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QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of  
James Cook University

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## OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

### *Background*

In 2003, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake an academic audit of James Cook University.

This report of the audit provides an overview, and then details the Audit Panel's findings, recommendations, affirmations and commendations. A brief introduction to James Cook University (hereinafter JCU or 'the University') is given in Section 1 and at Appendix A; the objects of AUQA are shown in Appendix B; membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix C; and a list of abbreviations and acronyms used is at Appendix D.

### *The Audit Process*

AUQA bases its audits on each organisation's own objectives, together with the MCEETYA National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes ([http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/mceetya\\_cop.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/mceetya_cop.htm)). The major aim of this audit was to consider and review the procedures that JCU 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>).

On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February 2004 JCU presented its submission (2004 Performance Portfolio) to AUQA, along with 29 Supplementary Materials. The Audit Panel met on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April to consider these materials.

The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a preparatory visit to the JCU Townsville Campus at Douglas on the 28<sup>th</sup> of April. During that visit, there was opportunity to clarify the questions and additional materials requested from the Portfolio Meeting, and to review the planned arrangements for the Audit Visit. At this meeting JCU was also advised that the Audit Panel Chairperson and the Audit Director would visit the JCU Singapore Campus and a JCU partner organisation in Singapore, as well as representatives of the Singapore Ministry of Education, the Singapore Nursing Registration Board, and the Singapore Psychological Society. These offshore visits took place on 17-18 May.

The main Audit Visits took place over 24–31 May. The Audit Panel briefly visited the Douglas Campus on the first day for a short familiarisation tour and then spent the next three days at Townsville. On the 28<sup>th</sup> of May the entire Audit Panel visited the JCU Cairns Campus. On the 31<sup>st</sup> of May the Audit Director visited Holmes College in Melbourne, another JCU partner organization, and also spoke with staff and students involved with the JCU Bachelor of Business. The Audit Panel is grateful for the cooperation and openness shown by the University, and appreciated the courteous support provided during all stages of the audit process, and in particular for the timely response to requests for additional information prior to and during the Audit Visit.

In all, the Audit Panel spoke with approximately 300 people during the Audit Visit, including academic and general staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students from across JCU campuses, studying either on campus and off-campus, JCU Councillors, and external stakeholders. The Audit Panel held a teleconference with staff of SEGi involved in the teaching of the JCU B Bus and B Eng in Malaysia. Sessions were also available for any member of the JCU community to meet the Audit Panel and three people took advantage of this opportunity.

This report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended 31 May 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 JCU as well as information gained through

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

The report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations, recommendations and affirmations. The latter two categories suggest possible improvements and in some cases endorse actions already being undertaken by the University. It is acknowledged that recommendations in AUQA audit reports may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for institutions. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise these recommendations, and recognises that it is JCU's responsibility to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

AUQA normally seeks to structure its audit reports in accordance with each university's Performance Portfolio. In this instance, this structure has been followed, with some additional cross-referencing to findings in other sections of this report as necessary. Also, in the section on Teaching and Learning, there have been some additional sub-sections added in order to adequately cover issues identified during the offshore visit to Singapore.

## CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations, and recommendations. It should be noted that other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the report.

### *Introduction to Findings*

James Cook University of North Queensland (as it was originally called), was founded by an Act of State Parliament in 1970, and renamed James Cook University (JCU) under new legislation in 1997. JCU is now a multi-campus, medium sized Australian regional university with a broadly based curriculum and a very strong research focus. JCU is also the second oldest university in Queensland, having separated from the University of Queensland. In the mid-to-late 1990's the University went through a period of fiscal uncertainty and structural upheaval.

The stated mission of JCU is to *'advance the economic, social and environmental well-being of tropical Queensland, the nation and the world by delivering world-class education and research outcomes across a range of disciplines, with emphasis on subjects of special relevance to the tropics and its location in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region'* (JCU In the Third Millennium...our future and how we get there, 2003-2008, p5)

In terms of the current organisational structure, the University has four Faculties (comprising 21 schools) each reporting to Chancellery through an Executive Dean (no. of schools in brackets): Arts, Education & Social Sciences (6); Law, Business & The Creative Arts (3); Medicine, Health & Molecular Sciences (5); and, Science, Engineering & Information Technology (7) and there are also four Administrative Divisions. (See Appendix A for more information on the JCU academic profile.)

