

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of
The Flinders University of South Australia

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OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

In 2006 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of Flinders University of South Australia.

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

The Audit Process

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

On 5 May 2006, Flinders presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) to AUQA, including 11 appendices, along with 57 pieces of supporting material. The Audit Panel met on 29 May 2006 to consider these materials.

The Audit Panel Chair and Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to Flinders on 10 July. During that visit, the Audit Panel's requests for further information, the proposed Audit Visit program and offshore visit were discussed.

On 20-22 July the Audit Panel Chair and the Audit Director visited two partner organisations (Nankai University, Tianjin and the Capital Normal University, Beijing) supporting the delivery of three of Flinders' offshore (transnational education) programs in China. A sample of over 50 staff, students, graduates and employers associated with the programs were met. A written report of this visit was prepared and circulated to the full Audit Panel for its consideration prior to the main Audit Visit. During the main visit, the Panel had the opportunity to meet Flinders' staff who teach and coordinate the three courses offshore.

The main Audit Visit at the Bedford Park campus took place 14 to 17 August 2006. In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 310 people during the Audit Visit, including the Chancellor and members of Council, the Vice-Chancellor and members of senior management, academic staff, general and sessional staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students, student and staff representatives, and external stakeholders. Sessions were also available for any member of the University's community to meet the Audit Panel and seven people took advantage of this opportunity.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 17 August 2006 and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. It records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by Flinders as well as information gained through web resources, interviews, discussion and observation. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of Flinders' activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

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

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. Other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Introduction to Findings

Flinders' distinctive characteristics are outlined in the *Flinders Strategic Priorities and Future Directions Mark III 2006-2010* (FSPFD). The Audit Panel found evidence to confirm a number of these, including strengths in inter-disciplinary activities; a strong focus on postgraduate offerings (offshore and onshore); research strengths in areas such as medicine; disciplinary strengths in, *inter alia*, law, health and cultural tourism; and a general perception of a community that values staff and students. There is an opportunity to use these special characteristics to define a more clearly differentiated market position for Flinders.

Flinders has a comprehensive planning framework which includes various Strategic Overview Action Plans (SOAPs), each linked to the 131 strategies of FSPFD. The planning process could be strengthened through inclusion of responsibilities and timeframes for identified actions, and the use of performance targets against identified priorities. Alignment of the University's existing Key Accountability Measures (KAMs) and SOAPs with Flinders' strategic priorities, and the introduction of specific targets against which performance can be evaluated, is recommended.

Like other universities, Flinders is aware of the need to adapt and renew its activities to operate effectively within an increasingly competitive and rapidly changing environment. The Audit Panel found a range of activities designed to assist the University within this context, including a number of recent initiatives designed to strengthen quality assurance processes, although the Panel concluded that the scale and urgency of performance management and evaluation may be underestimated.

The University's four faculties were created in 1992 and operate with a high level of autonomy in the arrangement of their affairs. This supports its major aims of innovation and multi-disciplinary initiatives. However, the Panel found evidence of inconsistent and/or uneven implementation of some policies and procedures (including student complaints, performance review transnational education and attention to implementation of review outcomes), that operational responsibilities are not always clarified, and that staff with central accountabilities could not always influence faculty processes necessary for implementation of identified initiatives. Improved systems of monitoring, review and accountability are recommended. In relation to its review framework, Flinders does not have a system of cyclical reviews of organisational units or faculties and the range of review processes do not currently encompass all issues involved with management of an academic unit. Cyclical reviews of these areas, involving sufficient independent participation, are recommended.

Council relations with senior executives are strong, and effective induction and mentoring processes for Council members exist. Risk management and governance processes at the institutional level and in relation to controlled entities have been strengthened over recent times, and attention now needs to be given to systematise processes at the faculty and operational unit levels to operationalise the risk management framework.

In general, staff are positive about the working climate at Flinders, share a sense of community and feel that their opinions are listened to. Flinders' has a higher proportion of its academic staff cohort 45 years and over compared to national sector averages and robust workforce planning processes need to be developed as a matter of priority.

There is a wide range of professional development opportunities available to staff and students, including the Flinders Foundation of University Teaching program and the innovative suite of materials to support

research higher degree students. An inaugural leadership program beginning in September 2006 is intended to provide enhanced support for current and aspiring heads of operational units.

Flinders claims a strong commitment to equity, equal employment, diversity and cultural inclusivity, and its proportion of senior women in positions at Level D and above, and access and participation rates for students with a disability, are above national averages. An impressive Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice Toolkit has been developed, which has been purchased under licence by two other universities. The Yunggorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research supports Indigenous education and provides excellent facilities for students. Strategies to improve declining Indigenous staff numbers are to be implemented.

Flinders has a diverse range of academic courses in general and professional areas, including innovative programs that are responsive and highly regarded by students and external stakeholders. Students are generally satisfied with their educational experience, with overall satisfaction results as measured by the Course Experience Questionnaire generally above sector averages. An improvement in performance across a range of measures between 2004 and 2005 has been realised.

There is opportunity to strengthen course approval processes and to assure equivalence of course structures and learning outcomes for courses offered across multiple locations. Opportunities to strengthen quality assurance arrangements for student practicums and placements also exist.

Students appreciate the greater online information available through the expansion of WebCT™ at Flinders, although enhanced planning, governance and quality assurance processes for the use of educational technologies to support pedagogy are recommended.

The development of an Academic Integrity Management Strategy has contributed to a high level of awareness of the University's plagiarism policy amongst staff and students.

Flinders' research measure outcomes generally remain above the national higher education sector averages. Declining trends in several measures, including grants, publications and research income between 2000 and 2004 were reversed in 2005 according to the most recent preliminary annual data. Flinders has recently restructured and refocused the major part of its research activity into Areas of Strategic Research Investment (ASRI) with the aim of maximising performance in response to the changing external environment. The impact of this strategy is yet to be realised, and there is a range of issues to be clarified, including performance measures and expectations and governance structures. Further, the status, purpose and relationship of research centres and research institutes with ASRIs needs to be clarified. Strategies to strengthen systems to monitor training, experience and effectiveness of research higher degree supervisors, such as the development of a supervisor register and introduction of measures of the quality of supervision, are recommended.

A range of initiatives (including staff manuals, workshops, student evaluation of teaching offshore and offshore annual reporting) have recently been introduced to strengthen processes for transnational education, which, when fully implemented will improve quality assurance arrangements. There is a need to ensure that delivery arrangements, agreement provisions, level of moderation and student information are appropriate for, and consistent with, prior credit arrangements in place with some transnational programs and for the University to assure a more consistent approach to the provision of offshore student services and the level of risk assessment of potential partners.

Flinders has a broad and impressive range of community engagement activities and now needs to adopt a more strategic approach to community engagement to ensure that activities are aligned with identified priorities, and to further develop monitoring and quality assurance arrangements.

In relation to student support, the University could reconsider existing delivery models and develop solutions that transcend administrative functions and ensure that students are aware of the services on

offer. In particular, appeals, grievance and complaint processes require attention to increase awareness among staff and students and to ensure issues are resolved promptly.

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

Commendations

1. AUQA commends Flinders for an engaged and consultative Council supported by a sound professional development framework that includes effective induction and mentoring processes, and with supportive and strong linkages to the senior management team.15
2. AUQA commends Flinders for a collegial culture in which staff feel valued.20
3. AUQA commends the range of professional development activities offered by the Staff Training and Development Unit, most notably the Flinders Foundations of University Teaching program, and the innovative suite of materials to support research higher degree students.22
4. AUQA commends Flinders for its commitment to equity, equal employment opportunity, diversity and cultural inclusivity, and in particular for its outcomes in access and participation of students with a disability and development of a Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice Toolkit.24
5. AUQA commends Flinders for the development of innovative degrees that draw on the strengths of the University and meet the needs of industry, including Nanotechnology, Cultural Tourism and the Graduate Entry Medical Program.26
6. AUQA commends Flinders for the development of an Academic Integrity Management Strategy that has contributed to a high level of awareness of the University's plagiarism policy among staff and students.30
7. AUQA commends Flinders for facilitation of cross-disciplinary research outcomes and encouragement of areas of research concentrations through the establishment of Areas of Strategic Research Investment.34
8. AUQA commends Flinders for its diverse range of community engagement activities, including rural and remote health initiatives, the INSPIRE peer mentoring program for students, and establishment of the Australian Science and Maths School on the University's main campus.48
9. AUQA commends Flinders for its effective Library, which has a central place in decision-making within the University, is highly responsive to its users (including those in remote locations), and is committed to quality improvement of its services, informed by benchmarking activities and robust student feedback mechanisms.49
10. AUQA commends Flinders for its Student Learning Centre that makes a highly valued contribution to student academic support and is committed to continuous improvement of its services.51

Affirmations

1. AUQA affirms the recognition by Flinders of the need to strengthen benchmarking processes, and notes that this should be undertaken as part of an institution-wide system to monitor and improve academic standards and outcomes.....12
2. AUQA affirms the action taken by the University to strengthen its risk management framework including enhancement of processes for controlled entities, reporting and governance.19
3. AUQA affirms Flinders' decision to formalise staff feedback mechanisms through administration of a University-wide staff culture survey during 2006 that will enable benchmarking of outcomes with selected universities.....20
4. AUQA affirms Flinders attempts to strengthen workplace planning systems, including development of systematic succession planning processes and introduction of human resource benchmarking processes.21
5. AUQA affirms the introduction of a leadership development program at Flinders to support current and future heads of operational units.23
6. AUQA affirms Flinders' planned development of a cohesive approach to identifying and implementing generic graduate outcomes (attributes) that will assist in preparing graduates for employment and define the characteristics of a Flinders graduate in the labour market.....30
7. AUQA affirms recommendations in the August 2006 external review of Areas of Strategic Research Investment (ASRIs), including the need for Flinders to pay urgent attention to the development of key performance indicators and associated targets, supported by reliable and accurate data provision, to examine appropriate governance models for ASRIs, and to clarify funding and financial incentive arrangements (including distribution of intellectual property income).....35
8. AUQA affirms the need for Flinders to review its policy on centres and in doing so, clarify the status and purpose of centres and their relationship with ASRIs and research institutes.....35
9. AUQA affirms the need for Flinders to implement a statement of minimum resources for research higher degree students as soon as possible.36
10. AUQA affirms work being undertaken by Flinders which, when fully implemented, will strengthen its quality assurance processes for international education, including introduction of a formalised agreement template, student evaluation of topics and teaching offshore, staff manuals and workshops, consideration of standards across multiple locations within its course review process, an offshore annual reporting template and process, and a DVD to support offshore students.43
11. AUQA affirms Flinders' intent to develop and apply the University's strategic directions, monitoring and quality assurance arrangements in respect of its community engagement activities.45

Recommendations

1. AUQA recommends that Flinders strengthen its strategic planning framework through the use of performance targets, consistent alignment of Key Accountability Measures and Strategic Overview Action Plans with strategic priorities and clear specification of responsibilities and expected completion dates for actions identified.11

2. AUQA recommends that Flinders strengthen its quality assurance and improvement system through introduction of regular reviews of its academic operational units that involve sufficient independent participation, and institutional mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of review outcomes.11
3. AUQA recommends that Flinders take steps to improve central systems of monitoring, review and accountability to ensure greater consistency of application of policies and quality assurance arrangements across the University.....17
4. AUQA recommends that Flinders continue to strengthen its risk management approach through development of systematic processes at the faculty and AOU levels, aligned to planning and quality frameworks.....19
5. AUQA recommends that Flinders enhance its course approval processes to ensure that there is a robust and transparent system that monitors quality, standards and educational approaches, and ensures the equivalence of course structures and learning outcomes for courses offered in multiple locations.27
6. AUQA recommends that Flinders formalise a systematic approach to communication of student feedback outcomes, noting that processes should cover students across all locations.28
7. AUQA recommends that Flinders strengthen systems to monitor and evaluate student practicums and placements and ensure consistent implementation of processes to manage these activities across the University.31
8. AUQA recommends that Flinders develop a plan that clearly outlines targets and strategies for the use of educational technologies to support teaching and learning and that governance and quality assurance arrangements are strengthened for the future development of online learning.32
9. AUQA recommends that Flinders develop systems to support a robust process to monitor the training, experience and effectiveness of research higher degree supervisors, such as the development of a supervisor register and introduction of measures of the quality of supervision.37
10. AUQA recommends that for the two courses offered with Nankai University, Flinders ensure that delivery arrangements, student information and partner agreement provisions are consistent with arrangements for prior credit as stated on academic transcripts.42
11. AUQA recommends that Flinders reconsider its existing student service delivery models, including those relating to enrolment processes, and enhance communication to students in order to improve their awareness of service provision.50
12. AUQA recommends that Flinders take urgent action to strengthen processes to ensure that staff and students are made aware of student appeals, grievance and complaint processes and that processes are implemented consistently to ensure that issues are resolved promptly.....53

1 PLANNING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

1.1 *Mission, Values and Aims*

The Flinders mission is expressed as *Think, Learn, Lead, Link*. This informs teaching, research and community engagement activities and the University's stated commitment to innovation.

The University has identified the following distinctive characteristics which it holds as values:

- An internally cohesive university, which combines a participatory mode of governance with effective and responsible leadership, and with a sense of community characterised by a regard for the well-being of students and staff and a commitment to equity, diversity and cultural inclusivity.
- An outward-looking university which seeks out, listens to, takes seriously and meets wherever possible the needs of the multiple external communities that have expectations of universities generally and of Flinders in particular.
- A university of academic breadth, depth and high quality which supports both disciplinary specialities and cross-disciplinary collaborations in education and research, encourages innovation and applies a future-oriented critical perspective to all its current and proposed new activities.

Flinders has identified seven major institutional aims, which are to be:

1. *known locally, nationally and internationally as a research university*
2. *recognised for our leadership position in higher education in establishing courses that are distinctive and relevant, and for offering quality courses that meet national and international standards*
3. *acknowledged by students, graduates, employers, industry, and Australian Indigenous community, the public and our peers for excellence and innovation in teaching and in research*
4. *recognised nationally and internationally as an active contributor in the global higher education network*
5. *acknowledged as leading our peers in commitment and practice in relation to equity, equal opportunity and human relations and for promoting the success and well-being of our students, our staff and our community*
6. *a leader in the community, recognised for engaging with external communities and organisations to create significant mutual benefits*
7. *a medium-sized university, with continued planned growth in activities and income*

These major aims and values clarify the standards that the University sets for itself and the Audit Panel took these, together with more specific goals and objectives set out in the *Flinders Strategic Priorities and Future Directions Mark III 2006-2010 (FSPFD)*, as the basis against which to audit the University's activities and considers that there is an opportunity to use these special characteristics to define a more clearly differentiated market position for Flinders.

The University's location within a mainland state of Australia with a small economy and population relative to other states was identified during the audit as posing challenges for Flinders in achieving its aims, and future growth is focused on the postgraduate student area, on increasing onshore and offshore international student load, and on research activity.

In 2006, Flinders is commemorating its 40th anniversary through a program designed to celebrate and profile the achievements of the University and its alumni and launch a major fund-raising campaign.

1.2 Strategic Planning and Quality Assurance Framework

1.2.1 Flinders Strategic Priorities and Future Directions

The FSPFD builds upon earlier versions of the University's strategic plan developed initially in 2001, reviewed in 2003 and then again in October 2005 (PF p9). It identifies the major institutional aims (section 1.1), then focuses on four principal areas: education, research, international and community engagement, each with specific goals, objectives and strategies. It is a comprehensive plan, comprising 12 overall goals, 72 objectives and 131 associated strategies and there is clear cross-referencing of goals, objectives and strategies within the FSPFD document. Flinders is urged to consider a reduction in the number of goals, objectives and strategies within the FSPFD in order to focus on those of highest priority and provide greater clarity in the context of institutional aims and values and in alignment of Key Accountability Measures (KAMS) to monitor and review performance against the FSPFD (section 1.2.3).

The Audit Panel considers the University's mission statement does not effectively describe the University's unique purposes and benefits and that there is a need to identify the desired future size and academic profile within the planning framework in order to provide a high level perspective on the future of the University.

