion, ranged from one person (in 2001, of 76.7 FTE) to a high of six (in 2003, of 73.7 FTE). The number of successful applicants and total applicants for promotion to more senior levels, while higher, are still low in proportion to total staff numbers. It may be useful for the University to routinely analyse and consider the number of applicants as a percentage of staff who would be eligible to apply for promotion.

ECU does not align promotions against comparators, nor did it provide evidence of analysing comparator benchmarks. Yet the data suggests that there may be a number of issues worthy of deeper investigation. It is apparent that the University does not consider the strategic implications of the results of the promotion process as thoroughly as may be appropriate. The Audit Panel concludes that this area requires attention, with findings being factored into human resources planning.

## **Recommendation 12**

**That Edith Cowan University review the outcomes of its promotion process, at appropriate intervals, with a view to determining matters of strategic significance and incorporating them into Human Resources planning.**

### **8.4 *Staff Feedback***

ECU periodically checks on the satisfaction of staff through a Staff Satisfaction Survey. This provides useful information for developing or revising various human resources policies or indeed other strategies to improve the work environment. Evidence suggests that the University does act in response to the survey results, indicating quality assurance in practice (for example, see the comments on resource management in section 1.5 above).

In the results of this survey, staff in RPS (at the South West Campus) report markedly lower satisfaction than staff at other campuses on such items as 'being satisfied in my job', 'valuing employees in my Faculty/Centre' and 'providing for the health and well-being of employees'. The Audit Panel appreciates that in a small campus many factors can influence staff survey results. It also accepts that the University is seeking to address these issues. However, these results contribute to an overall impression formed by the Audit Panel that efforts to bring the South West Campus into parity of esteem with the metropolitan campuses are not yet successful.

### **8.5 *Workload and Managing for Performance***

The University has established and implemented a performance management and review called Management for Performance (MFP – but also regularly referred to as M4P, for example in *Teaching@ECU*). The Audit Panel spoke with a wide range of staff across the University and found MFP to be well embedded. In the last round (ending 31 March 2004), HRS reports that 90% of staff participated. Staff find MFP beneficial, particularly as an effective means of reflecting on their achievements and receiving some positive feedback from their supervisors. Every second year the University reviews MFP using a number of focus groups, and makes improvements to the process.

#### **Commendation 20**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the Management for Performance system, which is well embedded and found to be beneficial by staff and management alike.**

Closely related to the issue of performance management is workload management. Indeed, MFP provides an opportunity for staff to discuss their workloads with their supervisors. Most Schools are operating the University's workload model in a manner tailored to the particularities of their disciplines, and staff, for the most part, find these workload models to be fair and transparent.

#### **Commendation 21**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for the systematic application of a workload model that is regarded by staff as appropriate.**

The model itself will need further development as new activities become more mainstream for the University. For example, offshore teaching workloads are currently handled via a separate mechanism. Already this divergence is being perceived by some staff as creating inequities and behavioural incentives apart from the University's main workload model.

## 8.6 *Staff Exit*

The Audit Panel met with a number of Heads of School and other staff who advised that they perceive staff turnover to be a problem. A review of turnover statistics does not necessarily support this perception, with academic staff turnover at 7.7% and general staff turnover at 11%. Without benchmarks it is difficult to infer much from these statistics, and the University signals in its *ECU Functional Staffing Plan* a need to liaise with other universities to obtain “meaningful benchmark data that will allow the establishment of benchmarked ‘normal bands’ within which to monitor ECU’s staff separations”. Also, the perception staff have of high turnover may be compounded by the high number of casual staff engaged in the teaching program (see section 2.3.1 above).

ECU recognises that further effort is required in determining the causes and consequences of staff turnover (including appropriate benchmarking) so that effective management strategies may be put in place. In particular, it identifies an opportunity to improve its systems for collecting and analysing information at the point of staff departure. The chosen method for doing this will be an improved Exit Survey. The Audit Panel affirms the University’s identification of, and progress towards, such quality improvements.

## 9 OTHER SERVICES

There is a wide range of support services provided at ECU. The Audit Panel could not feasibly consider them all, and selected the sample referred to in sections 9.2 to 9.4 that follow. The cross-service issues of Service Level Agreements and Records Management are also considered.