The JCU 2004 Performance Portfolio was structured to reflect preparation for improved quality assurance and used to guide the Self-Review conducted during 2002-2003 and the Trial Audit conducted in September 2003, in preparation for the AUQA audit. The Portfolio concludes with the following description of the University's 'evolutionary' approach to quality:

'The approach taken to the improvement of quality assurance in the University has not been to overlay a completely new quality assurance 'system' and standardising discourse, but to develop existing processes of strategic planning by increasing attention to systematic data use on the one hand and the mission of the University on the other' (PFp101).

At the time of the Audit Visit the University was in the process of further developing its 'Quality Assurance System' (QAS) in line with the strategic direction provided by the University's current strategic plan, the *Millennium Document*. Overall, the Audit Panel endorses the direction of developments which are designed to strengthen the QAS and concurs with the findings of the University's self-review that are germane to the current state of the QAS at JCU.

Mindful of the findings of the University's own self-review, the dynamic nature of the QAS and processes, and the sometimes complex relationship between these factors, the Audit Panel makes a number of findings in relation to the University's 'enacted' approach to quality. Quite a number of these are commendatory, others affirming the direction of work already in progress, and a number of others identifying areas for further improvement, and especially the need for JCU to ensure that it can 'close the quality loops' (that is, to ensure that the outcomes achieved are always evaluated against the set objectives, in order to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the processes involved).

With respect to governance and management, the Audit Panel considered that Council and the senior management team were committed strongly to achieving the strategic 'Priority Objectives' articulated in

the *Millennium Document*, through promoting adoption of a risk-managed approach. However the Audit Panel found that more systematic deployment of formal quality processes is still required at the operational level, to ensure that all the findings of the self-review can be addressed properly. Active feedback loops need to be installed or re-activated where they are either missing or not operating as intended.

With respect to Teaching and Learning, the Audit Panel found strengths in the customisation of curricula to meet the needs of distinctive groups and purposes, and educational development, but commented on the need for further attention to feedback loop closure mentioned above. The University is also urged to look more closely at the nature of the student experience at both the Townsville and Cairns campuses. With respect to the delivery of JCU courses offshore, the Audit Panel found that an effective QA framework had been put in place for the management of offshore education, but that there were still a number of ‘teething problems’ that need concerted attention.

With respect to Research and Research Training, the Audit Panel found much to praise in terms of the University’s research strategy, its performance as a ‘tropical research-intensive university’, and in serving the needs of the northern Queensland region through research collaboration. The Audit Panel also noted the need to pay further attention to ensure that minimum standards of support for HDR students are being observed.

Concerning the provision of Support for Services to Students, the University wins praise for establishing a student friendly learning environment, but attention is drawn to the Townsville / Cairns issue noted above, with respect to perceived unevenness in both Teaching and Learning support and Research Training.

With respect to the provision of Service to Region and Community, the University received positive endorsement from the Audit Panel for support of rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. However, it is urged to be more systematic in how it attempts to consolidate its approach to regional and community engagement across the northern Queensland region as a whole.

Finally, concerning the University’s approach to Resource Management, the Audit Panel found the University’s approach to campus planning and development to be commendable, but considered that more work is still needed to integrate more fully performance and information management processes as part of the human resource management culture at JCU.

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

**Commendations**

1. AUQA commends JCU for demonstrating that it is clearly aware of what is required to effectively manage risk for the preservation and enhancement of the University’s reputation, particularly in relation to its core functions of teaching, learning, and research..... 10
2. AUQA commends JCU for the processes used to develop and implement a clear strategic direction for the University as set out in the *Millennium Document*, which has been endorsed by the JCU Council and is effectively embedded in the JCU culture as a means to focus on key priorities, monitor risks and resolve internal tensions re distribution of scarce resources. .... 12
3. AUQA commends the JCU Council for developing effective Quality Assurance processes as part of its governance responsibility, including the use of 360 degree feedback processes to monitor the performance of the Vice-Chancellor..... 13