In May 2006, all objectives of the FSPFD were mapped to the South Australian Strategic Plan and the Ten Year Vision for Science, Technology and Innovation in South Australia to identify areas of alignment and areas for possible further development and focus. This document was considered by the Council at its strategic planning retreat in June 2006; it was therefore not possible for the Audit Panel to examine evidence of the impact on the University's planned priorities.

The Flinders Way handbook contains the key elements of the University's planning and quality assurance framework in a summary form. It is relied upon as the official source of information on planning and quality for most practical purposes.

1.2.2 Strategic Overview Action Plans

The FSPSD is implemented through the development of Strategic Overview Action Plans (SOAPs), prepared annually by the University's four faculties, the Yunggorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research (Yunggorendi), the Library and Central Administration. These each contain actions linked to the 131 strategies contained in the FSPFD. In addition, deputy vice-chancellors (DVCs) develop SOAPs containing actions linked to strategies within their portfolio areas — International, Research, Community Engagement and Education — in consultation with the faculty executive deans.

In general, the Audit Panel found evidence of widespread awareness of the SOAP process amongst staff and an inclusive planning process that allows the faculties and academic operational units (AOUs) to contribute to the development of SOAPs.

While SOAPs are very detailed and contain actions against each strategy in the FSPFD, the plans lack any performance targets identifying desired future outcomes and do not contain timeframes for implementation of all of the actions. Also specific responsibilities have not been assigned for identified actions, making it difficult to clarify operational levels of responsibility.

Progress against actions is reviewed annually by the Vice-Chancellor's Committee (VCC), Academic Senate and Council. Up to five priorities are identified for particular attention in each SOAP, although a report on progress against each action is also provided. A review of the progress reports reveals that many of the actions (including those given priority) are described as 'in progress' or 'completed'. Some of the former provide no specification of the expected completion dates or specific responsibilities for actions. Where actions are described as completed, there is no systematic indication of impact or indication of future reviews planned. It was also not apparent to the Audit Panel that there is a system to ensure that all actions remaining pending at the end of the planning year continued to be monitored through the following year's SOAP.

Although the Panel found evidence that DVCs liaise with executive deans of faculties in developing their SOAPS, a review of the documents reveals that priorities for the University (as identified within the SOAPS developed by DVCs) are not always translated as priorities for the faculties. Similarly, while the SOAP reporting templates require cost centres to identify actions being undertaken as a result of their review of KAMs (section 1.2.3), the relationship between the two is not always clear. Without setting specific priority targets for each faculty, drawing on existing KAMs, and ensuring that these are given prominence in the SOAPS, it was difficult for the Panel to conclude that the SOAP process is used to maximum effect.

In addition to the SOAPS, various plans and strategies are in place for specific activities, such as information and communications technology (ICT) and equity. These are referred to in the context of these areas.

1.2.3 Key Accountability Measures

According to the Performance Portfolio, Flinders has used a suite of performance measures since 1998 to assist in monitoring performance against its goals (p11). As with the SOAPS, Flinders' current KAMs are grouped into four core areas of education, research, international and community engagement (until 2005, international measures were included with education data). KAMs are used to inform annual performance review processes conducted by the Vice-Chancellor and DVCs in conjunction with the executive deans and senior faculty staff. Most of the quantitative measures are reported to Council and Academic Senate annually; others less frequently; and some are reported separately.

Flinders has identified the need to continue to develop its systems to identify and report on KAMs to monitor progress against its community engagement goals, and is undertaking some comparative research with the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance. Research measures are also being refined to reflect better the University's collaborative activities and consultancies. They do not yet provide measures of research quality. Enhanced management information capacities to support this development are expected through the introduction of a new research management system, planned for 2007.

The Audit Panel recognised that the majority of KAMs are those quantitative indicators reported to the Department of Education, Science and Technology (DEST) and are not yet developed sufficiently to measure the University's distinctive characteristics (for example its focus on cross-disciplinary collaborations in education and research). There is opportunity to strengthen the framework through the development of qualitative measures. Significantly, although trend and comparative data (internally and externally) are provided for many of the quantitative measures, enabling performance to be tracked over time, there are no identified performance targets with which to evaluate the level of success, and reporting is largely in a narrative format. The Audit Panel formed the view that the KAMs system requires further enhancement to provide an evaluation process that prompts systematic identification of, and action on, areas for improvement and, consistent with comments in section 1.2.2, considers that KAMs should be aligned to the SOAPS to encourage such practices.

Recommendation 1

AUQA recommends that Flinders strengthen its strategic planning framework through the use of performance targets, consistent alignment of Key Accountability Measures and Strategic Overview Action Plans with strategic priorities and clear specification of responsibilities and expected completion dates for actions identified.

1.2.4 Review Framework

The Audit Panel found evidence of various review mechanisms across the University, including professional accreditation processes, five-yearly course reviews (section 3.3.1), regular Council self-reviews (section 2.1), individual staff performance reviews (section 2.10.4) and ad hoc reviews such as recent reviews of Ethics Committees (section 4.8) and [a review of] faculties (section 2.5). In preparation for audit by AUQA, the University undertook an extensive trial audit using an external panel. Findings of this activity are referred to in context throughout this Report.

Although these reviews indicate a level of commitment to quality improvement, Flinders does not have a system of cyclical reviews of organisational units or faculties. The Audit Panel was informed that reviews are normally instituted based on identification of issues such as teaching performance or the size/viability of a discipline area. Further, there was evidence that ad hoc reviews (including a recent review of faculties) are sometimes based on internal assessment with no external input and that academic organisational units (AOUs) are reviewed only indirectly in the context of their teaching.

The Audit Panel noted that reliance on current monitoring and review processes do not always encompass all issues involved with management of an academic unit and suggest that regular reviews of AOUs, with comprehensive and consistent terms of reference and involving independent input, be instituted. This is considered particularly important within the devolved structure operating within Flinders to provide further assurance that processes are being implemented effectively and consistently across academic units. Flinders' devolved structure is discussed at section 2.5.

The Audit Panel formed the view that review outcomes are not always systematically monitored, finding evidence of implementation plans that had not been updated and outstanding recommendations that appeared not to have been acted upon as they were noted to be outside the responsibilities of the AOU or faculty. Although the trial audit outcomes were used to inform the University's SOAPs, available evidence did not indicate that review outcomes are systematically incorporated within SOAPs at the faculty level.

Recommendation 2

AUQA recommends that Flinders strengthen its quality assurance and improvement system through introduction of regular reviews of its academic operational units that involve sufficient independent participation, and institutional mechanisms to ensure effective implementation of review outcomes.

1.2.5 Quality Steering Group

In 2002, a Quality Steering Group was formed to oversee the development of the University's quality assurance arrangements and preparations for the AUQA audit (PF p15). The group comprises the Vice-Chancellor, three DVCs and the Registrar. The group has developed a Quality web page, including examples of practices which highlight quality, diversity or

innovation aimed at raising awareness and providing a forum for sharing information about practices across the University (PF p15). In the context of considering the most effective organisational arrangements for continuing quality management, the University will consider the future role and composition of the group beyond the AUQA audit.

1.2.6 Benchmarking

The Audit Panel noted numerous examples of benchmarking activities occurring across different areas of the University, particularly based on quantitative data. However, less evidence was available that these processes had been used to improve performance outcomes, and it was clear that activities were not undertaken in the context of an institution-wide system. Given that one of Flinders' major aims is to provide quality courses that meet national and international standards, deliberately focused benchmarking would assist in monitoring and evidencing progress toward these outcomes.

Examples of benchmarking activities included professional accreditation, a recent human resources benchmarking exercise through the Queensland University of Technology (QUT), Australasian University Safety Association's Positive Performance Indicator benchmarking exercise, the Council of Australian Universities Librarians statistics, and benchmarking of courses such as the Bachelors of Arts and Law. Flinders has acknowledged suggestions from its trial audit that it explore further opportunities for benchmarking and, according to its Performance Portfolio (p46), further discussions are to be held in 2006 with the Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRUA) group to identify benchmarking opportunities based on Institutional Assessment Framework (IAF) and Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) data. The Audit Panel was advised that the University was planning later in the year for a benchmarking exercise with Deakin University aimed at improving standards of teaching and learning, and focusing on flagship courses.

Affirmation 1

AUQA affirms the recognition by Flinders of the need to strengthen benchmarking processes, and notes that this should be undertaken as part of an institution-wide system to monitor and improve academic standards and outcomes.

1.3 Financial and Resource Planning and Management

Human resource management is discussed at section 2.10.

1.3.1 Budget Planning and Management

The University's budget allocations are set through the VCC, with input from cost centre heads. The final budget proposal is determined by the Vice-Chancellor prior to endorsement by the Resources Committee and final approval by Council. Heads of major cost centres have significant delegated responsibilities for budget management. Budget processes differ across faculties, with some indicating use of a formula base to devolve budget management to AOU's, others adopting more central faculty control, and some using 'off the top' discretionary elements at the faculty level to support some strategic initiatives.

The Panel was informed that Flinders has limited scope for discretionary funding within budget planning. A high reliance on Commonwealth funding (including Higher Education Contributions Scheme and Commonwealth Loan Programs) of 70.7% compares to a sector average of 56.1% in 2004 and was raised as an area of concern by DEST in the University's last IAF (p7). Flinders has launched the 'Flinders Fund for the Future' fund-raising campaign as part of its 40th anniversary celebrations and has recently established a Development Office to assist in diversifying and increasing its revenue sources. Other strategies include increasing international

income through onshore and offshore students, the introduction of Areas of Strategic Research Investment (ASRIs) (section 4.1) and further strategic development of relationships with government, business and community organisations (refer to Affirmation 11).

The alignment of budget and strategic planning processes was not clear to the Audit Panel, and it formed the view that budget decisions are based more on core performance data (such as student load and historical patterns) than planned priorities. The need for more clarity about the linkages between strategic objectives and the budget process has been confirmed by some Council members through a self-evaluation exercise reported in August 2006. AUQA concurs, and suggests that there is an opportunity for further enhancement to coordinate budget and planning cycles.

1.3.2 Capital Infrastructure and Information and Communication Technologies Planning

Capital infrastructure and ICT planning processes are undertaken through the University's Infrastructure Committee, which is a standing committee of the Resources Committee, chaired by the Vice-Chancellor and comprising all cost centre heads. The Panel did not investigate these processes in detail, but it noted that the University's space requirements appeared to still be informed by a review of the campus conducted in 1992.

An issue identified by several staff, students and external stakeholders during the course of the audit was the perceived inadequacy of physical facilities at the Sturt campus, in particular relating to courses offered by the School of Nursing and Midwifery. The Audit Panel was informed that the University has responded to these identified needs, and new buildings to be constructed on the main campus will enable the School of Education to be relocated in 2007, freeing up some 2000 m² to allow the School of Nursing and Midwifery to expand its operations at the Sturt campus.

2 GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

Flinders' organisational structure includes four faculties across the portfolios of Science and Engineering; Social Sciences; Health Sciences (HS) and Education, Humanities, Law and Theology (EHLT). The Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Executive Deans of Faculty, University Librarian, Executive Director of Administration, heads of the Equal Opportunity Unit and the Public Affairs and Alumni Office and the Director, Yunggorendi have direct reporting lines to the Vice-Chancellor.

Flinders values include *“an internally cohesive university, which combines a participatory mode of governance with effective and responsible leadership, and with a sense of community characterised by a regard for the well-being of students and staff and a commitment to equity, diversity and cultural inclusivity”*.

The Audit Panel concluded that, in general, this was being realised, with evidence of an engaged Council and a collegial culture in which staff feel valued. Opportunities exist to reconsider devolved arrangements in the context of improving consistency of application of policies and quality assurance arrangements across the University (section 2.5).

2.1 Council

The Council, as the governing body of the University, has its powers, authorities, duties and functions set down in the *Flinders University of South Australia Act 1966*. Council comprises 21 members, of whom 12 are external to Flinders.

Flinders claims that there is ‘... a strong, effective and supportive relationship between Council, the Vice-Chancellor and the Senior Executive team’ (PF p18). AUQA found evidence to support this statement, and external Council members highlighted a number of informal and formal communication mechanisms and expressed positive perceptions about their interactions with Flinders' senior management team. External Council members praised the high standards of financial reporting.

A comprehensive Council handbook has been developed to assist Council members and members of its standing committees, which includes information on responsibilities, liabilities and rights of Council members, criteria and procedures for appointment of members and performance review arrangements. Processes for induction of new Council members appear sound, and include formal information sessions, information packages and a tour of campus. New members are also allocated another experienced Council member as mentor, and this practice is highly valued. Since 2005, induction has been expanded to include members of Council's key standing committees; namely Academic Senate, Audit Committee and the Resources Committee. Professional development activities for Council members have included a seminar conducted by the National Institute of Governance on Governance Strategy in Higher Education in April 2006. In order for Council members to gain a wider appreciation of its academic operations, Council has recommended to its external members that they should attend meetings of Academic Senate from time to time. This opportunity is highly appreciated by Council members.

Council undertook its first formal performance self-review in 2002, with the most recent self-evaluation undertaken in 2006 (using an external facilitator for the first time). The review report indicates that a comprehensive process is used, including a short interview and questionnaire involving 35 questions across a range of areas, namely: the role of Council, Council Committees, Skills, Interest and Performance and Meetings. This includes its role in assuring compliance with the National Governance Protocols for Higher Education Providers (National Governance Protocols).

Commendation 1

AUQA commends Flinders for an engaged and consultative Council supported by a sound professional development framework that includes effective induction and mentoring processes, and with supportive and strong linkages to the senior management team.

An annual performance review of the Vice-Chancellor is conducted by the Chancellor based on identified performance indicators linked to the FSPSD and Flinders has recently strengthened Council's involvement in strategic planning. In June 2006 an extra Council meeting was held to conduct a dedicated strategic planning and report session, providing members with information on progress toward implementing agreed priorities and associated performance data using KAMs. Council members expressed appreciation for this session. However, the Audit Panel considers that there is scope for Council to play a more proactive and leading role in strategy formulation, beyond responding to information from senior management and recommending refinements to the existing planning documents. This observation was confirmed from a review of the documentation presented at the forum and outcomes of the most recent Council self-evaluation, and was also identified in the trial audit.

2.2 *Controlled Entities*

The University has a number of controlled entities, including nine that are wholly owned. Governance systems for controlled entities have been strengthened recently to ensure compliance with the National Governance Protocols. This has included introduction of an annual report and risk assessment exercise submitted to Council via the Resources and Audit Committees.

Council members expressed satisfaction with the enhanced risk management processes now in place for controlled entities and noted the significant improvements made recently.

External Council members chair Boards of major controlled entities, including those two sampled by the Audit Panel. Flinders Consulting Pty Ltd is the University's dedicated commercial consulting company, established in 1993. Its relationship with Flinders is detailed in a Memorandum of Understanding; while a Service Agreement developed in 2004 specifies the level of University administrative services available to the Company. The Board comprises six non-executive directors, including three who are external to the University.

Flinders Technologies Pty Ltd was established in 1986. Under a Technology Transfer Agreement (reaffirmed in 1995) the company has first right to technology that the University wishes to commercialise and undertakes consulting as requested by Flinders.

AUQA finds that the University's recently strengthened policy and processes used for controlled entities appear appropriate. There is a need to clarify research commercialisation processes managed by Flinders Technologies and Flinders Consulting (FC) and these issues are discussed at section 4.6.

2.3 *Vice-Chancellor's Committee*

The VCC is an advisory body on significant strategic and operational matters and proposed new developments (PF p20) including course proposals and new staff positions and plays a key role in policy development, and in budget formulation.

The committee meets fortnightly and comprises the Vice-Chancellor, DVC (Academic), the DVC (Research), the DVC (International) and the Executive Director, Administration in addition to the University Librarian, the Registrar and the four executive deans.

Available evidence did not indicate existence of a policy or strategy for succession planning for these senior executives and this is discussed further in the wider context of workforce planning in section 2.10.2.

2.4 Academic Senate

The Academic Senate is the prime body for advising Council on policy, goals and objectives and quality assurance for academic matters. Its terms of reference include responsibility for quality assurance in relation to academic matters and for the review of University performance in these areas. To assist the Senate in discharging its duties, there are several standing committees. These are the University Research Higher Degrees Committee (section 4.4), Scholarships Committee, Student Appeals Committee, Equal Opportunity and Diversity Committee (section 2.11), Course Reference Group (section 3.2), and the Fee Monitoring and Advisory Committee.