### 9.1 *Service Level Agreements*

ECU has applied Service Level Agreements (SLAs) in a number of areas as a means of defining the division of responsibilities between Service Centres and Faculties or Schools. SLAs are currently used by the Knowledge and Information Technology Services Centre (KITSC) and Learning and Development Services (LDS), as well as by other support services such as Cleaning, Grounds and ECU Copy Services. Such SLAs typically define each party's responsibilities, excluded services, evaluation methods and problem resolution processes. ECU has found through experience that SLAs are not necessarily the most effective mechanism for managing service relationships in every instance.

The Audit Panel learned that those managers providing leadership in financial services, risk management and internal audit have had no involvement in the evaluation of the effectiveness of these SLAs, and suggests that this is a notable opportunity for improving the overall co-ordination of operational policy implementation and integration of risk management principles and practices.

### 9.2 *Knowledge and Information Technology Services Centre*

The Knowledge and Information Technology Services Centre (KITSC) incorporates Communication and IT Services and the Library into a single administrative entity. The purpose of this is to optimise information services to the academic activities of ECU. The Audit Panel looked at a number of KITSC issues in detail and these follow.

#### 9.2.1 Library

The Library is guided in the medium term by a three-year strategic plan and also employs annual operating plans. A wide range of statistics, including operational statistics (lending rates etc.), hits to the Library's online services and resources; Library surveys (called 'smilies'); Library information from the Student Experience Survey and national benchmarking through the Council for Australian University Librarians (CAUL), are all used to help track progress and identify issues.

The Library utilises Faculty Librarians and teams that help to ensure that there is a close relationship between academic staff and their Library needs, and the resources and services of KITSC. The Faculty Librarians sit on Faculty Boards and CTLCs, ensuring that any Library issues are able to receive due consideration. Academic staff are very supportive of this development.

#### **Commendation 22**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for thoroughly integrating the Library into the affairs of Faculties.**

### 9.2.2 ECU and the Internet

ECU recognises that the Internet has become a pivotal aspect of many of its activities. It has placed significant emphasis on ensuring that it is well-placed to utilise this resource in the interests of staff and students.

One particular example stands out. Mindful that many of the University's growing number of offshore students rely upon Internet access to University resources (such as Library, course materials and email contact) ECU sought to reduce costs and improve reliability and speed of internet traffic. It recognised that Singapore was the major international hub for the majority of its offshore activity, and that the link to Singapore was well below competitive standards. Accordingly, ECU was instrumental in working with other universities and AARNet to bring about an improved link that has resulted in considerable reduction in traffic costs (63%) as well as increased speed and reliability.

ECU has also effectively deployed other strategies designed to optimise sage use of information technologies. For example, many of ECU's offshore partners throughout South East Asia host mirrored sites from which students can access ECU courseware quickly. Also, the University has introduced an Internet Management Policy which has ensured that internet resources are utilised appropriately and efficiently. The policy provides for exceptions to the standard limitations (such as filters and blocked ports), recognising that an academic community will have many legitimate varying demands.

#### **Commendation 23**

**AUQA commends Edith Cowan University for its clear strategic focus on improving Internet access and for reducing Internet costs via initiating and negotiating industry developments and for improving local strategies and systems.**

### 9.3 *Marketing*

The University annually updates a rolling three year *ECU Marketing and Development Plan*, one of the University's suite of functional plans. This well-defined plan has been based on market research and is clearly driving action. It enables the Marketing & Development Office to play a role in the University's approach to engaging with communities and professions (see sections 5 and 6).

The University has a new brand architecture, designed through a consultative process, with which it seeks to position the University in the hearts and minds of its various stakeholders. Deployment of the brand is aided by a style guide, and compliance is audited through the Course Enquiry Taskforce and the Operational Marketing Committee.

Evidence of the success of the University's approach to branding and marketing is found in the winning of external awards, and also through the strong sense of identity many students feel towards the University.

In general, the University's approach to developing and working with a strong brand, and to marketing in its broadest sense, is highly professional.

(See section 3.3.3 above for the marketing of offshore programs).