4.	AUQA commends the Academic Board of JCU for sustaining an appropriate balance between consistency and flexibility in the processes used to accredit and review course proposals which enables staff to customise courses and course materials to meet regional, international, and Indigenous needs. ....	18
5.	AUQA commends JCU for nurturing a student-centred teaching and learning culture and environment. ....	20
6.	AUQA commends the JCU Mentoring Program for first-year students and the Induction to Teaching and Learning program offered to new academic staff by the Teaching and Learning Development group. ....	20
7.	AUQA commends JCU for having put an appropriate Quality Assurance framework in place in the form of the Management of Off-Campus Academic Programs Policy. ....	23
8.	AUQA commends JCU for establishing a research profile that meets the needs of the northern Queensland region and for making substantial progress towards achieving its vision as a world-class tropical research university. ....	27
9.	AUQA commends JCU for the process it has developed to establish Areas of Research Strength and specialisation, and which are managed well. ....	29
10.	AUQA commends JCU for the establishment of the innovative and inter-disciplinary Area of Research Strength – ‘People, Identity and Place’, which is in line with the strategic goals of the University. ....	29
11.	AUQA commends JCU for its engagement with CRCs and for having a focus on collaborative research which also positively contributes to community engagement in northern Queensland. ....	30
12.	AUQA commends JCU for success in providing effective research training opportunities for Indigenous HDR students. ....	31
13.	AUQA commends JCU for systematically surveying its International Students on arrival as a proactive strategy to help reduce attrition in the commencing year of their studies. ....	35
14.	AUQA commends JCU for the relationship that it has established with the northern Queensland region and its various communities; and especially for successful examples of the <i>Millennium</i> strategies being enacted in respect of its priority objectives for Participation and Engagement. ....	39
15.	AUQA commends JCU for achieving recovery from the mid 1990s financial difficulties, through adoption of an effective, transparent and University wide budget process that is performance-based. ....	44
16.	AUQA commends JCU for the thoroughness of the Campus Development and Management Plan 2003, especially with respect to its linkage to academic planning, and for the University-wide process of consultation in its development. ....	44
17.	AUQA commends JCU for its Indigenous employment strategy, which has been implemented across disciplines, for both academic and general staff. ....	45

***Affirmations***

1. That JCU implement the Consolidated Action Plan in relation to SFS / SFT and CEQ / GDS; to increase student participation, use data systematically, and to be able to properly monitor and improve outcomes in relation to Teaching and Learning. ....19
2. That in line with the University's stated commitment to introduce systematic course reviews, the JCU Academic Board put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the formal review of all JCU courses is completed within the first five-year cycle. ....20
3. That JCU in resolving the issue of the long term off-shore provider for its Bachelor of Business and MBA programs put in place appropriate transition arrangements for students to protect the quality of the programs and the reputation of JCU in Singapore. ....25
4. That JCU consolidate plans to externally benchmark the standards of JCU honours theses against standards at other Australian and international universities, as appropriate. ....32
5. That JCU implement its decision to more systematically evaluate the first-year undergraduate program as a matter of priority, so that baseline data collected from 2005 can be used to develop strategies to continue to improve student retention. ....35
6. That JCU's commitment to undertake benchmarking of student services is an important aspect of the Quality Assurance System, and that the initiative of the JCU Counselling Service demonstrates a possible model for the other student service providers across the University to use. ....35
7. That JCU continue to consolidate and integrate academic planning considerations into its approach to campus planning and development. ....44
8. That JCU strengthen its approach to strategic workforce planning by including provision for succession planning. ....46
9. AUQA acknowledges the progress achieved at JCU towards building a performance-based culture through the introduction of a Performance Management Program, but affirms that to be effective it needs to be rolled-out systematically across the University and its impact reviewed after full implementation, including the way that it is linked to other HR strategies designed to improve or reward performance. ....48

***Recommendations***

1. That all actions identified in the Consolidated Action Plans resulting from the University's self-review and trial audit be integrated into the JCU Operational Plan 2004-2006, with specific performance targets identified in future operational plans. ....12
2. That in line with its objective for 'Equity, Access and Participation' in the Millennium Document, JCU be more systematic with respect to the planning for equity and the monitoring of performance of equity outcomes against clear targets. ....14
3. That JCU introduce a systematic cyclical program to review the performance of schools, faculties, and divisions; and introduce a system for the regular review of important University-wide functions and processes. ....15
4. That JCU and JCU Singapore liaise closely to ensure that the quality management systems being developed at each location are harmonised in order to work effectively, both separately and together. ....16