The Chair of Academic Senate, normally a senior academic staff member, is appointed by the Vice-Chancellor for a two-year term, and is an ex-officio member of Council. From 2002 to 2004 the position was held by the DVC (Academic). Although not a member of the VCC, the current Chair of Academic Senate attends VCC meetings from time to time. The Audit Panel considers that full membership could enhance communication between the two key decision-making bodies. Ten per cent of the Chair's full-time academic workload is allocated to undertake these responsibilities, and the Audit Panel observed that this is a small allocation of time in comparison to time allocations for these positions in many other universities.

The Academic Senate plays a key role in monitoring KAMs data although it appears to play a minimal role in establishing strategic directions. Dedicated strategic planning forums to enable members to provide greater strategic input into the development of the University's strategic directions, targets and performance measures could more effectively harness the wider expertise within the Senate.

Unlike Council, the Academic Senate does not undertake full self-reviews of its performance (nor do its standing committees). The Audit Panel suggests that formalised performance reviews against full terms of reference would assist with systematic improvement and in enhancing the University's overall review system framework (Recommendation 2 relates).

2.5 Faculties

The present four faculties were created in 1992 in accordance with Statute 4.3, which provides a level of autonomy to faculties in the arrangement of their affairs. There are different structures across the faculties, including substantial differences in the number and types of staffing structures and committees. The Faculty of EHLT comprises four schools, Science and Engineering has three schools, Social Sciences has six schools and four departments (two schools will merge with the establishment of the Flinders Business School from 2007), and Health Sciences has two schools (with 26 departments associated with the School of Medicine). Various centres and Areas of Strategic Research Investment are also attached to faculties.

A review was initiated by the Vice-Chancellor in 2005, following the University's trial audit, in order to consider the effectiveness of faculties and AOU, including committee structures and decision making, appointment of heads of AOU, and the role, composition and function of faculty boards. The review's terms of reference did not extend to academic performance, or adequacy of administrative arrangements. The review process was determined by each faculty, and conducted predominantly by staff internal to each faculty. All involved a staff survey, although staff responses rates were low. No external input was included. Reports from three faculties have been developed in response to the review findings (the Faculty of Health Sciences report is expected in late 2006 and includes consideration of alternatives to the current arrangements within the School of Medicine). The person who had chaired the trial audit was

asked to provide comment on the faculty internal review process. In considering these reports and the review process used, he observed that it was “difficult to escape the impression that these were lightweight reviews with lightweight outcomes”, and the Audit Panel concurs. This reinforces the need for a more robust review process, as set out in Recommendation 2.

Common issues raised from the review across the three faculties included low engagement of staff with the discussions and decisions of the faculty boards and limited communication within and across the faculties and the centre. All universities need to strike a balance between centrally directed policies and processes and the necessary delegation of powers and responsibilities, and the Audit Panel noted that Flinders operates with a significant degree of devolution to its faculties. The Audit Panel probed the issues raised in the review within the context of this degree of devolution and found that communication (particularly to share practices across faculties) could be improved, and that service on numerous committees had an adverse effect on the workloads of some staff. However, in general, the staff interviewed were comfortable with the internal communication arrangements and considered that devolution supported innovation and multi-disciplinary initiatives, both major aims within the FSPSD.

The Audit Panel balanced these advantages of devolution with the findings noted above and evidence of inconsistent and/or uneven implementation of some policies and procedures, including student complaints (section 7.2.6), transnational education (section 5.3), performance management (section 2.10.4) and attention to implementation of review outcomes (section 1.2.4). The Panel also found that staff with central accountabilities could not always influence faculty processes necessary for implementation of identified initiatives, and that operational responsibilities are not always clarified (section 1.2.2). The degree of devolution of the University’s structures and systems should be reconsidered in this context. Improved systems of central monitoring and review would enhance consistency of application of policies and quality assurance arrangements.

Recommendation 3

AUQA recommends that Flinders take steps to improve central systems of monitoring, review and accountability to ensure greater consistency of application of policies and quality assurance arrangements across the University.

2.6 *Yunggoorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research*

Yunggoorendi supports access of Indigenous Australians to tertiary study, teaches into targeted degree programs and undertakes research and Indigenous community engagement activities. The Centre reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor and comprises 11 staff, (ten of whom are Indigenous) and has two visiting professors. Approximately 140 students are attached to the Centre.

The Centre was most recently reviewed in 2003, and recommendations have been addressed to varying levels and will be implemented through a staged process to 2009. The priority recommendation related to the need for senior staff in Yunggoorendi to complete doctorates as soon as possible. A research plan for the Centre is under development. No evidence was provided of benchmarking activities to support the Centre’s activities.

The Audit Panel viewed the excellent facilities at Yunggoorendi, and spoke to staff who indicated appreciation of the University’s support for their activities. The Centre clearly supports Flinders’ stated commitment to equity, diversity and cultural inclusivity, and implementation of the 2003 review recommendations should further enhance outcomes against its stated objectives.

2.7 *Central Support Areas*

Apart from the Library and Financial Services, client feedback tends to be collected informally by several central administrative areas of the University (such as Human Resources, the International Office and Policy and Secretariat). There are opportunities to improve systems to ensure that units consider and respond to client service requirements and feedback beyond reliance on informal mechanisms or the Student Satisfaction Survey conducted every three years.

Services provided by these areas are discussed in the context of relevant sections of the Report, including section 7.2.

2.8 *Policy Framework*

Flinders has a comprehensive policy framework. A booklet 'Education at Flinders: a guide to the principles and policy framework for education and teaching and learning' (dated June 2004) summarises key policy principles, lists relevant policies and plans, and references external documents such as the CEQ. It provides an excellent guide for staff and students and is available through the University's intranet. The booklet supplements a dedicated website that links to full versions of all policies and procedures (including those relating to human resources and financial management issues).

Policy reviews are undertaken as a result of changing external regulatory requirements, internal audit outcomes, issues arising from course reviews or feedback from faculties. Financial management policies are updated annually as part of an audit by the South Australian Auditor General's Department, and human resources policies have been updated to ensure compliance with the Higher Education Workplace Reform Requirements. A range of policy amendments over recent years have been made and some key policies (such as course approval and review) provide for regular reporting in order to monitor implementation progress.

In 2004, as part of Flinders' preparation for its audit by AUQA, an internal assessment of how effectively some key education and research policies had been implemented was undertaken. This resulted in the development or review of various policies, discovery of areas of good practice, and identification of uneven implementation and compliance in some areas. This latter finding was confirmed by the Audit Panel.

While these initiatives show a commitment to continuous improvement by the University, the Audit Panel considers that in order to ensure all policies are formally and regularly updated, a cyclical review schedule should be considered. As well, policy documents would be enhanced by including specific accountabilities and responsibility for implementation, beyond the contact officer currently noted. Evidence also suggests that the University should check effectiveness of existing communication and support systems for staff in implementing policy amendments and new policies.

2.9 *Risk Management*

The University has recently strengthened its risk management processes and systems. In 2005, a framework for monitoring legislative compliance was introduced. This involves classification according to risk level, and annual reporting to the Audit Committee for legislation classified as high risk (such as the Trade Practices Act). A Risk Management Reference Group has also been established, although at the time of the Audit Visit had not yet met.

Other initiatives introduced to enhance risk management and governance practices include introduction of an annual report template and risk assessment exercise for each partly-owned entity (section 2.2), a contracts register and a policy covering delegations of authority to enter into contracts. A set of guidelines for the establishment of significant and commercial ventures has also been introduced, together with a risk management focussed annual meeting of senior

managers, involving Chairs of the Resources and Audit Committees and linked to the FSPFD planning cycle (PF p25).

Impetus for these initiatives has included the National Governance Protocols requirements. The University has also taken cognisance of the Auditor General's report in August 2005 indicating that the University's risk management practices "could be enhanced by the development of a more coordinated, systematic and documented approach to risk management"; and Council self-evaluations that have highlighted a lack of knowledge of processes for managing risk and the need for closer attention at management levels.

Elements of risk assessment are supported by the University's Internal Audit function, which is undertaken under contract to the Internal Audit unit of the University of South Australia. Reports on outcomes from internal audit activities are provided to the Audit Committee, and the Panel was advised that a register of ongoing actions is to be introduced in August 2006 to enable more effective monitoring of outstanding actions from previous audit reports.

Affirmation 2

AUQA affirms the action taken by the University to strengthen its risk management framework including enhancement of processes for controlled entities, reporting and governance.

Although initiatives to strengthen risk management and governance processes at the institutional level were evidenced, the Audit Panel did not find evidence of systematic risk assessment planning or assessment processes implemented at the faculty and AOU levels in order to identify and manage potential risks. Greater attention needs to be given to systematise processes at the faculty and AOU levels to operationalise the University's risk management approach, aligned to the planning and quality management framework.

Recommendation 4

AUQA recommends that Flinders continue to strengthen its risk management approach through development of systematic processes at the faculty and AOU levels, aligned to planning and quality frameworks.

2.10 Human Resources Management

A range of policies and procedures, together with the Enterprise Agreement 2004-2006 provide the framework for human resource management at Flinders. The Executive Director, Administration has overall accountability for the Human Resources Division.

In 2005, Flinders had 1493.3 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff and 900 people classified as 'academic status title' holders. These titles are awarded to recognise the ongoing contribution of external people to the University's programs (most notably to the Faculty of Health Sciences).

In 2004, there was a higher proportion of full-time and fractional full-time academic staff holding higher degree qualifications at Flinders than the average for the Australian sector, and a lower proportion of casual staff.

2.10.1 Staff Culture

The University claims that its human resources are its major asset and that it "has a long-standing reputation for valuing its staff" (PF p23). The Audit Panel sought evidence of this claim and found that in general, staff are very positive about the working climate at Flinders, feel a sense of community and believe that their opinions are listened to. Staff involved in the enterprise

bargaining process indicated a positive experience, and a culture of nurturing and caring was reported by several external stakeholders as well as staff.

One measure of the staff climate can be drawn from staff turnover. Based on figures provided through the QUT benchmarking program, turnover of academic staff for 2005 was 13.2% (as a % of all academic staff) at Flinders, comparing to a sector average of 16.49%.

Commendation 2

AUQA commends Flinders for a collegial culture in which staff feel valued.

Nonetheless, Flinders has no systematic way of obtaining staff feedback to monitor staff satisfaction formally. A University-wide staff climate survey was last conducted in 1996 and the Panel was informed of some other ad hoc arrangements, such as a staff feedback process using an external consultant in the School of Nursing and Midwifery.

Flinders has acknowledged in its Performance Portfolio the need to conduct a further staff survey during 2006 (p27). A survey tool to enable benchmarking with other selected universities was approved by the VCC at the time of the Audit Visit, and the Panel supports this action. An important aspect of the process will be ensuring that staff are made aware of outcomes, and that identified issues are addressed promptly.

Affirmation 3

AUQA affirms Flinders' decision to formalise staff feedback mechanisms through administration of a University-wide staff culture survey during 2006 that will enable benchmarking of outcomes with selected universities.

AUQA notes the importance of ensuring that, once the culture survey has been administered, findings are used to implement improvements.

2.10.2 Workforce Planning

Flinders staff profile indicates an older and ageing workforce, with 65% of academics 45 years and over, compared to a sector average of 56% in 2004 (IAF p 13).

The University has recognised that it needs to address workforce planning issues and to improve succession planning for academic leadership roles (PF p27). The Faculty of EHLT has identified career succession in relation to research and leadership roles as a priority for 2006 through its SOAP. Cost centres are responsible for workforce and succession planning and evidence available confirmed that they have tended to undertake these initiatives reactively rather than as part of a planned strategy.

Planned initiatives to enhance workforce planning processes include future development of a workforce profile report for cost centres, analysis of measures and outcomes from a recently conducted Human Resources (HR) Benchmarking Program coordinated by QUT, development of a Leadership Program (section 2.10.5), and assignment of a staff member within HR to provide support for workforce planning.

The Panel was advised that a large proportion of the University's technical staff profile is older and encourages Flinders to ensure that this cohort is also taken into account in the development of holistic future workforce and succession planning strategies.

Affirmation 4

AUQA affirms Flinders attempts to strengthen workplace planning systems, including development of systematic succession planning processes and introduction of human resource benchmarking processes.

2.10.3 Workload Management

Each AOU determines its own workload formula, guided by the University's Academic Workload Policy and its workload equalisation principles which articulate general expectations of a full-time academic workload per annum. All academic staff are expected to teach and conduct research, though the Audit Panel found evidence that this is not always the case. Staff feedback suggests that in general the system used to allocate workloads is collaborative, with representative academic workload committees used in some AOU's and an awareness by staff of the workload allocation model used.

The University's onshore student/staff ratio for academic staff (excluding casuals) was 21.75 in 2004, below the sector average of 24.95. This has increased from a ratio of 17.75 in 2001. The Audit Panel noted evidence of concerns of increasing workloads in some areas, and workload balance between teaching and research is identified as a priority in the 2006 SOAP for the Engineering and Science Faculty. The Audit Panel observes that implementation of the University's workload equalisation principles and policy should be closely monitored in this context.

2.10.4 Performance Review

In accordance with the University's Academic Staff Performance Review Scheme, all academic staff (other than casual staff) are required to undertake a performance review, normally annually. The policy provides for each supervisor to inform the Executive Dean of implementation. The Panel found evidence of some staff who had not had a performance review discussion with their supervisor in the past year, confirming evidence collected by the DVC (Academic) in 2004-05 that indicated patchy implementation of this policy across the faculties. Compliance with the annual performance review of staff is noted as a KAM, to be reported through the Vice-Chancellor's Management Report to Council each December. A review of the 2005 report indicates that this information was not included.

Performance Management Guidelines for casual academic staff provide for the use of the Student Evaluation of Teaching instrument (SET) (section 3.4.1) as part of an overall assessment of performance at the conclusion of the teaching period for which the staff member is employed.

The performance review and development framework for general staff set expectations that a formal review process take place annually. The majority of general staff interviewed indicated that they had participated in this process, although there was some divergence between policy and practice in both timeframes for review and in the discussion and identification of professional and career development opportunities. Also, some staff perceived that their supervisors had not taken the process as seriously as might be expected. The Audit Panel suggests that the University pursue these issues and identify appropriate strategies to ensure that staff and supervisors are supported in, and understand the importance of, an effective performance review process that includes appropriate coverage of staff development.

2.10.5 Professional Development

There is a wide range of professional development and training programs offered at Flinders, and staff are generally positive about the opportunities available to them. Many professional development activities are provided through the Staff Development and Training Unit (SDTU)

and these are supplemented by initiatives and support at the faculty and AOU levels, including time release for further study and conference attendance.

One of the most notable programs, highly regarded by staff, is the Flinders Foundations of University Teaching (FFOUT) program, participation in which is required of all academic staff new to university teaching who are appointed to continuing or convertible classifications, or to fixed-term positions for a period in excess of 12 months (unless exemptions are granted on the basis of appropriate prior experience or qualifications). A total of 355 staff have completed the program since its introduction in 1998, and the SDTU has a tracking system in place to monitor participation and progress rates as well as to identify staff yet to complete the requirements. The program received a National Teaching Award in 2001 (PF p43) and several staff commented positively on the program and its positive impact on their teaching practices.

In addition to some faculty-based activities, SDTU workshops are available for academic status holders to attend. Statistics reveal a low participation rate (4.1% of all academic status holders) and a decline in attendance (from 133 in 2004 to 72 in 2005) for the SDTU workshops. Sessional staff attendance is also acknowledged as being low, and the Audit Panel was advised that this is an area of attention for the SDTU, which has made progress to strengthen a sessional staff teaching program and plans to introduce a training program for supervisors of sessional teachers in 2007.

Staff in remote locations are serviced by the SDTU through a “summer intensive” program which comprises a week-long series of professional development activities. An online survey was conducted in 2005 to ascertain how to meet the needs of remote staff and results are being used to improve services for this staff cohort.

Various research programs are also provided to staff and to research higher degree (RHD) students. Most notably, programs and resources designed to assist students to develop the skills of self-management were recently successful in a Carrick Citation Award for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning. Flinders now needs to encourage further participation in this suite of valuable activities given that RHD student attendance at least one SDTU program has been approximately 50% (of total RHD student enrolments, excluding staff members who are also RHD students) since 2003.