### 9.4 *Management Information*

The University has developed an executive information system, facilitated by COGNOS software. Some members of the Audit Panel received a presentation on COGNOS and tested it

with a number of queries. ECU has approximately 140 licences from COGNOS, which are used mostly by senior and middle management, with online access to a range of data pertinent to performance monitoring, financial management reporting and decision-making. The data includes student enrolment and academic results data, CEQ and staffing data. All of the University's 17 KPIs are available via the COGNOS system, and the *Annual Statistics Report* is also produced from the system.

The new reporting systems that the COGNOS system promises are not yet fully rolled out. Evidence suggested that further work on COGNOS slowed pending completion of the CALLISTA Student Records project. COGNOS is becoming a very powerful management information tool, likely to become even more so once the CALLISTA project (and other projects such as the Course Management System and UTEI Online – see section 2.3 above) is completed. However, considerable work is still to be done with COGNOS in terms of both user friendliness and training, and also in terms of assisting decision-makers with learning how to build the information into planning processes. The University is considering preparation of a range of standard reports as well as further development of the system and the performance indicators it supports.

#### **Affirmation 6**

**AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's finding that its use of COGNOS requires further development in order to provide users with easy access to information germane to their planning, monitoring and reviewing requirements.**

### **9.5 *Records Management***

Early in 2003, the University commissioned an external review of its records management. The drivers for this included increasing use of technology in records management, a desire for efficiency and effectiveness gains, and a need to comply with the State Records Act 2000 (WA), (which required submission of a Record Keeping Plan by March 2004).

The Review report was very thorough and developed in accordance with a sound method. It was highly critical of the current records management practices of the University and recommended a significant overhaul. The University is to be supported in recognising the need to seek such a review. The Audit Panel affirms the importance of ECU addressing the issues raised within the report.

#### **Affirmation 7**

**AUQA affirms Edith Cowan University's commitment to improving its management of records, in accordance with the findings of a commissioned external review.**



## APPENDIX A. EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

### *History and Location*

Edith Cowan University (ECU) was established on 1 January 1991 as part of the changes flowing from the Dawkins reforms. ECU was formed from the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, itself an earlier amalgamation of a number of teachers colleges. Despite some diversification of the academic profile following the 1982 amalgamations, Education remained a major component of the University's activities.

ECU currently has four metropolitan campuses in Perth (Joondalup, Mt Lawley, Churchlands and Claremont) and one regional campus at Bunbury, approximately 200 kms south of Perth. The South West Campus services the South West Region of WA and offers programs focusing on regional professional studies.

### *Academic Profile*

ECU has five academic Faculties:

- Faculty of Computing, Health and Science (CHS)
- Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences (CSESS)
- Faculty of Business and Public Management (BPM)
- Faculty of Communications and Creative Industries (CCI)
- Faculty of Regional Professional Studies (RPS)

The University also has four major service Centres (which comprise a total of 11 separate Centres):

- Management Services
- Facilities and Services
- Student Services
- Governance, Policy and Planning Services

### *Key Statistics 2003*

Total Student Teaching Load:		21,711
Including:		
Research Student load (2002):		426 EFTSU
International Student Enrolments:	Onshore:	2,113
	Offshore:	1,280
Full time students		63%
Part time students		25%
External students		12%
Students aged 24 years or less		53%
Students aged 25 years or more		47%

Total Staff FTE (not including casual staff):	Academic:	660
	General:	1,067
	Total:	1,727

Total Operating Revenues (2002):	\$203,736,000
Total Operating Expenses (2002):	\$188,274,000

## **APPENDIX B. AUQA'S MISSION, VALUES AND OBJECTS**

### ***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.

### ***Values***

AUQA will be:

1. Thorough: AUQA carries out all its audits as thoroughly as possible.
2. Supportive: recognising institutional autonomy in setting objectives and implementing processes to achieve them, AUQA acts to facilitate and support this.
3. Flexible: AUQA operates flexibly, in order to acknowledge and reinforce institutional diversity.
4. Co-operative: 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.
5. Collaborative: as a quality assurance agency, AUQA works collaboratively with the accrediting agencies (in addition to its audit role with respect to these agencies).
6. Transparent: AUQA's audit procedures, and its own quality assurance system, are open to public scrutiny.
7. Economical: AUQA operates cost-effectively and keeps as low as possible the demands it places on institutions and agencies.
8. Open: AUQA reports publicly and clearly on its findings in relation to institutions, agencies and the sector.