5.	That JCU ensure in areas not covered by external course accreditation or approval processes that ‘School Liaison’ advisory or review committees are established so there is external input across all areas of the curriculum.....	18
6.	That JCU use the set of key Teaching and Learning quality indicators, which together constitute the minimum standards for Teaching and Learning at JCU, to internally benchmark the nature of the student learning experience across the University, and in particular between the Cairns and Townsville campuses and in respect of all off-shore locations.....	21
7.	That JCU audit Schools for compliance with the Policy on Minimum Standards for HDR Students, make greater use of HDR student survey data, and take action in a timely manner where it is clear that minimum standards for HDR students have not been met. ....	31
8.	That JCU provide timely feedback to postgraduate students on the results of the Annual Surveys of HDR Students, details of any subsequent improvements put in place and also foreshadow any likely future action to further improve the research training environment.....	32
9.	That JCU implement the strategies identified to address the acknowledged decline in the rate of publications, and strengthen existing mechanisms to provide more performance-based incentives to individual researchers, as part of a strategic university-wide approach to improving research productivity.....	33
10.	That in expanding access to library resources (particularly for HDR students at both the Townsville and Cairns campuses), JCU establish improvement priorities annually, considering feedback from data from student surveys.....	36
11.	That JCU assign responsibility at a senior level for the review of all existing and proposed mechanisms for student feedback and that these be streamlined, made comprehensive across campuses and locations, and be timed so as to regularly seek information from students on their levels of satisfaction with all aspects of their experience at JCU, including academic matters.....	37
12.	That JCU be more systematic in the consolidation of its Participation, Engagement, and Consolidation Priority Objectives, by developing a coherent policy framework, with allocated responsibilities, reporting on these regularly, and linking them more explicitly to the criteria for promotion.....	41
13.	That JCU review its current timetable and priorities for the IT Infrastructure Upgrade and Replacement Program so that any improvements deemed necessary are effected prior to the 2005 academic year.....	45
14.	That JCU build on the success of tailored staff development programs such as the ESLP, by adopting a more systematic approach to staff development for all levels and categories of staff.....	46
15.	That JCU introduce formal induction programs for all JCU staff teaching off-shore, including cross-cultural training, and that some tailored staff development opportunities be provided for locally recruited staff so there is a sense of ‘integration’ with JCU Australia staff and knowledge of JCU systems and expectations.....	47
16.	That JCU, in line with its ‘Integration’ Priority Objective, regularly undertake and review results from staff surveys, including a focus on the quality of services provided within the University, and on organisational climate, as part of the University’s Quality Assurance System.....	47

## 1 THE QUALITY SYSTEM AND STRUCTURES

The University's Strategic Plan is a document entitled 'JCU In the Third Millennium – our future and how we get there, 2003 - 2008 (henceforth called the Millennium Document). This document does not contain any explicit goals under a separate heading 'Quality System'. However there are a number of embedded statements in the Millennium Document which, if taken together, come relatively close to describing the University's overall approach to assuring and enhancing quality:

*'In the prevailing climate of increased accountability and emphasis on process the most effective way of protecting our core values from external intervention is to pre-empt the motives that might lead to such intervention (p3).....JCU is also a large-scale business organisation that is increasingly diversifying its sources of funding.....As a consequence, JCU needs corporate governance structures, including a risk management system, that meet the changing needs of its activities (p4).....we believe that the pursuit of excellence is a good in itself, and that we should judge all our activities against the highest ethical and intellectual standards.....we are committed to the traditions of academic freedom. (p11)....Critical assessment of performance against clear intentions and aspirations will be a feature of all aspects of our affairs. (p12)'*

There is comment by the Audit Panel on the effectiveness of the enactment of this approach at sub-section 1.2 below, and in each substantive section of the report that follows.

### 1.1 Introduction to James Cook University

James Cook University of North Queensland (as it was originally called), was founded by an Act of State Parliament in 1970, and renamed James Cook University (JCU) under new legislation in 1979. JCU is now a multi-campus, medium sized Australian regional university with a broadly based curriculum and a very strong research focus. JCU is also the second oldest university in Queensland, having separated out from the University of Queensland.