Commendation 3

AUQA commends the range of professional development activities offered by the Staff Development and Training Unit, most notably the Flinders Foundations of University Teaching program, and the innovative suite of materials to support research higher degree students.

The Flinders’ Mentoring Scheme for Early Career Women Researchers has been operating since 1998 and has provided support for 70 women to build their research careers. A detailed study of the outcomes of the program¹ indicates that participants were more likely to succeed in gaining promotion than non-participants, gained greater confidence of their capacity as an academic, and attracted comparably greater research grant income. This is acknowledged by the Audit Panel as a valuable scheme.

An inaugural Leadership Program will begin in September 2006 to support academic and administrative staff members, including heads of AOUs. As a pilot program, the target participants will already be in leadership positions, although ultimately the University expects that participation in the program will be a prerequisite to being considered for appointment as a head of cost centre, dean or associate head. Although the proposed program content was not

¹ Gardiner, M. (2005) *Making a difference: Flinders University mentoring scheme for early career women researchers...seven years on...* Adelaide, South Australia: Flinders University.

considered by the Audit Panel, this initiative, which is intended provide a more systematic approach to the identification of, and support for, heads of AOU, is strongly encouraged.

Affirmation 5

AUQA affirms the introduction of a leadership development program at Flinders to support current and future heads of operational units.

2.10.6 Induction

Flinders conducts a formal staff induction program centrally twice per year to supplement faculty and AOU induction activities. In general, the Audit Panel found that staff were satisfied with induction provided, although there was evidence of some staff not being inducted, including sessional staff members. Heads of AOU attend individual or small group two-hour induction sessions conducted by the Manager of the Human Resources Division that cover roles and responsibilities and an overview of key HR policies. Evidence suggests that sometimes these sessions are not held until heads have been in the role for six months.

2.11 *Equal Employment Opportunity, Cultural Diversity and Social Justice*

Flinders' institutional aims include to be "*acknowledged as leading our peers in commitment and practice in relation to equity, equal opportunity*" and its values include "*a sense of community characterised by...a commitment to equity, diversity and cultural inclusivity*".

Evidence to support success in its equal employment opportunity and diversity objectives includes Flinders obtaining waiving status for reporting to the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency in 2001 and 2005; achieving Employer of Choice for Women status in 2005; and becoming a signatory to the Corporate Leader for Indigenous Australians Project of the Department for Employment and Workplace Relations. The University's staff profile indicates that from 2000 to 2004 the proportion of academic positions at Level D and above held by women is above the national average.

The number of Indigenous staff at Flinders has grown from 10.8 to 21.9 FTE between 1999 and 2005 (PF p93), although there has been a decline in the number of Indigenous staff in teaching and research positions since 2002 (IAF p22). An Employment Strategy for Indigenous Australians was adopted in 2005 and its implementation is expected to realise an increase in Indigenous staff numbers by June 2007. At the time of the Audit Visit, the Indigenous Employment Coordinator position was vacant. This appointment, and implementation of the strategy, will be important in helping the University to realise its commitment of working toward 1.26% of the workforce being Indigenous Australians.

A range of policies and plans are in place to support compliance with legislative provisions relating to equal opportunity, anti-discrimination and disability provisions. An Equal Opportunity (EO) and Diversity Committee reports to the Academic Senate, and the Equal Opportunity Unit Director reports directly to the Vice-Chancellor. Disability initiatives are supported by a Disability Committee (reporting to the EO and Diversity Committee). EO contact officers are located in each faculty, and those interviewed by the Audit Panel indicated a high level of satisfaction with ongoing training and development to support them in this role.

Diversity Initiative Grants were introduced in 2005 and provide a total of \$10,000 to support individuals, groups or organisational units to advance cultural diversity and inclusive practices within the University's community. In 2005, eight grants were awarded. It is too early for the Audit Panel to comment on the impact of these projects.

In 2004, access and participation rates for students with a disability at Flinders (4.8% and 6.2% respectively) exceeded state and national averages. Flinders has implemented a number of

strategies to achieve this positive outcome, including appointment of a Disability Liaison Officer and nominated Disability Academic Advisers in each faculty and within the Library. Support for students with a disability includes guidelines for staff admitting students with disabilities, implementation of the *AVCC Guidelines on Information Access for Students with Print Disabilities* and practical initiatives such as use of smart cards for students with a vision impairment. In conjunction with other South Australian universities and TAFE South Australia, a “Come and try tertiary study” day for high school students in years 10, 11 and 12 has been introduced to encourage people with disabilities to consider tertiary study. In 2004 attendance of people with a disability increased to 120, from 65 in 2003.

A Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice Toolkit was developed in 2004 by the Equal Opportunity Unit and the SDTU for staff and students to provide practical guidance in carrying out discussions about cultural diversity within teaching and learning, research, leadership and administration, and University community contexts. Its value has been recognised by two other universities, which have purchased the toolkit under licence. The Audit Panel applauds the University for development of the toolkit, although notes that work remains to be done to widen awareness amongst staff and students of the toolkit and its benefits.

Commendation 4

AUQA commends Flinders for its commitment to equity, equal employment opportunity, diversity and cultural inclusivity, and in particular for its outcomes in access and participation of students with a disability and development of a Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice Toolkit.

3 EDUCATION

The FSPFD includes the following goals with respect to education:

1. *be a leader in providing quality programs*
2. *provide leadership in the provision of programs relevant to all stakeholders*
3. *be a leader in fostering a student-focused approach to education*

Responsibility for overseeing the quality of educational programs, teaching and learning outputs and policies relating to teaching and learning is delegated to the DVC (Academic), who reports to the Academic Senate and Council on priorities for education and is supported by the Educational Matters Advisory Group. All faculties have teaching and learning committees.

The University has developed a set of KAMs relating to education that are reported to Council and Academic Senate annually. They are: student progress, student demand, graduate outcomes, student satisfaction as measured by the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Graduate Destination Survey.

Student Progress: Rates have increased slightly over recent years, and in 2004 were similar to sector results at around 91%. Progress rates for Higher Education Contributions Scheme only students are slightly lower than those for overseas fee-paying students. Attrition rates for all students (excluding cross-institutional, non-award and exchange courses) have declined in recent years to 12.6% in 2004-05 (from 13.3% in 2003-04). For undergraduate students, DEST figures suggest that attrition rates are on par with the sector averages.

Student Demand: The ratio of first and second preferences to offers required to fill quotas for 2001-05 reached a peak of 2.6 in 2004 and has dropped back to 2.1 in 2005.

Graduate Outcomes: The proportion of first degree graduates in full-time employment has increased from 72.9% to 81.1% between 2004 and 2005, placing Flinders above the South Australian average and equivalent to the national average in 2005 (PF p42). In 2004, however, results for the fields of education of Natural and Physical Sciences and Society and Culture were well below sector averages. In relation to graduates in full-time study, Flinders' 2004 results are above sector averages.

Student Satisfaction: Flinders' overall student satisfaction results, as measured by the CEQ, indicate a decline from 71% to 65% between 2002 and 2004, although they improve for 2005 back to the previous level of 71%. In relation to the Good Teaching Scale, Flinders' overall results between 2002 and 2005 are consistently above national averages, most notably in the Creative Arts field of education, although the Agriculture, Environmental and Related field of education is well below sector averages.

Overall, this data indicates that students are generally satisfied with their experience at Flinders and an improvement in performance across a range of indicators between 2004 and 2005 can be evidenced.

3.1 Academic Programs

Flinders has a diverse range of academic courses in general and professional areas. In 2006, 228 courses in total were on offer (PF p30). Of the majority, 62 were at the masters coursework level, 64 at the bachelor's level; 40 at graduate diploma level; 36 at graduate certificate level; and eight at the masters by research level.

In pursuit of the goal to “provide leadership in the provision of programs relevant to all stakeholders”, there are innovative programs that are responsive and highly regarded by students and external stakeholders. These include the Graduate Entry Medical Program, the first degree of its kind in Australia. It has been unconditionally reaccredited for six years by the Australian Medical Council, and the curriculum has been purchased under a licence agreement by Griffiths University. A further example is the Cultural Tourism degree, which is well regarded by external stakeholders and students, and involves students publishing a summary of their thesis on the South Australian Tourism Commission’s website. The Bachelor of Science (Nanotechnology) (Honours), introduced in 2000, is claimed to be the first of its kind in Australia.

There is external community input to the development of courses through mechanisms such as industry advisory committees in some discipline areas, and professional accreditation. Other direct community inputs include the use of elements of the Science and Technology Enterprise Partnership within the Bachelor of Innovation and Enterprise degree (PF p86), and outcomes of a graduate employer survey in 2003 being used to design and establish a Professional Studies minor within the Bachelor of Arts.

Commendation 5

AUQA commends Flinders for the development of innovative degrees that draw on the strengths of the University and meet the needs of industry, including Nanotechnology, Cultural Tourism and the Graduate Entry Medical Program.

Flinders has adopted a flexible approach to arrangements for external input to the development of courses and topics, and the Audit Panel found that in some cases, direct evidence of consideration of industry needs in course and topic approval processes was not able to be found.

3.2 Course and Topic Development

Course approval processes are set out in the Policy on Course and Topic Development, Approval and Management, which was updated in late 2005 to provide, *inter alia*, for the involvement of “suitably qualified people external to the University” in the development of courses. Some courses (such as Medical Science and Biotechnology, Health Sciences) use Course Advisory Committees, although this is not consistent across faculties or disciplines. There are policies outlining course requirements and structures for honours programs, masters by coursework, professional doctorates, and research higher degrees.

Courses are generally developed within the AOU, considered through relevant faculty committees and endorsed by faculty boards prior to consideration by the VCC in the context of resourcing and strategic issues, and approval by Council via the Academic Senate. Following endorsement by the Academic Senate, a Course Reference Group considers curriculum and educational requirements and “provides advice to faculties on issues relating to quality, standards or educational approaches”. The policy provides that these issues must be resolved prior to the course being offered. Evidence of the Group’s activities, including recent minutes and comments made on course proposals, was considered. The Audit Panel formed the impression that the process could be further strengthened by requiring that the Group evaluate proposals prior to endorsement by Academic Senate. This would ensure that detailed evaluation of the curriculum is undertaken prior to formal endorsement and would remove any possible reluctance by the Group in raising issues that require further amendments by the faculties at a very late stage of the process.

Library and IT implications for new courses are included in the course approval templates, and are considered at VCC, which includes the Librarian. This is relatively late in the process, and

there is scope for the Library to become involved much earlier in the curriculum development process.

Development of offshore programs is subject to the University's Policy on the Development of Offshore Programs. Academic approval is considered in the same way as significant changes to a course (when courses are already offered onshore), or in the case of new courses, using the course development process noted above. Course approval documentation and a business case accompanied by a draft contract are submitted to the DVC (International) for approval. The Audit Panel considers that there is a need to strengthen processes to ensure equivalence of course structures, curriculum standards and outcomes between courses offered in different locations, such as the requirement for curriculum mapping or similar, during the course approval process. This was confirmed by the Audit Panel's findings from some of the offshore courses reviewed in detail and is discussed further in section 5.3.

Recommendation 5

AUQA recommends that Flinders enhance its course approval processes to ensure that there is a robust and transparent system that monitors quality, standards and educational approaches, and ensures the equivalence of course structures and learning outcomes for courses offered in multiple locations.

3.3 *Course and Topic Evaluation, Monitoring and Review*

3.3.1 Course Reviews

Flinders' Policy on Course and Topic Evaluation, Monitoring and Review provides that courses be reviewed every five years, using terms of reference approved by the DVC (Academic) on recommendation from an executive dean. Recent changes to the policy (October 2005) provide for compulsory external stakeholder input (except for the numerous courses with professional accreditation); a requirement for panel membership to be approved by the DVC (Academic); and for review committees to consider whether standards are comparable with offshore programs or different modes of delivery. These changes, when fully implemented, will underpin development of a more robust system.

Faculties report annually on course reviews completed, progress in implementing recommendations of earlier reviews and on the schedule of planned reviews. Course review reports are provided to the DVC (Academic) and a summary of review outcomes is provided to Academic Senate, together with proposed actions. While this system shows a commitment to quality improvement, some reports viewed by the Audit Panel do not provide assurance that all recommendations are addressed. This is consistent with observations made at section 1.2.4.

Review schedules in each faculty indicate that there are some courses that have not been reviewed for over five years, and the University is urged to assure compliance with the policy requirements.

In addition to course review outcomes, the KAMs process considers outcomes from other relevant data, including CEQs (section 3.4.1).

3.3.2 Topic Evaluation

It is a policy requirement for topic evaluations to be undertaken at the AOU level not less than every five years. The Audit Panel found evidence of a systematic process to ensure topic evaluations were being conducted in some faculties, such as the EHLT, although the degree of

actual implementation varied across faculties and further work is required to ensure consistent implementation of the policy requirements across the University.

As part of this process, a minimum of two student evaluations of each topic within a five-year period is required. The Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) instrument is used, and alternative instruments have recently been developed for problem-based learning, distance education and offshore programs; to be implemented during 2006.

In general, topics are evaluated by students more frequently than the minimum policy requirement. The Audit Panel formed the view that SET evaluations appear to be well embedded and found evidence that they are used to inform improvements to teaching and learning practices and in curriculum development.

3.4 Teaching and Learning Environment

3.4.1 Evaluation, Reflective Practice and Improvement

The policy on Evaluation of Teaching requires that teaching be evaluated by enrolled students at least every two years using the SET instrument. Teachers are able to select additional, operational questions to supplement standard questions, and can select their own topics for evaluation of their own teaching contribution. Information is used in the promotions process, in confirmation of appointments and in academic staff performance reviews. Outcomes of the SET responses for 2005 indicate generally satisfied students.

CEQ scores are monitored each year as part of the KAMs process, with attention paid to performance by each course by field of education. Formal responses are requested from AOU and/or faculties when trends show a decline of more than 10% and where responses number more than 10, and these are discussed at annual KAMs meetings involving the Vice-Chancellor, DVC (Academic) and DVC (International). In 2005, comments from four courses and two discipline areas were sought and evidence of the reports were viewed by the Audit Panel.

Although student evaluation of topics and teaching appears well embedded, the Audit Panel found evidence of a need for more formalised systems to be introduced to ensure that students are informed of the outcomes of feedback provided beyond the current reliance on individual lecturers. The Portfolio (p103) notes that the recently introduced Student Portal, iFlinders, will enable faculties to inform students about various matters, including changes to courses resulting from student feedback, although no associated implementation plan was provided. When a formalised system to communicate student feedback outcomes is implemented, it needs to ensure that it covers students across all locations, on and offshore.

Recommendation 6

AUQA recommends that Flinders formalise a systematic approach to communication of student feedback outcomes, noting that processes should cover students across all locations.

In addition to these policy requirements, student feedback is gathered through consultative committees for some disciplines, for example second-year students in Bachelor of Nursing and Bachelor of Science are surveyed. Such initiatives to ensure that other feedback mechanisms supplement formal CEQ evaluation are commendable and wider adoption of these initiatives across the University would be beneficial.

Student evaluation of the wider learning environment, including pastoral care services, is conducted using the Student Service Survey instrument every three years.

To further evaluate graduate outcomes, Flinders conducts a Graduate Employer Survey of South Australian employers every five years. The most recent survey was undertaken in 2003 (with a response rate of 13.3% covering 294 employers), and a comparison with data in 1998 suggests an improvement in the perceived overall quality of graduates (from a mean of 3.45 to 3.61 using a scale of 1 to 5). The Audit Panel interviewed a sample of employers of Flinders' graduates and found that they are generally very positive about the quality of graduates.

3.4.2 Encouraging and Recognising Teaching Excellence and Innovation

Education at Flinders (p11) states that Flinders has a commitment to “providing incentives, through tangible and demonstrable recognition of achievement and excellence in teaching”.