### ***Objects***

The Objects of AUQA are to:

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

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

Mr Martin Carroll, Audit Director, AUQA

Dr Patricia Groves, Accreditation Advisor, Ministry of Higher Education, Directorate General of Private Universities and Colleges, Oman

Professor Sue Johnston (Chairperson), Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching & Learning), University of Tasmania, Tasmania

Professor Stuart Macintyre, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of Melbourne, Victoria

Professor Leo West, Consultant, 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.

AARNet.....	Australia's Academic and Research Network ( <a href="http://www.aarnet.edu.au/">www.aarnet.edu.au/</a> )
ABC.....	Activity-Based Costing
ABEF.....	Australian Business Excellence Framework ( <a href="http://www.businessexcellenceaustralia.com.au/GROUPS/ABEF/">www.businessexcellenceaustralia.com.au/GROUPS/ABEF/</a> )
ADRI.....	Approach-Deployment-Results-Improvement (a model of quality management)
ARC.....	Australian Research Council (see <a href="http://www.arc.gov.au/">www.arc.gov.au/</a> )
AUQA.....	Australian Universities Quality Agency (see <a href="http://www.auqa.edu.au/">www.auqa.edu.au/</a> )
BPM.....	Faculty of Business and Public Management
CAUL.....	Council for Australian University Librarians (see <a href="http://www.caul.edu.au/">www.caul.edu.au/</a> )
CCI.....	Faculty of Communications and Creative Industries
CEQ.....	Course Experience Questionnaire
CHS.....	Faculty of Computing, Health and Science
COGNOS.....	ECU's information management system (also a commercially available business intelligence and performance planning software (see <a href="http://www.cognos.com.au/">www.cognos.com.au/</a> )
CPAI.....	Creative and Performing Arts Index
CRDR.....	Centre for Regional Development and Research
CSESS.....	Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences
CTLC.....	Curriculum, Teaching and Learning Committee
Delegation.....	A Delegation of the AUQA Audit Panel which undertook an audit visit to ECU partners offshore
DEST.....	The Australian Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (see <a href="http://www.dest.gov.au/">www.dest.gov.au/</a> )
ECU.....	Edith Cowan University (see <a href="http://www.ecu.edu.au/">www.ecu.edu.au/</a> )
FTE.....	Full-time Equivalent (staff numbers)
GPPS.....	Governance, Policy and Planning Services (a Service Centre of ECU)
GSA.....	Guided Self-Assessment
HDR.....	Higher Degree by Research
HE.....	Higher Education
IPC.....	International Policy Committee
IQRP.....	Internationalisation Quality Review Process
KITSC.....	Knowledge and Information Technology Services Centre

KPI.....	Key Performance Indicator
LDS.....	Learning Development Services
MFP.....	Management for Performance
MCEETYA.....	Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (see <a href="http://www.mceetya.edu.au/index.htm/">www.mceetya.edu.au/index.htm/</a> )
NGU.....	New Generation Universities – a consortium of about eleven of Australia’s younger universities.
NHMRC.....	National Health and Medical Research Council
OECD/IMHE.....	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development’s Programme on International Management in Higher Education
ORS.....	Office of Research Services
PDRI.....	Plan-Do-Review-Improve (ECU’s Quality model)
QAC.....	Quality and Audit Committee (a committee of the University Council)
RAI.....	Research Activity Index
R&HD.....	Research and Higher Degrees
RPS.....	Faculty of Regional Professional Studies – based at the South West (Bunbury) Campus
RRTMR.....	<i>Research and Research Training Management Report</i>
RSSC.....	Research Students and Scholarships Committee
SARS.....	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SES.....	Student Experience Survey
SLA.....	Service Level Agreement
SOCA.....	School of Contemporary Arts
UTEI.....	Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument
VC.....	Vice-Chancellor
VET.....	Vocational Education and Training
WA.....	State of Western Australia
WAAPA.....	Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts (see <a href="http://www.waapa.ecu.edu.au/">www.waapa.ecu.edu.au/</a> )
WBL.....	Work-Based Learning