In the 1990's the University went through a period of serious financial difficulty and 'massive upheaval in all its policy development, implementation and review processes' (PFp101) in what was referred to by the University as the 'mid-1990s crisis' (PFp101).

At the time of the AUQA audit the University had 13,587 students or 9784 EFTSU. Please see Appendix A for further details about JCU's profile.

In terms of organisational structure, the University currently has four Faculties (comprising 21 Schools) each reporting to Chancellery through an Executive Dean (no. of Schools in brackets): Arts, Education & Social Sciences (6); Law, Business & The Creative Arts (3); Medicine, Health & Molecular Sciences (5); and, Science, Engineering & Information Technology (7). The University also has three Divisions, each reporting to Chancellery through a Pro Vice-Chancellor: Corporate & Commercial; Research & International; and the Academic Support Division (including Information Services and Technologies, and Staff Development and Student Affairs). Chancellery comprises the Offices of the Vice-Chancellor, DVC and the PVC (Cairns & Academic Planning & Development) and there is also an Internal Audit Unit.

The Millennium Document states that the University's mission is to 'advance the economic, social and environmental well-being of tropical Queensland, the nation and the world by delivering world-class education and research outcomes across a range of disciplines, with particular emphasis on subjects of special relevance to the tropics and its location in Australia and the Asia-Pacific region' (p5).

JCU's vision is 'to be acknowledged by 2010 as one of the top five universities of the world enhancing life in the tropics through education and research' (p5). This is a laudable though ambitious aim for an Australian regional university and this became the benchmark that the AUQA Audit Panel used to validate the University's self-assessment of its own performance, especially in relation to Research (see Section 3).

## 1.2 *The Quality Assurance System*

In the JCU 2004 Performance Portfolio the Audit Panel was informed that 'The Quality Assurance System' (referred to in this report as 'QAS' for brevity, though the University itself does not use this acronym) is described more explicitly than one would expect from a reading of the Millennium Document, in the following terms:

'The QAS of the university is based upon the strategic planning process that has been developing for a number of years. The QAS is built from the strategic plan structure with more direct attention to:

- The integration of relevant policies;
- The explicit use of feedback and evidence; and
- Action loops that show who is responsible for acting on the evidence and implementing improvements.....

The objective of the QAS is the establishment of cyclic processes for planning, enactment, feedback and renewed planning which promote and emphasise quality enhancement through the generation of a collective self-critical attitude. This attitude is disciplined by attention to the goals of the University and by data collection and analysis.' (PFp1)

Despite the upper case 'QAS' in the above, the Audit Panel noted that the University had reached the following conclusion about its 'enacted' approach to quality in the 2004 Performance Portfolio:

'The approach taken to the improvement of quality assurance in the University has not been to overlay a completely new quality assurance "system" and standardising discourse, but to develop existing processes of strategic planning by increasing attention to systematic data use on the one hand and the mission of the University on the other.

The approach taken is consonant with the JCU's commitment to the devolution of functions and decision making, but heeds the need for closer monitoring of the impact of the policy framework by the Academic Board and the Senior Management Group in particular. Clarification of the role of Council is also an important outcome for the University.' (PFp101)

These comments are highly consistent with the description of the QAS in the JCU – Quality in Teaching and Learning Policy:

'The QAS articulates priorities and the conditions and strategies needed to achieve them. The QAS should show the university and its community that disciplined self-reflection is actually described, reasonably systematic and demonstrably comprehensive. The QAS is essentially a structured manifestation of good academic practice that builds upon and describes existing academic planning and reflective processes in the University.' (p7)

The Audit Panel was mindful of these sometimes consonant, and at other times disparate descriptions and analyses of the University's QAS in forming its own judgment about the effectiveness of the University's overall approach to the assurance and enhancement of quality.

On the one hand, the Audit Panel finds that the University deserves credit for recognising and designing its approach to quality assurance around the relatively devolved nature of its organisational structure and academic culture of reflection, and for factoring this into how it endeavors to 'enact' its various quality processes.