In addition to local initiatives at faculty and AOU levels, there are several central processes to encourage and recognise staff who develop teaching expertise, including:

- promotions process and professional development activities, including FFOUT (section 2.10.5)
- academic staff performance review process (section 2.10.4)
- Vice-Chancellor's Awards for Excellence in Teaching and an annual symposium on Excellence and Innovation in Teaching
- Teaching and Learning Innovation Grants (\$5000 to \$10,000) to support projects that seek to develop innovation in any aspect of teaching, learning and/or assessment, and
- support for National Teaching Award applications (since 1997, Flinders' staff have been finalists on 12 occasions).

3.5 Graduate Outcomes

As identified in the University's trial audit, although learning outcomes are specified for topics and courses, Flinders does not currently have a set of generic graduate attributes. The Audit Panel was advised that the University is considering development of graduate outcomes through the Educational Matters Advisory Group, using the University's mission as a framework for development, although timeframes and project methodology were not clear. The Audit Panel noted that a Statement of Intent that implied a set of graduate attributes was adopted in earlier versions of the FSPFD documents, although this Statement was removed when the Strategic Plan was updated in 2005.

While acknowledging different disciplinary cultures and the need to contextualise graduate attributes accordingly, AUQA encourages Flinders to invest resources into the development and implementation of a set of graduate attributes (outcomes) that will help to prepare graduates for employment and define distinctive characteristics of its graduates in the labour market. A small sample of employers interviewed by the Panel confirmed that Flinders graduates were highly regarded, citing particular attributes in common such as an outward-looking focus, thoughtfulness, an emphasis on applying knowledge, caring and bright. The Graduate Employer Survey (section 3.4.1) could provide useful feedback to inform development of the graduate attributes.

Once developed and tested appropriately with external and internal stakeholders, the University will need to ensure graduate attributes are embedded through such processes as course approval and review, alignment of assessment tasks, learning activities and learning outcomes, input to teaching practices, and appropriate evaluation and monitoring. Web-based mapping tools used in other universities could also be investigated.

Affirmation 6

AUQA affirms Flinders' planned development of a cohesive approach to identifying and implementing generic graduate outcomes (attributes) that will assist in preparing graduates for employment and define the characteristics of a Flinders graduate in the labour market.

3.6 Assessment and Academic Integrity

The University has developed an Academic Integrity Management Strategy as a result of a review of its academic integrity practices in 2004-05. In addition to revising the Policy on Academic Integrity and associated procedures, this strategy has involved development of protocols for the use of electronic text matching software by staff, and an online interactive package and quiz (completed by approximately 3000 students at the discretion of topic coordinators) to assist in understanding and exercising academic integrity.

There is a high level of awareness of the University's plagiarism policy by staff and students interviewed, including students offshore. Of the sample of topic guides viewed, the majority included a clear statement on the University's academic integrity policy.

Commendation 6

AUQA commends Flinders for the development of an Academic Integrity Management Strategy that has contributed to a high level of awareness of the University's plagiarism policy among staff and students.

A project to audit assessment against topic aims and outcomes is planned, although it has been postponed until 2007 pending the appointment of a Director, Academic Development within the SDTU. This initiative is commendable, and appropriate resources should be provided to enable this project to be undertaken. The project should also consider assessment tasks between different delivery locations (sections 3.2 and 5.3).

The Assessment and Grading Policy sets out assessment expectations for Flinders, and examination boards (some operating jointly for disciplines such as Biotechnology) are responsible for the moderation of assessment outcomes. A Statement of Assessment Methods is required to be developed for each topic, which provides for consultation with students on assessment arrangements. Other monitoring mechanisms for assessment standards include professional accreditation, employer surveys, and a recent honours benchmarking exercise. Evidence of examination boards analysing student results by location was also found.

3.7 Professional placements

It is an objective of Flinders "to expand professional placement opportunities in city, rural and regional areas within Australia and Internationally". A large number of courses include a professional practicum/placement component. Statistics on students involved in placements were not available for faculties other than EHLT and Social Sciences, which had 1147 students and 276 respectively involved in placements during 2005. The enhancement of record keeping systems in the other faculties would provide evidence to monitor progress toward this objective.

Following an audit of its professional placements in 1999-2000, Flinders developed an online program to prepare students to go on work placements using funding awarded through a Higher Education Innovation Programme (HEIP) grant, and a licence to use this has been purchased by some other universities. The University's practicum website includes good practice principles; workshops are offered to those with responsibility for placement coordination; a manual for staff

involved in placements has been developed; and a WebCT™ program to prepare students to go on work placements has been prepared by the SDTU.

The Audit Panel noted that a further review of placements policy and processes was to be undertaken by SDTU during 2006; however it was advised that this has been suspended pending appointment of the Director, Academic Development within the SDTU. The Careers and Employer Liaison Centre (section 7.2.3) also provides opportunities for work placements through its WorkReady program and supports academic practicums in some areas.

Quality assurance processes for practicums differs across faculties, with some having a practicum or field office (such as EHLT) and others relying on academic and clinical staff to support arrangements (such as HS).

The Panel interviewed a sample of students who had been involved in practicums/placements and external organisations that provided these opportunities for Flinders graduates. In general, there was a high value placed on the experience by students. However, student feedback on placements is not always formalised, accommodation arrangements can be difficult for remote students, and there is a perception that staff are sometimes not adequately supported in clinical placements. In the case of clinical placements for nursing, there have been some instances where sufficient practicum places in hospitals were not available (for example in remote locations, a problem experienced by other universities) and students were obliged to undertake placements in community medical centres or nursing homes. They considered that this experience did not enable them to develop the range of skills believed necessary as a foundation for future topics. One offshore student indicated that she did not have the opportunity to undertake a first year clinical placement, unlike students onshore.

Recommendation 7

AUQA recommends that Flinders strengthen systems to monitor and evaluate student practicums and placements and ensure consistent implementation of processes to manage these activities across the University.

3.8 Use of ICT in the Teaching and Learning Environment

The Audit Panel was advised that the University has a target to have six courses fully online by the end of 2006, to be selected through a competitive allocation process for funding to support implementation. Flinders currently has seven of its courses (in EHLT and HS) delivered wholly online through ICT-based flexible delivery. Postgraduate offerings online include Masters of Clinical Education and Graduate Certificate in Tourism (Festival and Event Design and Management). Other uses of ICT to support learning and teaching include multi-media teaching in the anatomy laboratory by the Medical School (PF p45). WebCT™ has been adopted as the primary learning system to support online initiatives, and the student portal iFlinders (introduced in May 2006) provides the access framework. Leadership and support for online and flexible delivery is provided primarily through the Educational Designer, Flexible Delivery within the SDTU, who works with faculty representatives through a Design Advisory Group. A WebCT™ help desk is available to students through the Library. A commitment to developing the use of ICT was included in the previous FSPSD 2001-2005 Mark II, which provided for all courses and topics to have at least a minimum WebCT™ presence by 2005.

A Student Satisfaction Survey conducted in 2004 indicates 95% of internal coursework students use WebCT™. A WebCT™ student survey conducted in 2005 (involving 1570 respondents or 10.7% of all enrolled students) revealed that 83.5% liked using WebCT™, with the most common usage in accessing lecture notes, performing quizzes and tests and communicating via the online discussion board.

Interviews with students confirmed to the Audit Panel the high value placed on the use of WebCT™, and many students expressed their desire to see greater use of WebCT™ in the delivery of courses. Continued efforts to provide greater online information to students through the expansion of WebCT™ in order to support teaching and learning is strongly encouraged.

The online material viewed by the Audit Panel also indicates that there is opportunity to increase the level of interactivity of course material delivered online.

Education at Flinders identifies principles relating to online delivery. However, no evidence of an overall plan for the use of educational technologies to support teaching and learning was found, and the Audit Panel considers that such a plan, primarily driven by pedagogical considerations, would assist in supporting an effective and robust flexible learning framework. Outcomes from a planned staff survey during 2006 on the use of WebCT™ could be useful in informing development of appropriate strategies within the plan.

There is devolved responsibility to the faculties for maintaining content of online courses, and the Audit Panel was not convinced of a coordinated approach to their design, development and implementation, including ongoing staff training and pedagogic review.

Flinders has identified the need to adapt the standard SET instrument for evaluation of online topics to ensure that relevant issues germane to online delivery are identified and resolved. This instrument is planned for development in 2006, and the Audit Panel encourages this initiative to ensure that there are appropriate evaluation mechanisms in place for online delivery.

Recommendation 8

AUQA recommends that Flinders develop a plan that clearly outlines targets and strategies for the use of educational technologies to support teaching and learning and that governance and quality assurance arrangements are strengthened for the future development of online learning.

3.9 Teaching-Research Nexus

A major objective within the research section of the FSPFD is to ensure that course offerings are characterised by a strong teaching-research nexus. The Panel was advised of various examples of staff using research outcomes to inform teaching practices, some students confirmed this practice, and the objective is supported by the expectation of all academic staff to undertake research (although as noted in section 2.10.3, this is not always realised in practice).

An identified strategy for 2006 is to work towards “having the majority of those courses which distinguish Flinders in the education marketplace align with an area of research focus” and to “map courses against the University’s research profile and to develop a process to address identified gaps”. However, no implementation actions have been identified as yet to achieve these goals and no timeframes for completion are indicated within the Strategic Overview Action Plan (SOAP).

4 RESEARCH

The FSPSD includes the following goals with respect to research and research training:

1. *increase the level of high quality research activity across the University*
2. *recruit and graduate high quality research higher degree students*
3. *build strong and productive research links with industry and other external bodies*

The DVC (Research) has delegated responsibility for leadership and management of research, including management of the University's research budget, and is supported by a Research Advisory Committee, a Research Higher Degree (RHD) Committee and a Scholarships Committee. Within faculties, research committees and, in some cases, associate heads/deans, provide overall support.

Flinders places significant emphasis on research, and was ranked ninth amongst all Australian universities in 2004 and 2005 by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research and among the top 100 best research institutions in the Asia-Pacific region within the Shanghai Jiao Tong listing in 2004 and 2005.

Despite these notable achievements, research indicators indicate stagnant performance and a decline relative to the sector over the last several years. In 2004, Flinders research income (excluding IGS and RIBG) was \$26.7 million, the same level as 2000. The University's share of both the total national higher education sector and other IRUA members' research income has steadily declined each year over the same period (IAF p43), although preliminary figures for 2005 indicate an encouraging increase in research income to \$33.3 million (unaudited). Flinders' share of the national total RHD load fell from 1.88% in 2001 to 1.77% in 2004.

Other than research income and RHD load, other KAMs reported to Academic Senate and Council relating to Flinders' research goals include research publications; grant applications and successes; research active staff; completion rates for RHD students and a number of privately and externally funded scholarships.

Flinders' weighted research publication output between 2000 and 2004 increased by 31%, and although its share of national publications decreased, it remained above the national average. The number of ARC Linkage Grant applications has increased to 21 in 2006, and success rates increased between 2004 and 2005 after a decline in 2003-04. There were 596 'research active' staff in 2004 (defined as those who record at least one of the following attributes: research income, publication, or principal supervision). The Audit Panel notes that some other IRUA members take into account research performance over time in framing their definition of 'research active'.

Average RHD completion times have remained steady for the period 2000 to 2004, while the number of externally linked scholarships awarded reached a peak of 117 in 2002, and have declined to 104 in 2005.

In summary, the results indicate that Flinders' research measure outcomes generally remain above the national higher education sector averages, although there have been declining trends in several measures over the last several years that require attention. Some strategies to address these are discussed below.

4.1 *Areas of Strategic Research Investment*

Flinders' principal strategy to support its research goals and improve its research performance has been to realign the University's research effort into Areas of Strategic Research Investment (ASRI) which are essentially areas of research concentration. In 2004, a document outlining a process of competitive selection to identify an initial set of ASRIs was released by the DVC (Research), and in July 2004 the first round of selection began. Since that time, a further two rounds have been undertaken in 2005, one in early 2006 and the most recent (and final) round in April 2006 (referred to as 4+) which was restricted to those who had previously lodged an unsuccessful application. The process has resulted in the establishment of 17 ASRIs for an initial five-year period, each one with a 'home' faculty, the majority of which have cross-faculty and multiple AOU membership. The University has committed a total of \$2.8 million to support establishment of ASRIs, and this funding has been generally used to engage professional staff to support and facilitate development initiatives.

At the beginning of 2006, 490 researchers (either academic status or academic staff) were involved with at least one ASRI, representing approximately 82% of the University's research active staff (PF p50). Performance data for 2005-06 indicates that this figure has increased to around 92%.

As the key strategy in supporting the University's research focus and in improving research performance, the Audit Panel investigated the ASRI processes in some detail and found that the ASRI strategy is facilitating cross-disciplinary research, encouraging grant applications, providing support networks for early career researchers and has prompted development of external collaborations that would not otherwise have been realised. There is general support for the strategy from many staff interviewed, and the Audit Panel notes the particular importance of clarifying research strengths with the impending introduction of the Research Quality Framework nationally.

Commendation 7

AUQA commends Flinders for facilitation of cross-disciplinary research outcomes and encouragement of areas of research concentrations through the establishment of Areas of Strategic Research Investment.

Given that the strategy is relatively new (with the initially established ASRIs being barely two years old), it is inevitable that processes and systems to support the strategy will not be fully developed. A number of concerns and challenges were expressed to the Audit Panel, many of which have been confirmed by a recent external review of ASRIs. Flinders has drawn up an implementation plan to address these.

It was not clear to the Audit Panel that a sufficient level of resourcing will be available to ensure the longer-term sustainability of all 17 ASRIs. There was no evidence of funding support beyond the initial \$2.8 million allocation (although available evidence indicated that discretionary resources would be preferentially directed to ASRIs), and the recent review highlighted the limited availability of space in some cases. Moreover, any preferential financial and other support for ASRIs will need to be carefully considered to ensure that the engagement and productivity of active researchers who are not involved in an ASRI can continue to be harnessed. This need has been acknowledged in the 2004 ASRI implementation document, which notes that guidelines will be released "in due course" (p8). However, clarification is yet to be provided.

Consistent with the University's degree of devolution, ASRI management is the responsibility of faculties and there are different practices across ASRIs and faculties with limited controls to ensure consistency in effective practice. Critically, measures and associated targets to provide clear expectations and evidence of ASRI performance have not yet been developed. The Audit Panel considers that development of a suite of performance measures and associated targets,

together with a process for regular monitoring of outcomes, should be given urgent attention to ensure that performance expectations are made clear as soon as possible and issues can be identified.

Processes to manage broader issues such as conflicting demands between teaching and research commitments for those staff associated with ASRIs, and distribution of research income, including from intellectual property (IP) have yet to be determined. These issues arise because many ASRIs cross faculty boundaries, some staff are involved in multiple ASRIs, and all compete for internal and external recognition and funding with each other and with existing research centres. One ASRI has drafted a 'member charter', indicating a percentage of research time to be committed to the ASRI and agreement to a research levy on all external research income generated, although the status and actual effect of this document was unclear to the Panel.

Many of these issues were identified in a recent external review of ASRIs (August 2006) and the Audit Panel affirms the need for Flinders to take urgent action to address the recommendations contained in the report.

Affirmation 7

AUQA affirms recommendations in the August 2006 external review of Areas of Strategic Research Investment (ASRIs), including the need for Flinders to pay urgent attention to the development of key performance indicators and associated targets, supported by reliable and accurate data provision, to examine appropriate governance models for ASRIs, and to clarify funding and financial incentive arrangements (including distribution of intellectual property income).

4.2 Research Centres

Considerable difficulties were experienced by the Audit Panel when seeking clarification of existing research centres in the context of selecting a sample for closer consideration during the audit. Flinders' research centre website is outdated; many centres listed there are now under review and/or have ceased to operate, and some (such as the Lincoln Marine Science Centre) exist primarily to provide physical infrastructure rather than undertake research activities per se. A range of entities and structures adopt the title of centre, although only some are managed through the University's Policy on Centres. It was unclear to the Panel what review process was in place for those entities and structures not covered by the Policy on Centres.

The Audit Panel concluded that there is confusion and unclear delineation between the University's key research groupings. One ASRI has gained centre status since becoming an ASRI, and some ASRIs were already centres prior to becoming an ASRI. Staff are unclear whether centres will remain part of ASRIs into the future, and there are concerns amongst some staff about the promotion of ASRIs when some existing centres have established external reputations, and the danger of them competing for research funding.

Through its review of policy implementation in 2004, Flinders has identified the need to review its Policy on Centres. The Audit Panel urges the University to take prompt action to complete this review in order to clarify the status, purpose and associated procedures for centres, and their relationship and status vis-a-vis ASRIs and research institutes.

Affirmation 8

AUQA affirms the need for Flinders to review its policy on centres and in doing so, clarify the status and purpose of centres and their relationship with ASRIs and research institutes.

In implementing this affirmation, AUQA notes the importance of the University ensuring that information is widely communicated to internal and external research stakeholders.

4.3 *Resources for Research*

A separate research budget totalling \$6.26 million for 2006 is the main central source of financial support for research activities such as RHD scholarships, research infrastructure, and support for ASRIs. This is distributed by the DVC (Research) on advice of the Research Advisory Committee, with a substantial allocation to faculties for discretionary distribution according to their own plans (PF p55).

The faculty SOAPs reveal that priorities differ between faculties; and this, together with the fact that compliance with the centrally imposed research infrastructure levy does not always occur (PF p62), caused the Audit Panel to form the view that resources may not always be harnessed most effectively to support identified University research priorities. Flinders notes (PF p55) that faculty plans are “progressively being aligned with *FSPFD* research goals, strategies and action plans”.

4.4 *Research Higher Degree Students*

Flinders has a comprehensive suite of RHD policies and procedures that are managed by the University’s RHD Committee. These comprise 29 sections and seven appendices, and cover, *inter alia*, responsibilities of supervisors, conciliation and arbitration procedures for supervised higher degree research and examination procedures. The University first formally identified the need to develop and implement a statement of minimum resources for RHD students to supplement this suite of procedures in its 2004 SOAP, and this need was confirmed by the Audit Panel, which found evidence of differing levels of support for students across disciplines. Examples included office space, computing and photocopying facilities and support for conference attendance. The statement is yet to be implemented, and Flinders is encouraged to ensure that this occurs as soon as possible to ensure adequate and equitable support for all RHD students.

Affirmation 9

AUQA affirms the need for Flinders to implement a statement of minimum resources for research higher degree students as soon as possible.

An impressive suite of workshops, short courses and written materials is available to support RHD students through their candidature, including a student handbook entitled 7 secrets of highly successful PhD students and a Student Related Policies and Procedures Manual. Students interviewed by the Audit Panel who had participated in induction and training programs were generally positive, although some considered that induction would be strengthened through a greater attention to laboratory occupational health and safety issues.

Students indicated that they provide feedback on their experience primarily through completion of an annual review of progress, although some students indicated that they were not inclined to provide negative feedback on their supervision through this mechanism. Other mechanisms for RHD student feedback are provided through the University’s Student Satisfaction Survey, which is administered to all students every three years. In 2004, this revealed that, of the 310 RHD student respondents, 84% were satisfied with their supervision in general. The national Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire (PREQ) instrument is administered to students on completion of their degrees. Response rates are low, and the Audit Panel was informed that no plans are in place to attempt to increase these rates. Further, some senior faculty research staff are not aware of its existence, and there is no evidence to indicate student feedback is systematically used to identify improvements. This evidence led the Panel to conclude that there

is opportunity to enhance the frequency and type of student feedback mechanisms for RHD students and to ensure that outcomes are used to inform improvements to the student experience.

The Higher Degree Administration and Scholarships Office provides central support for research administration and scholarships administration. The Audit Panel heard evidence of a robust process to ensure completion of annual reports by scholarship students, although found it more difficult to identify evidence of tracking systems for non-scholarship students to ensure compliance with the policy. The majority of students indicated that they had completed annual reviews.

The University's RHD and Research Advisory Committees have considered proposals to improve the University's management of student IP and the need for improved processes was confirmed by some students interviewed.

4.5 Research Supervision

It is the responsibility of faculties (through AOU) to ensure that supervisors are suitably qualified in accordance with policy, and that supervision is provided for the duration of candidature. Supervisors are required to undergo training to update skills every five years, although in practice, this requirement is difficult to implement.

In general, students expressed satisfaction with their supervision arrangements, although some areas of concern were identified. The Audit Panel heard of instances where students had not met with supervisors for several months, and of difficulties in appointment of replacement supervisors. In one case, the principal supervisor was also the Head of Department, and the co-supervisor the partner of the principal supervisor. Despite several attempts to meet with them, the student had not succeeded and was unsure of how to resolve the difficulty. These experiences suggest a need for clarification of grievance procedures (see also section 7.2.6) and involvement beyond the AOU in the appointment of supervisors and in some cases in the review of supervision arrangements.

Active (and non-active) supervisors are recorded on the Student One system. Flinders does not have a supervisor register to assist in monitoring training and experience of supervisors, or of overall performance and does not have a measure for quality of supervision (such as student satisfaction with supervision from the PREQ survey) in its KAMs system.

The Audit Panel was informed that some preliminary discussions had been held to create a supervisor register, but this was not an identified priority.

In 2004, a set of guidelines on responsibilities for supervisors was developed. Since then, the Education Matters Advisory Group has noted that honours coordinators are sometimes unclear about their roles, particularly in relation to the level of authority in managing complaints about student supervision (section 7.2.6).

Recommendation 9

AUQA recommends that Flinders develop systems to support a robust process to monitor the training, experience and effectiveness of research higher degree supervisors, such as the development of a supervisor register and introduction of measures of the quality of supervision.

4.6 Commercialisation of Research

Flinders Technologies Pty Ltd (FT) is the principal vehicle for commercialisation of IP generated in the University. Flinders Consulting (FC) also provides a pathway for the commercialisation of

research, facilitating contractual opportunities between external organisations and Flinders' staff (section 2.2).

In its Research and Research Training Management Report 2004, the University recognised the need to improve communication between staff and FT, and to raise awareness of IP issues and potential for commercialisation among staff. Despite some initiatives such as location of a FT staff member within Health Sciences one day per week, staff find commercialisation processes unclear. Some spoke of a perceived competitiveness between FT and FC, creating difficulties for staff, and some external stakeholders consider that opportunities exist for further commercialisation.

The University has identified a potential to develop a 'one stop shop' for researchers for commercialisation activities, aligned to ASRIs (possibly through the amalgamation of FT and FC). AUQA supports the need for Flinders to simplify and clarify its research commercialisation processes, particularly in light of the ASRI structure, and urges the University to take steps to meet this need.

4.7 Research Collaborations

Flinders' research goal to "build strong and productive research links with industry and other external bodies" was considered by the Audit Panel, which noted that KAMs data has not yet been refined to measure performance in research collaborations.

Nevertheless, evidence of a range of collaborative research initiatives was found, and the Audit Panel spoke to a sample of external stakeholders involved in some projects who are generally positive about their relationship with Flinders, commenting that the staff with whom they deal are less constrained by organisational boundaries than at some other universities.

4.8 Research Ethics

Flinders has four committees with responsibility for approving research applications in respect of matters relating to animal welfare, human ethics and biodiversity. Three of these report to the Academic Senate annually, while the Biosafety Committee reports through the Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Committee.

A review of the ethics committees was undertaken over 2005-06 (the first comprehensive ethics review for 10 years) through a three-staged process, involving an external Chair for each stage and a call for written submissions. Of note is that no student input was included. At the time of the Audit Visit, the biosafety review was yet to be completed.

The Audit Panel met a sample of members from each of the committees, and confirmed several of the review findings. These included the need to formalise induction processes and to streamline processes in order to reduce lengthy meetings (noting that some members were often not able to stay for full durations), extensive paperwork and associated workloads of committee members. Some also indicated a need for role clarification of committee members and the need for enhanced training and information for the Flinders community to raise awareness of ethics processes and protocols.

Flinders is working through the recommendations, and has implemented some changes, such as an update to the terms of reference of the Animal Welfare Committee to ensure compliance with the *National Health and Medical Research Council Australian Code of practice for care and use of animals for scientific purposes*. The Academic Senate will receive progress reports on implementing groups of recommendations from the DVC (Research).

5 INTERNATIONAL

The Strategic Plan includes the following goals with respect to international:

1. *internationalise to enrich the University environment*
2. *increase the number of international students in quality programs and generate additional income*
3. *enhance the international profile of the University and its presence in global higher education*

The DVC (International) has delegated responsibility for strategic direction and quality assurance of internationalisation and oversees the development of the International SOAP. An International Committee and an International Fees Committee support development of policy and direction in the internationalisation of Flinders. As part of the University's devolved structure, some faculties manage issues relating to international student enrolments and welfare, and coordinate marketing and recruitment activities, while the International Office and the International Student Services Unit (ISSU) also play a key role in these activities. Each faculty has an International Programs Committee. The Audit Panel found that enrolment arrangements can sometimes lead to confusion amongst students, and further details are included in section 7.2.

There is clear evidence that Flinders' goal to increase international student enrolments is being realised. From 2000 to 2005, international student enrolments increased by 128% (from 1214 to 2772) and in 2005 accounted for 17.6% of total enrolments. International income grew from \$10.1 million to \$21.8 million over the same period.

Offshore enrolments have recently stabilised (at 912 in 2004 and 913 in 2005), although they grew from less than 250 in 2000. For both onshore and offshore students, enrolments are higher in postgraduate courses than in undergraduate courses.

Performance data suggests that the academic performance of international students at Flinders is good. Their progress rate is higher than that of non-international students and their attrition is generally lower than for domestic students (PF p74). For example, in 2004-05 the attrition rate for international students was 6.1%, compared to 11.7% for domestic students, while student progress rates were also higher, at 93% for international students compared to 89% for domestic students in 2005.

Although strong onshore growth has been realised, the Audit Panel found less clear evidence of consistently applied and robust quality assurance processes to support transnational education. These issues are discussed in section 5.3.

5.1 *Internationalisation*

Flinders has identified "internationalisation at home" as including development of global competencies among students and staff (PF p67) and one of its key objectives within FSPSD is to "enrich educational programs by drawing on relevant international perspectives and content".

Several courses cover international issues (such as the Bachelor of International Studies, and the Master of Business Administration (International Business)), and Flinders offers various language topics through collaborative arrangements with other South Australian universities, in addition to overseas study opportunities in some courses (see section 5.4). The Audit Panel, however, found limited evidence of systematic processes to internationalise the broader curriculum. The Education Matters Advisory Group has discussed strategies to internationalise the curriculum,

although no timelines for implementation were provided, and the DVC (International) addresses internationalisation in course review meetings. The Cultural Diversity and Inclusive Practice Toolkit (section 2.11), when fully implemented, should be a valuable tool to assist staff in considering other cultural perspectives in their teaching and learning activities. Should Flinders decide to develop and embed a set of general graduate attributes across its curriculum, this would provide a useful system to ensure global competencies (see Affirmation 7).

AUQA strongly encourages Flinders to identify and implement strategies to internationalise the curriculum in line with its identified objectives.

5.2 *International Students*

In 2005, Flinders had 1855 international students enrolled in programs on campus from 84 different countries. The Audit Panel met a sample of international onshore students, who were generally satisfied with their experience at Flinders, although some concerns were expressed, including around enrolment and grievance systems (section 7.2).

An International Students Policy and Procedures sets out, *inter alia*, provisions of the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS) and the associated *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students*.

Compliance with ESOS and the associated *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students* is managed by an ESOS Compliance Group. The Group monitors aspects of the legislation, provides advice to faculties and administrative divisions to facilitate compliance, and oversees a communications strategy, with the Convenor acting as the University's ESOS Compliance Officer. Membership includes nominees from each faculty, the International Office, Enrolment Services, ISSU and the Public Affairs and Alumni Office. No formal minutes of meetings are taken; however the Panel sighted a table dated September 2005 that set out ESOS requirements, with associated responsibilities and evidence of compliance. An associated communications strategy exists, although it has not yet been implemented. Within a devolved structure it is particularly important to ensure that faculty staff are made aware of their obligations under the applicable legislation. An ESOS compliance website indicates information sessions are to be offered by the SDTU, although these are not advertised in the SDTU website with other scheduled programs. ESOS compliance provisions are also included in governing agreements for the delivery of partnered courses offshore.

The International Student Services Unit and the International Office provide services to international students, including airport reception and accommodation location assistance. A Muslim prayer room, multi-faith Religious Centre and chaplaincy services are available on campus. English language support is provided through the Intensive English Language Institute, established by Flinders and the American Cultural Exchange in 1995.

In 2005, the University reviewed its English-language entrance requirements. Language proficiency of International English Language Testing System 6.0 for both undergraduate and postgraduate courses has remained, although a minimum level of 6.0 in writing and speaking has been introduced (previously there was no requirement for sub-band scores). The Audit Panel supports this change.

The Student Learning Centre, in conjunction with the ISSU, provides an Introductory Academic Program, which until recently was primarily directed to AusAID students. Modules are now more widely available to all international students. A student satisfaction survey conducted in 2003 by AC Nielsen on behalf of AusAID (n=129, a 77% response rate) indicates that the program is viewed positively by students and has no doubt contributed to the University's "outstanding" rating given for AusAID students' satisfaction with support services and the help provided to overcome academic difficulties (see commendation 10).

5.2.1 Student Recruitment

An annually updated University-wide International Student Recruitment Plan guides the recruitment process. The University has also recently introduced an enhanced international agent process, including minimum criteria, a standard questionnaire, an agents database, and checklist for appointment. The Audit Panel did not fully consider implementation of these new initiatives but considers that the revised documents, when fully implemented, will provide a sound framework for performance evaluation and inform a planned reduction in the number of agents contracted by Flinders.

5.3 *Offshore Programs*

Flinders does not have any offshore campuses, and offers transnational education through partnership arrangements. After reviewing the information provided by Flinders about its onshore and offshore activities, the Audit Panel decided to visit a sample of Flinders' offshore partners in China. These were Nankai University (Tianjin) and Capital Normal University (Beijing). Three programs were audited at these locations, namely:

- Master of Arts (International Relations in Economy and Trade)(IRET) (346 students)
- Master of Hospital Administration (169 students)
- Master of Education (182 students)

Common strengths of the courses were apparent. These included the strong reputation of the partners in China and the good reputation of the courses, evidenced through consistent demand and positive perceptions of the courses by a sample of employers and graduates interviewed. Both partners viewed the relationship with Flinders positively and expressed hope that the partnership would be continued into the future.

The Audit Panel found a number of opportunities for improvement to quality assurance practices, some of which would be expected to be addressed through initiatives under development, as noted throughout this section and in Affirmation 10. These include consistently communicating outcomes of student feedback to partner staff and offshore students (see also section 3.4.1); less reliance on partner processes for induction, ongoing training and review of offshore staff; and the provision of consistent and appropriate levels of student support services, including student orientation, and (in the Master of Education course) the level of English language support for students. Some formal agreements are silent on processes to assure compliance with copyright legislation, although this has been addressed in revised contract templates introduced in 2005. The Audit Panel formed the view that monitoring of the contract provisions is reliant on individual relationships rather than a regular formal monitoring and review system.

Flinders is planning to establish an alumni chapter in China, and graduates expressed support for this initiative and for the invitation extended to some to be involved in Flinders' 40th anniversary celebrations. The Panel considers that there is potential for increased promotion of the University in China. Many students expressed a desire to know more about Flinders, and the Audit Panel was informed that some are undertaking programs based on the partner's reputation rather than on the reputation of Flinders.

The requirements of the Master of Arts (IRET) are confirmed by the University as having equivalent status to the corresponding Master of Arts (International Relations) offered onshore and elsewhere through coursework or research streams. Similarly, the Master of Hospital Administration is considered by Flinders to have equivalent status to the Master of Health Service Management. The Audit Panel therefore investigated course structures, credit arrangements, topic outlines and assessment requirements across these courses. A review of the course guides and the course structures outlined in the governing agreements revealed different assessment requirements, the use of an entrance examination developed and administered by the partner for which credit is provided offshore (but not onshore) and different credit points awarded for the

research dissertation component of the course. This confirms the need to continually monitor the equivalence of learning outcomes, including through the practice of examination boards analysing student results by different locations (Recommendation 5 also relates).