On the other hand, as the University itself affirms, there is often a problem to ensure the closing of 'action loops' within an environment of properly devolved academic decision making. The University also recognises clearly that the current economic and policy environment demands that the University must develop a stronger culture of corporate governance and management accountability, including responsibility for the management of risk, especially in relation to any threats to the University's reputation for quality (i.e. for 'academic excellence'). It was noted in this respect that the University had approved a 'Policy on Policies' and from the most recent policies reviewed by the Audit Panel it is apparent that JCU has commenced systematising its existing policies and procedures for more consistency. In addition, a major finding of the trial audit and self-review was the need for Academic Board and the Senior Management Group to be more systematic in the use of performance measures (see also sub-section 1.6 below).

Overall, the Audit Panel endorses the direction of these developments which are designed to strengthen the QAS and concurs with the findings of the self-review that are germane to the current state of the QAS at JCU. In recognition of the dynamic nature of the QAS and processes, and the sometimes complex relationship between these factors, the Audit Panel makes a number of findings in relation to the University's quality system - commendations, affirmations, and recommendations.

Firstly, the Audit Panel concluded that the University had struck an appropriate balance between the desire to preserve the integrity of its culture based on devolved academic decision making, and the need to pay due attention to a more rigorous and strategic approach to the management of risk. In drawing this conclusion the panel noted that the University's first listed strategic Priority Objective was protection of its 'reputation' (see also p6) and that there was a clear focus on the quality of teaching and learning and research under this priority, the focus of which quite properly also extended to its offshore programs.

### **Commendation 1**

**AUQA commends JCU for demonstrating that it is clearly aware of what is required to effectively manage risk for the preservation and enhancement of the University's reputation, particularly in relation to its core functions of teaching, learning, and research.**

The AUQA Audit Panel found that the University's own self-review and the trial audit had yielded a candid and realistic assessment of JCU's areas of strength and opportunities for improvement, and that the University had clearly benefited from its participation in both of these whole-of-institution quality review exercises. There was also some acknowledgement by the senior management of the University of the need for action in response to any quality system shortcomings identified by these self-initiated quality review processes.

However, 'enactment' of this sort usually takes place at the operational level. The sections that follow outline further observations and a recommendation in relation to the nexus between 'The Quality Assurance System' so described, and the University-wide operational plan.

### **1.3 Strategic Planning**

As stated above, the heart of the JCU Quality Assurance System is the University's strategic planning process and the key strategic planning document is the Millennium Document.

The Millennium Document has been in existence in various versions since 1998 and since then has been refined, and most recently (in its third iteration) changed so that - 'much of the implementation detail associated with our Priority Objectives has been removed and included in our Operational Plan' (p2). The other major change indicated by the Vice-Chancellor was the degree of involvement of the University Council in its production - 'Ownership of the document now resides where it should be, at the governance rather than the management level.' (p2)

Apart from the introductory background, context, and Mission and Vision statements already covered above, the Millennium Document now consists of 'characterisations' of the University's local and global aspirations. It includes:

- A global perspective;
- International reference scales;
- Regional responsibility and focus; and
- Local ownership.

The University's core beliefs and values are listed in the Millennium Document, including: the value of delivering education of the highest possible standard; the creation of a tolerant society that values diversity, trust, and an absence of discrimination; the importance of providing professional education for the region; the University's special responsibility to the remote, rural, and indigenous communities of the region; and its contribution through conducting high calibre research of special importance and benefit to people living in the tropics.

In addition there are a set of guiding principles, lists of graduate attributes and qualities for JCU undergraduate and postgraduate coursework and research degrees, and finally a statement of the seven 'Priority Objectives' for the Decade 2000-2010:

1. Reputation - international standing of JCU for excellent teaching & research.
2. Participation of those relatively under-represented in the region.
3. Engagement with the region of northern Queensland.
4. Internationalisation as a dimension of teaching & learning & research.
5. Consolidation of the full potential of the Cairns and Townsville campuses.
6. Integration to support & value all members of the JCU community.
7. Self-determination by expanding and nurturing the University's resources.

Each 'Priority Objective' also lists a number of implementation strategies and the desired outcomes, but interestingly the more usual strategic planning terms 'goals', 'aims', and 'targets' are not used.

The Audit Panel considered the Millennium Document to be an effective strategic planning tool but noted that it has a high level of abstraction, so followed various lines of enquiry (including cross referencing of responses of various people and groups), to determine the extent to which awareness of its Priority Objectives had penetrated down to the operational level of the University.

The Audit Panel found the Millennium Document not only to be well understood, but that its strategic importance was also understood by JCU staff. There was also clear evidence, such as the processes used to identify and develop Areas of Research Strength aligned to the 'tropical research university' theme, and the opportunities that this provided for synergy with the teaching and learning profile, as well as the JCU Internationalisation strategy which is articulated and operationalised in part through the Asian Marketing Plan, of it being used, as intended, to influence the allocation of resources.

## Commendation 2

**AUQA commends JCU for the processes used to develop and implement a clear strategic direction for the University as set out in the *Millennium Document*, which has been endorsed by the JCU Council and is effectively embedded in the JCU culture as a means to focus on key priorities, monitor risks and resolve internal tensions re distribution of scarce resources.**

The next document down from the Millennium Document in the strategic planning process at JCU is the University-wide Operational Plan. The Audit Panel reviewed the JCU Operational Plan 2003-2005 which was submitted as a supporting document to the 2004 Performance Portfolio for AUQA. It noted that, despite the statements quoted above, that 'action loops should show who is responsible for acting on the evidence and implementing improvements', and that 'much of the implementation detail associated with our priority objectives has been removed and included in the operational plan', the Audit Panel noted that the operational plan for 2003-2005 did not allocate responsibilities to individuals. Moreover, although there was a column headed 'Measured and assessed through', this column did not nominate any specific performance targets to be achieved.

However, on Day 3 of the Audit Visit the Audit Panel was provided with copies of a 'newly completed' version of the JCU Operational Plan 2004-2006 (dated December 2003). The panel noted the addition of a new column headed 'Responsibility' but there were still no specific performance targets included in the 'Measured and assessed through' column. AUQA affirms the decision of the University to allocate responsibilities for completion of actions in the JCU Operational Plan 2004-2006, but urges consideration of the inclusion of specific performance targets in future operational plans.

In addition, in the most recent operational plan under the heading 'Factors affecting the Operational Plan in 2004 and beyond' there is now a complete section devoted to the University's self-review and trial audit, suggesting there is now a strong link between these University-wide quality review process and the University-wide operational planning process. However, here the Audit Panel noted that the seven actions that were listed in the Portfolio's Consolidated Action Plan were all concerned with Teaching and Learning and were explicitly identified as 'major actions arising from the self-review and trial audit' (p11).

Although a number of other actions had also been included, the 34 actions listed in the 2004 Performance Portfolio's five Consolidated Action Plans which addressed other core functions such as Research, were not included. It was also noted that there was no Consolidated Action Plan for 'The Quality System and Structures' section of the Performance Portfolio, prompting the Audit Panel to question how 'the loop would be closed' to ensure that the University's developing quality system itself could be improved in a planned manner.

## Recommendation 1

**That all actions identified in the Consolidated Action Plans resulting from the University's self-review and trial audit be integrated into the JCU Operational Plan 2004-2006, with specific performance targets identified in future operational plans.**

Another area of the strategic planning process considered by the Audit Panel to be worthy of comment was the move by the University to consolidate and integrate academic planning with campus planning for the development of the Cairns and Townsville campuses and affirmative and commendatory findings are included in Section 6 of this report (see 6.2).

During the Audit Visit the Audit Panel learned that one of the major issues currently facing the University is improving morale and developing the campus at Cairns, and that the University had

just made a specific senior appointment to manage Cairns – to find ways to give it a unique identity, and to increase postgraduate and International Student enrolments. The Audit Panel also noted that this position would have an allocated responsibility for Academic Planning and Development. There is also comment relevant to the Cairns situation and this appointment in Sections 2, 5, and 6 below.

## **1.4 Governance and Management Structures**

### **1.4.1 Governance**

What is described as ‘the third key element of the Quality System’ in the 2004 Performance Portfolio is the Governance and Management Structure of the University (PFp5). The portfolio goes on to state that ‘the University recognises corporate governance as the process by which organisations are directed, controlled and held to account’ and that ‘Corporate governance should facilitate improved performance and enhanced accountability’ (PFp5).

In terms of recent improvements in corporate governance JCU pointed to the fact that as part of the University Self-Review process JCU Council developed a strategic objective document for itself in 2002, the JCU Council Objectives, and that it revised that document in 2003. Apart from listing typical University Council responsibilities of a fiduciary, legal, administrative, and ‘duty of care’ nature, the Objectives also included a number of exhortations:

- To ensure that the University continues to strive for excellence in its academic standards;
- To continue to strive for world’s best practice through continuous improvements in all areas of Council operation;
- To ensure that the University is a responsible corporate citizen; and
- To play a key role in defining and monitoring the strategic directions of the University.