The Audit Panel also experienced difficulties in reconciling actual delivery arrangements and course structures with the student academic transcripts for these courses. Specifically, Flinders advised that the topics taught by Nankai University (Nankai) are taught in Mandarin using curriculum supplied by Nankai; and further that these Nankai topics are regarded as prior credit and therefore are not moderated by Flinders staff. This is consistent with sample academic transcripts viewed for both courses that note the Nankai topics as “credit for prior study”. However, the student handbooks, Flinders Course Information Handbook and governing agreement provisions with Nankai indicate a different arrangement. They outline course structures that comprise a requisite number of topics and a dissertation. Some of the topics are described as being provided by Nankai as part of the course, and some by Flinders (in the case of the Master of Arts (IRET) Flinders provides eight topics of the required 14 topics and a thesis for completion of the course). Furthermore, the topics delivered by Nankai are taught throughout the duration of the course and not in advance, as would be expected for prior study credit arrangements. This arrangement calls into question the lack of moderation by Flinders of Nankai topics and the testamur, which does not indicate that the course is offered jointly, nor that any of its components are delivered in Mandarin.

The Audit Panel urges Flinders to take appropriate steps to clarify this situation to ensure that the delivery arrangements, agreement provisions, level of moderation and student information are appropriate for, and consistent with, the prior credit arrangements stated on the student academic transcripts.

Recommendation 10

AUQA recommends that for the two courses offered with Nankai University, Flinders ensure that delivery arrangements, student information and partner agreement provisions are consistent with arrangements for prior credit as stated on academic transcripts.

The Audit Panel considered the University’s processes for approving the delivery of a sample of several courses offshore. Evidence was found to suggest that there is scope for a more consistent approach to the level of risk assessment undertaken of potential partners. In particular, consistent processes are required to ensure that there are appropriate strategies and support mechanisms identified, implemented and monitored which address the unique risk profiles of different partners based on information gathered during the due diligence process (such as market research conducted by Australian Education International). Risks (particularly those relating to institutional reputation and students) identified through the due diligence information should also be highlighted for particular attention during the offshore annual reporting process. The establishment of an Offshore Programs Reference Group and the revised contract template introduced in 2005 would be expected to provide a framework to ensure risk factors are addressed more systematically in the implementation of offshore programs.

Prompted by recent reviews of its offshore program processes, including an Internal Audit in 2003 and a review of contracts in 2005, Flinders has recognised the need to enhance its quality assurance systems to support transnational education and has initiated various strategies accordingly. A formalised contract template has been developed, which provides a tighter and more consistent legal framework for offshore partnered activities, including exit strategies. A contracts register is used by staff within the International Office to record all exchange agreements, Memoranda of Understanding and contracts. Program monitoring is also being enhanced, with the introduction from 2006 of an offshore annual reporting template that includes review of strategic value, financial, resources and services, risk management and quality

assurance measures and results for each program. An instrument for student evaluation of topics and teaching offshore has been introduced from semester two 2006. Formation of an offshore programs working group is proposed, which will monitor offshore programs and assess proposals for further programs. Recent changes to the course review process also provide for consideration of comparability of standards across multiple locations. As part of the DEST Transnational Quality project, Flinders is developing a handbook for offshore teaching, workshops for staff teaching overseas, and a DVD to provide further information about Flinders for offshore students.

The Audit Panel endorses these initiatives which, when fully implemented, will contribute significantly to enhancing Flinders' quality assurance systems for international education to support a targeted growth strategy.

Affirmation 10

AUQA affirms work being undertaken by Flinders which, when fully implemented, will strengthen its quality assurance processes for international education, including introduction of a formalised agreement template, student evaluation of topics and teaching offshore, staff manuals and workshops, consideration of standards across multiple locations within its course review process, an offshore annual reporting template and process, and a DVD to support offshore students.

Flinders does not have a policy or quality assurance processes for delivery of programs in a language other than English, and these are expected to be developed in order to be able to offer a Graduate Diploma of Nursing (Emergency Care) in Norway from 2007 in Norwegian. In light of Recommendation 11, these policies may possibly need to have wider applicability to other courses offered at Nankai University.

Examinations were not offered in the postgraduate courses sampled by the Audit Panel. The Examination Office assumes responsibility for the coordination of one offshore exam conducted in Malaysia. It appears that a robust system is used to ensure exam security, including invigilation procedures, same day examinations, deactivation of online discussion boards and extensive communication with the partner to ensure consistency of practices. It was noted that some examinations are conducted through the faculties, including those for the Bachelor of Nursing in Norway, and the Audit Panel suggests that Flinders consider using the expertise of the Examination Office for all offshore programs to assure consistent and robust practices are in place across the University.

5.4 Student Mobility

Flinders has exchange partnerships with approximately 60 institutions, broader links with more than 100 others (PF p65), and is a member of the International Network of Universities. Some of these partnerships also facilitate staff exchanges.

Optional overseas study opportunities are also provided in some courses, such as the American Studies Washington Internship Program that enables students to undertake a six-week placement in the United States Government, and final year medical electives being taken offshore (PF p68).

In an attempt to support and increase student mobility, some scholarship funding to enhance opportunities has been secured and in 2005 an exchange fair was held for the first time, which was attended by over 600 students. Flinders is also a member of the newly established Innovative Universities European Union Centre. The Audit Panel endorses these initiatives in line with Flinders identified objectives.

5.5 *Credit Transfer*

A Credit Transfer Policy for students entering Flinders has been developed, and the University is currently undertaking a project to consider credit transfer arrangements for students coming from international institutions, with the aim of building a University-wide approach and a database for credit transfer. The Audit Panel was informed that a benchmarking exercise with two other universities on credit offered into IT and business degrees from diploma courses offered in China through International Education Network Institutes would be undertaken to also inform precedents for the database. The Audit Panel supports these initiatives to strengthen University-wide systems for credit transfer arrangements and notes that, once implemented, evaluation of effectiveness of the arrangements should be undertaken.

6 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The FSPFD includes the following goals with respect to community engagement:

1. *make a significant impact on the social, cultural and economic well-being of society*
2. *be a connected and collaborative university*
3. *be a good corporate citizen*

The DVC (International) has delegated responsibility for strategic direction and coordination of community engagement and monitoring of quality through the KAMs process, although other DVCs retain responsibilities for community engagement within their portfolios and the Yunggorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research (Yunggorendi) for developing and conducting relationships with Indigenous communities. The DVC (International) is supported by a Community Engagement Reference Group (CERG) comprising internal staff.

Flinders undertakes a broad and impressive range of community engagement activities, particularly in southern Adelaide and the state of South Australia. In 2004, the direct economic impact of Flinders on the South Australian economy was estimated at \$250 million (PF p80).

The Audit Panel concurs with the University's identified opportunity for improvement to adopt a more strategic approach to community engagement to ensure that activities are aligned with identified priorities and for the need to further develop a set of community engagement measures.

6.1 *Planning and Performance Measurement*

The University first included specific community engagement goals within its FSPFD 2001-2005 Mark II and has developed a preliminary set of measures as part of its KAMs process, although most of these are yet to be refined and implemented.

The University has acknowledged feedback from the trial audit report that "ongoing work is required to further develop and focus the University's strategic directions, monitoring and quality assurance arrangements in respect of its community engagement activities". The Audit Panel concurs.

Flinders has also acknowledged the need to undertake benchmarking in the community engagement area to assist in identifying appropriate measures and strategies and has identified the possible use of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance and IRUA for this purpose (including piloting a community engagement assessment framework). The Audit Panel supports this initiative, in line with Affirmation 1.

Affirmation 11

AUQA affirms Flinders' intent to develop and apply the University's strategic directions, monitoring and quality assurance arrangements in respect of its community engagement activities.

The National Institute of Labour Studies has been commissioned to conduct a community services survey every five years on behalf of Flinders, the last one of which was in 2002. The report commented that "almost all academic staff engage in some form of community service" (PF p92). Given the diverse range of expertise in community engagement across the University, opportunities exist to formalise systems to share expertise and embed aspects of community engagement within the curriculum. Examples include the development of training programs and short courses or forums coordinated through the CERG.

Community engagement is encouraged through the academic promotions policy, which requires staff to address a professional performance category.

6.2 *Key Communities: Focus of Engagement*

The Audit Panel noted the breadth of the University's participation across numerous communities. In addition to the major community outreach strategy through its 40th anniversary celebrations, activities include those outlined below.

6.2.1 State and Regional Engagement

One of Flinders' primary communities is the southern Adelaide region, and Flinders has close links with a number of organisations including the City of Onkaparinga, City of Marion, TAFE SA and the South Australian Health Service.

The Southern Program for Improved Participation in Education supports students in completing high school and making transition to work or further study. The program incorporates peer mentoring (known as INSPIRE) that provides Flinders students with an opportunity to mentor young people. In semester 1 2006, over 130 trained Flinders student mentors were supporting around 520 young people across 30 partner organisations. The program for implementing the outcomes of INSPIRE into the academic curricula is being piloted by some disciplines across Flinders, including Education and Sociology, and the Audit Panel met students involved, who expressed positive views about their experience in the program. The INSPIRE program is funded to 2009 through a grant from the Department of Families, and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and has been identified as good practice in youth development by the South Australian Government Office for Youth (PF p90).

The University's regional engagement is broad, and Flinders has received revenue of more than \$37 million since 2002 to support rural and remote health initiatives. Flinders' Rural Clinical School has an administrative base at the Renmark Paringa Hospital in the Riverland region of South Australia. This provides the parallel rural community curriculum to enable medical students to undertake the third year of their course of study whilst located in a rural community, and working under the guidance of local general practitioners. Its activities also extend to rural-based research and clinical training across the health professions (PF p83). The Audit Panel interviewed a sample of students and a staff member from the Renmark site, who were generally positive about their experiences in this region.

The University also has a presence in the Northern Territory to support rural and remote health initiatives, with facilities and partnerships (including the Royal Darwin and Alice Spring Hospitals), to enable medical students to undertake the final two years of their course while based in the Territory (PF p83). The Audit Panel met a student undertaking a clinical placement in this region, who valued the opportunity highly.

The Greater Green Triangle University Department of Rural Health, operated in association with Deakin University, is based at Warrnambool and has satellite campuses in Hamilton, and Mount Gambier.

Other activities not directly related to health include involvement in the newly established South Australian Centre for Innovation Inc. (with the Engineering Employers' Association of South Australia and the University of South Australia (UniSA)) to provide specialist services and encouragement of high-growth South Australian companies to innovate (PF p83) and the Lincoln Marine Science Centre that is used for research, teaching, field courses and conferences in Port Lincoln.

6.2.2 Business and the Professions

Flinders' engagement with business and the professions encompasses research collaborations, professional education, including practicums (section 3.7) and input to course development and review (section 3.2). A Directory of Research and Specialist Expertise has been published online to assist community members to get in touch with relevant University staff.

Flinders Consulting Pty Ltd was awarded a contract to manage the National Primary Care Collaborative Program from the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing (\$15 million over three years) (PF p85).

6.2.3 Engagement with Indigenous Communities

In addition to activities undertaken through Yunggoendi, Flinders has an Indigenous health research program and participates in the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health. Evidence provided to the Audit Panel, confirmed by the review of Yunggoendi (section 2.6), identifies the need to further support and develop work to build relationships with Indigenous communities.

6.2.4 Alumni and Development

Flinders' Alumni Association Strategic Plan 2006-2008 contains goals to increase the number of alumni involved in the network, increase the profile of alumni on campus, and contribute to the 40th anniversary celebrations as a catalyst for alumni support for the Flinders University Fund for the Future (launched in March 2006). In 2005, Flinders claimed to have 15,738 active alumni members (from a total of more than 52,000 graduating since the University's inception in 1966) (PF p87).

Strategies within the plan include support for the Flinders Ambassadors in the Community, a group of identified highly achieving alumni, to assist in raising the profile of Flinders and in building networks. A strategy to increase the number of international chapters and strengthen links with offshore alumni has also been identified and the Audit Panel was informed that chapters in Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom (in collaboration with UniSA and the University of Adelaide) have been established. Plans to establish chapters in China have also been discussed, and the Audit Panel heard evidence that graduates in China will value this initiative highly (section 5.3).

Alumni activities are managed through the Public Affairs and Alumni Office, and there is an Alumni Committee to support activities. A Development Office has been recently established to support the Flinders University Fund for the Future, and a policy on sponsorship and donations is under development (PF p94).

6.2.5 Engagement with Educational Institutions

The Australian Science and Mathematics School (ASMS) is a state specialist high school located on Flinders' main campus and was opened in 2003 as a result of collaboration between the University and the Department of Education and Children's Services. The school was established to promote science education and explore ways to support transition from school to university, and is resulting in development programs in emerging areas of science such as nanotechnology, aquaculture, biotechnology, and laser science. At the end of 2005, 119 students were enrolled, 53 of whom were offered places in a science or science-related tertiary course in 2006. Thirteen ASMS staff are enrolled in postgraduate courses at Flinders.

Although the Audit Panel was not able to consider the ASMS arrangements in detail, it is supportive of the University's efforts to encourage young people to study science and mathematics at secondary and tertiary levels.

The University has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) and the South Australian Government to collaborate in the delivery and marketing of academic programs in the area of public policy and management at the newly established branch of CMU in Adelaide, to undertake joint research and to enable CMU students to access Flinders' library and student support services.

Flinders' collaboration with TAFE SA to promote pathways through joint degrees and credit transfer arrangements is formalised through a Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2002. Articulation from TAFE SA to Flinders has been relatively constant since 2002, with 266 students in 2005.

Overall, the Audit Panel concluded that Flinders is involved in an impressive range of community engagement activities.

Commendation 8

AUQA commends Flinders for its diverse range of community engagement activities, including rural and remote health initiatives, the INSPIRE peer mentoring program for students, and establishment of the Australian Science and Maths School on the University's main campus.

7 SUPPORT FOR ACADEMIC ACTIVITIES AND STUDENTS

The FSPFD includes the following objective:

To continue to ensure access to the University's academic programs by facilitating admission and providing support for all students

Support for staff academic activities is considered elsewhere and this section is dedicated to student support services. The Audit Panel found evidence of several highly valued programs and activities to support students, and also some areas for improvement.

7.1 *The Library*

In addition to the main library at Bedford Park, Flinders has dedicated medical and law libraries and a library at the Sturt campus. The Library operates a computer laboratory on the main campus which is open 24 hours, seven days per week and help desks support students' use of WebCT™ and other forms of ICT. In response to student feedback, the number of workstations has increased from 270 in 2004 to 450 in 2005.

Students are generally satisfied with the Library resources. In particular, students in rural locations and those interviewed offshore indicated unanimously that they do not encounter difficulties accessing the Library's electronic databases (through which 87% of current journal titles are available) (PF p97). This positive outcome can be partly attributed to the Library's efforts to enhance remote support, including a visit to some offshore partners in 2004 to inform strategies. Some students were not aware of the computer laboratory or how to access it, which suggests that opportunities exist to enhance promotion of these facilities.

The Library benchmarks its services using a number of mechanisms, including Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) statistics, the IRUA libraries and participation in the Rodski Library Customer Survey. Results indicate that a comparatively high level of service is provided. For example, in the 2005 Rodski survey, the Library was placed in the first nine of Australian university libraries overall (PF p98). In 2004, Flinders was identified as a best practice library by CAUL.

Feedback from students on the Library's services is gathered through the Student Satisfaction Survey (administered every three years), from annual student surveys on library service satisfaction and from regular student surveys on the availability of learning materials. In addition, a 'Tell Us' link on the Library web page and suggestion boxes facilitate student feedback on an ongoing basis.

The Audit Panel found evidence of the Library's responsiveness to the University's strategic objectives, including identified actions to liaise with faculties, to allocate senior liaison librarians to ASRIs and to develop web pages linking relevant resources, and was impressed that the Librarian is a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Committee. As noted in section 3.2 there is opportunity for the Library to become engaged earlier in the course development process.

Commendation 9

AUQA commends Flinders for its effective Library, which has a central place in decision-making within the University, is highly responsive to its users (including those in remote locations), and is committed to quality improvement of its services, informed by benchmarking activities and robust student feedback mechanisms.

7.2 *Support for Students*

Central student support functions at Flinders are coordinated through the Academic and Student Services Division. In 2003 an audit evaluation of student services was conducted by a panel that included some external representation. This has prompted a project to update and improve the University's website, and a staff guide for student support services has been updated. Furthermore, a web portal for students, iFlinders, has recently been introduced. Some recommendations from the review, including the recommendation to "investigate the advantages of a state of the art one-stop shop student service model" (refer also to general comments in sections 1.2.4 and 2.7) have not been adopted.

Despite initiatives noted above, the Audit Panel encountered a range of examples of students being unaware of whom to contact in relation to various matters, including enrolments and grievance resolution (section 7.2.6) that led it to form the view that service delivery to meet student needs requires further strengthening. The University is urged to consider development of a model that transcends administrative functions, such as a 'one-stop shop', recommended in the 2003 audit, supported by enhanced communication to improve student awareness of support processes.

The Audit Panel investigated reported difficulties with enrolments. In addition to a lack of understanding by students of whom to approach for assistance, issues raised related to three other main areas. First, international students expressed confusion over the roles of the International Office and the ISSU (a lack of clarity of the wider responsibilities of these two areas was also raised by some staff). Second, some students experienced confusion at the role of WebCT™ vis-a-vis the enrolments area. Third, students involved in cross-institutional studies expressed particular difficulties and delays in finalising enrolment arrangements. (Of note was an instance in which enrolment did not occur until two weeks before the exam period, precluding the student access to online lecture material and assessment results. Similar delays occurred in two consecutive years.) An annual review of enrolment processes is undertaken by Flinders, and the effectiveness of recently implemented online enrolment arrangements is being monitored. The Audit Panel was advised that some of these issues, such as those associated with cross-institutional enrolments, have been identified for remediation. Flinders is urged to give prompt attention to further improve enrolment processes in order to resolve these issues, including communication to students of the stages, responsibilities and assistance in enrolment.

Recommendation 11

AUQA recommends that Flinders reconsider its existing student service delivery models, including those relating to enrolment processes, and enhance communication to students in order to improve their awareness of service provision.

7.2.1 Student Learning Support

The Student Learning Centre supports identification of students at risk in their first year of study and provides academic, language and research skills support through one-to-one sessions (for writing and maths and/or numeracy support), workshops, and support materials.

A review of the Student Learning Centre in 2005 has resulted in strategies to support broader outreach for the Centre, including self-help materials and improved communication strategies. According to a document outlining the Centre's New Directions, the Centre's model of engagement has been benchmarked against work of other similar student support centres at other universities.

The Centre coordinates a number of transition programs, including a foundation course to provide alternative entry pathways to Flinders (which is run twice per week in the evenings and also

online) and the Introductory Academic Program (section 5.2) for international students. The EXCEerate program also provides academic assistance to commencing students and has two concurrent streams – Science and Health Science, and Arts and Humanities. Approximately 1200 students across both streams use the program per annum.

The Centre uses SET evaluations to obtain student feedback, and also links with faculties to inform development of its services. The Audit Panel met a sample of students who had participated in Student Learning Centre activities, and they applauded its services. The value of the Centre's activities was also confirmed by staff.

The Audit Panel considers that the Centre is committed to continuous improvement of its services and makes a positive contribution to the transition and support of students.

Commendation 10

AUQA commends Flinders for its Student Learning Centre that makes a highly valued contribution to student academic support and is committed to continuous improvement of its services.

7.2.2 Student Transition

In addition to the services provided by the Student Learning Centre, Flinders provides a number of other services to support student transition. These include a Start Smart program and Flinders Connect for rural and remote students. Peer Assisted Study Sessions, modelled on the University of Queensland program, provide opportunities for later year students to facilitate sessions for first year students to learn and discuss problems. A Transition to University Coordinator was appointed in 2005 to provide further support in reducing student attrition and increasing retention rates (an identified priority in the Education SOAP over recent years), and a "Preparing to Study" suite of materials is planned for development (PF p107). Taken together, these initiatives provide a sound framework for student transition support.

7.2.3 Careers and Employer Liaison

The Careers and Employer Liaison Centre provides programs to support graduate skills development, including recruitment and employment programs and facilitation of work placements through the WorkReady program. Over 450 placements per year have been realised through this program. The Centre also provides induction, sourcing of placements and insurance coverage support for some practicum programs operating in discipline areas within faculties.

A graduate mentor program links final year students with alumni who are working in relevant fields and industries.

7.2.4 Access and Equity

Flinders has a number of access and equity programs, including a Mature Age Entry Scheme, Indigenous Admissions Scheme, and a Rural and Isolated Students Access Scheme. Equity-related scholarships and bursaries, a student grant program and targeted student scholarships are also offered.

In 2004, Flinders enrolled 2.14% of South Australia's Indigenous Students. Success and retention rates for this cohort have been above national and state averages in 2003 and 2004, although access and participation rates have been consistently below average since 2000 despite the existence of an Indigenous admissions scheme. The Audit Panel was advised that a ten-year strategic plan for Indigenous Education is planned for development and that establishment of an Indigenous Consultative Body is under consideration, although timeframes for implementation are unclear.

7.2.5 Student Representation, Advocacy and Welfare Support

In the context of the introduction of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) legislation, Flinders has moved to replace six student organisations with a single organisation – Flinders Campus Community Services (FCCS). According to its Rules, this has been established as an incorporated association to support, promote and protect the rights of students and provide services and facilities to students and the wider community (p5). The governance structure of the new association includes a Board comprising 11 members (five students (three of whom are elected by students), five external directors (who may be staff of the University), and a Chairperson appointed by the University Council). A Student Council has been established to act as a conduit between the Board and the wider student population. The Audit Panel was advised that, as a result of the introduction of VSU, 17 staff have been made redundant. The University has agreed to fund three positions to provide advocacy and welfare services to students under the new arrangements until the end of 2007, and will review the need for further funding at that time.

The Audit Panel met a sample of student representatives who acknowledged that the new arrangements are designed to enhance good governance, but expressed some concerns. These related mainly to their perception that there was insufficient student consultation and input to the new arrangements, a perceived diminution of independent advocacy services for students, a reduced capacity for an independent student voice, and the likely detrimental impact on clubs and societies, particularly smaller clubs (previously there were approximately 60 affiliated clubs, with around 2000 members).

The perceived reduced capacity for an independent voice is due in part to a likely power imbalance in the future. Students predict that difficulties will be experienced by members in challenging decisions made by the Board of FCCS, since they will be obliged to speak in accordance with the Board's policy.

Concerns were also expressed about the loss of research support for student representatives on key University committees such as the Council and Academic Senate, and the diminished level of support for postgraduate students. At the time of the Audit Visit, wide promotion of the new arrangements, including student representation, was yet to be undertaken.

Quarterly progress reports are to be provided to the Resources Committee during the first year of operation of FCCS, and AUQA strongly urges the University to pay particular attention to the sufficiency of advocacy, welfare and support to all students, and in particular to postgraduate students.

Students advised that they receive induction for Council and Academic Senate membership, although support for their participation on faculty boards and selection committees is variable with no induction or training being provided in several instances. Appropriate induction and training support should be provided to students to enable full participation in these important decision-making bodies. Materials developed by the Policy and Secretariat area could be used to inform a more systematic approach to student induction on committees across the University.

7.2.6 Appeals, Grievance and Disciplinary Processes

Policies and procedures covering grievance processes are in place across a number of areas, including academic matters (through the Student Appeals and Complaints Policy), RHD matters, intellectual property, Equal Opportunity and unlawful discrimination, research practice and breaches of academic integrity. Processes to handle student conduct matters are identified in the University's Statute 6.4: Student Conduct.

In 2005, there were three formal appeals to the Student Appeals Committee. This outcome could be interpreted in various ways, including a high level of satisfaction by students and/or effective

resolution of issues at the local level and/or a low level of awareness by students of access to these processes.

Despite measures by the University to draw relevant policies to the attention of students, such as through the enrolment process and the website, the Audit Panel formed the view from evidence provided by postgraduate and undergraduate students across a range of areas that there is a general lack of awareness by students of processes to resolve concerns, including who to approach for support. Examples include complaints about re-marking of assessment and research supervision, and in the majority of instances highlighted to the Audit Panel, students reported that the staff members they approached were unable to provide advice on the process to follow. Some students reported delays in responding to concerns, which in some cases, meant they remained unresolved. Concerns about dealing with student grievances have also been raised in review documentation viewed by the Audit Panel.

The Audit Panel concluded that the University needs to clarify its student complaints and grievance processes to staff and students.

Recommendation 12

AUQA recommends that Flinders take urgent action to strengthen processes to ensure that staff and students are made aware of student appeals, grievance and complaint processes and that processes are implemented consistently to ensure that issues are resolved promptly.

APPENDIX A: THE FLINDERS UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

History and Location

Flinders was established by the *Flinders University of South Australia Act 1966* (most recently amended in 2005), as part of the expansion of public higher education in Australia. When Flinders first started in 1966, there were 90 staff and just over 400 students. Until the mid 1990s, the University was a single-campus institution. In 1991, the adjacent Sturt Campus of the then South Australian College of Advanced Education merged with Flinders and the University reorganised its 12 schools into four faculties.

While the majority of its activities are still based on its main campus in southern Adelaide, Flinders has extended its presence to a number of regional, rural and remote areas of South Australia, Northern Territory and Western Victoria and has overseas operations in several countries, most notably China, Malaysia, Norway and Singapore.

Flinders is a small-to-medium sized university and has a higher percentage of students entering from higher education courses than other South Australian universities (27% Flinders, 17% UniSA and 19% University of Adelaide) and mature age entry (13% Flinders, 9% University of SA and 6% University of Adelaide).

Since its inception, Flinders has placed equal emphasis on research, and teaching, and maintains a commitment to a teaching and learning environment which is enriched by the research and scholarship of the University's academic staff (PF p7). Flinders identifies itself as a research-intensive university, with the expectation that all academic staff undertake research. Flinders now also has an extensive range of community engagement activities. Flinders is one of six members of the Innovative Research Universities Australia (IRUA) group, the other members being Griffith, La Trobe, Macquarie, Murdoch and Newcastle universities. All six were established during the period of higher education expansion in the 1960s and 1970s; each is internationally recognised and the group shares certain key characteristics. Flinders uses this group for comparative purposes.

Academic Profile

Faculties and Academic Organisational Units (AOUs)

Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology comprising: Schools of Education; Humanities; Law and Theology.

Faculty of Health Sciences comprising: Schools of Medicine; and Nursing and Midwifery.

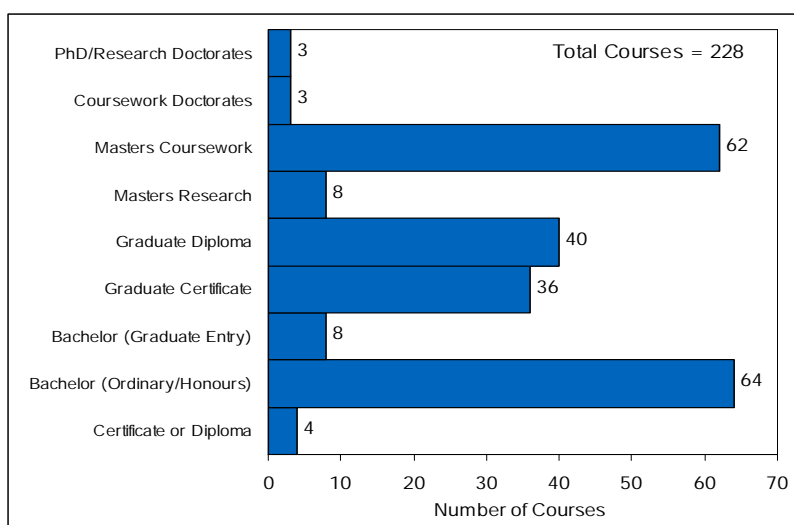
Faculty of Science and Engineering comprising: Schools of Biological Sciences; Chemistry, Physics and Earth Sciences; and Informatics and Engineering.

Faculty of Social Sciences comprising: Departments of American Studies; Sociology; and Women's Studies; and Schools of Commerce; Business Economics²; Geography, Population and Environmental Management; History; Political and International Studies; Psychology; Social Administration and Social Work.

² The Schools of Commerce and Business Economics will be replaced by a new Business School in 2007.

Summary of Courses

Number of Courses Offered by Level 2006



Source: Flinders University Course Information Handbook 2006

Areas of Research Focus

Applied Cognitive Psychology

Bioknowledge: Understanding and Interpreting Australian Biodiversity and Landscapes

Centre for Analysis of Educational Futures: Creating a knowledge base for educational action

Flinders Aboriginal Health Research

Flinders Centre for Clinical Change and Health Care Research

Flinders International Asia Pacific (FIAP): International Security, Transnational Risk Assessment and Development Solutions

Eye and Vision Collaborative Group

Flinders Cancer Control Alliance (FCCA)

Flinders Research Centre for Coastal and Catchment Environments (FRC₃E)

Health and Society: Equity, well-being and the social and economic determinants of health

Humanities Research Centre for Cultural Heritage and Cultural Exchange

Immune Strategies for improved population health

Medical Devices and Technologies

Musculoskeletal Health: expanding and coordinating collaborative multidisciplinary research and establishing Flinders University as a national leader in this field

Nanostructures and Molecular Interactions Research Group

Neuroscience: Researching the Nervous System in Health and Disease

Social Monitoring and Policy Futures Network

Key Statistics (based on data available November 2006)

	2005	2006
Total Student Enrolments @ 31 August	16,011	16,766
Research Student Enrolments @ 31 August	924	898
Postgraduate Student Enrolments @ 31 August	3,292	3,501
International Student Enrolments @ 31 August	2,772	3,105
Total Student Teaching Load (EFTSL) @ 31 August	10,478	10,887
Total Staff (FTE) (not including casual staff) @ 31 March	Academic:	605
	General:	888
	Total:	1,493
Total Operating Revenues (consolidated) for 2005	\$230,333,000	
Total Operating Expenses (consolidated) for 2005	\$218,358,000	

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

Mission

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

Objectives

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

Values

AUQA will be:

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

Vision

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

APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL

Ms Robyn Adams, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency

Professor Stuart Macintyre, Ernest Scott Professor of History, The University of Melbourne (Chair)

Professor Elizabeth More, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Macquarie University

Mr David Myers, Industry Development Manager, National ICT Australia

Dr Jairam Reddy, Director, United Nations University International Leadership Institute, Amman, Jordan

Observer:

Ms Jolin Chang, Senior Executive, Quality Assurance, Higher Education Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore

APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

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

AOU	Academic Operational Unit
ASMS	Australian Science and Mathematics School
ASRI(s)	Area(s) of Strategic Research Investment
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AVCC	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee
CAUL	Council of Australian Librarians
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
CERG	Community Engagement Reference Group
CMU	Carnegie Mellon University
DEST	Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training
DVCs	deputy vice-chancellors
EFTSL	equivalent full-time student load
EHLT	Faculty of Education, Humanities, Law and Theology
EO	Equal Opportunity
ESOS	<i>Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000</i>
FCCS	Flinders Campus Community Services
FFOUT	Flinders Foundation of University Teaching
Flinders	The Flinders University of South Australia
FC	Flinders Consulting Pty Ltd
FSPFD	<i>Flinders Strategic Priorities and Future Directions Mark III 2006-2010</i>
FT	Flinders Technologies Pty Ltd
FTE	full-time equivalent
HEIP	Higher Education Innovation Programme
HR	Human Resources
HS	Faculty of Health Sciences
IAF	Institutional Assessment Framework
ICT	Information and communications technology
IGS	Institutional Grants Scheme
IP	intellectual property
IRET	International Relations in Economy and Trade
IRUA	Innovative Research Universities Australia
KAM(s)	Key Accountability Measure(s)
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
Nankai	Nankai University, Tianjin

National Governance Protocols National Governance Protocols for Higher Education Providers are set out in Chapter 7 of the Commonwealth Grant Scheme Guidelines (http://www.backingaustraliasfuture.gov.au/guidelines/cgs_guide.htm)

PF p.....	Performance Portfolio page reference
PREQ.....	Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
RHD	research higher degree
RIBG	Research Infrastructure Block Grants
SET	Student Evaluation of Teaching
SOAP(s).....	Strategic Overview Action Plan(s)
SDTU	Staff Development and Training Unit
UniSA	University of South Australia
VCC	Vice-Chancellor's Committee
VSU.....	Voluntary Student Unionism
Yunggorendi.....	Yunggorendi First Nations Centre for Higher Education and Research