The Audit panel reviewed the findings about JCU as detailed in the most recent Auditor General of Queensland Report No. 2 2003-04 which inter alia found that JCU exhibits: ‘An example of better practice with regard to University Council and governance committee’s frameworks, particularly in relation to operating protocols, induction and ongoing training and meeting practices’ (p9).

On balance, the Audit Panel found that under the leadership of the Chancellor and Deputy Chancellor, the 2004 JCU Council is committed to providing effective corporate governance for the University, and that, consistent with the recognition of its devolved culture of academic decision making, the Council had put in place some mechanisms to link it more closely into the academic life and structure of the University. In making the commendation that follows, the Audit Panel looked favourably at the work of the Council Audit and Compliance Committee and the Chancellery Internal Audit Unit as contributing to the University’s recovery from the mid-1990’s financial difficulties (see also Commendation 15). The Audit Panel also noted the use of a ‘360 degree feedback’ process (whereby participants seek and receive feedback from ‘direct reports’ on their effectiveness) to monitor the performance of the Vice-Chancellor, as well as monitoring and evaluating Council’s own performance in corporate governance.

### **Commendation 3**

**AUQA commends the JCU Council for developing effective Quality Assurance processes as part of its governance responsibility, including the use of 360 degree feedback processes to monitor the performance of the Vice-Chancellor.**

### 1.4.2 Quality Assurance and Equity

The Audit Panel reviewed the structural arrangements for quality assurance that had been put in place since the financial difficulties of the mid 1990s and found them to be satisfactory and consistent with the description of the University's purpose and its organisational culture.

The University makes much of its commitment to equity. In the Millennium Document for example 'Equity, Access and Participation' is one of the seven 'Guiding Principles', and in some areas JCU's equity performance is indeed impressive (see Commendations 12, 14, & 17 in relation to rural, remote and Indigenous communities).

It was noted that management responsibility for units with an equity function was split between the PVC (Staff Development & Student Affairs) – for students, and the PVC (Corporate and Community) – for staff. The Audit Panel is aware that the split in responsibility for Equity is not unusual and is indeed a matter for the University to determine as it sees fit. The Audit Panel observed that the Equity Plan was not comprehensive (based on the compulsory annual 'Student Equity Report' to DEST), was lacking in specific targets (for example for Indigenous people) and was silent in relation to strategies and initiatives specifically designed for staff (such as to boost senior promotion opportunities for females). Furthermore, the Panel saw no compelling evidence that the plan was being monitored against performance outcomes on a regular basis.

Given that "Equity" is seen as important enough to be highlighted in one of the guiding principles, the Audit Panel suggests that it is timely to review the allocation of responsibility for equity matters at senior management level to ensure that this area of strategic intent is being planned and monitored appropriately. The University does have in place a range of initiatives which appear to relate to "Equity", for example, improved regional and community engagement, increased participation by students from underrepresented groups, and higher first year retention rates. The Audit Panel formed the view that these and related initiatives would benefit from greater coordination in terms of planning, a clearer focus in the organisational arrangements and hence a stronger means of ensuring proper accountability.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**That in line with its objective for 'Equity, Access and Participation' in the Millennium Document, JCU be more systematic with respect to the planning for equity and the monitoring of performance of equity outcomes against clear targets.**

There is also a recommendation on the strategic management of Service to the Region and Community more generally at the end of Section 5 of this report.

### 1.5 *Feedback Instruments and Processes*

The Student Feedback about Subjects (SFS) and Student Feedback about Teaching (SFT) systems are part of a suite of feedback mechanisms featured under Quality System and Structures in Chapter 1 of the JCU 2004 Performance Portfolio. However the arrangements for their improvement are included under Teaching & Learning in Chapter 2.

This arrangement is consistent with JCU's view that the QAS should be 'as generic as possible', but as already pointed out Chapter 1 of the Portfolio lacked any Consolidated Action Plan for improvement of the quality system itself. Consequently, substantive comment on improvements to these and other student feedback mechanisms has been reserved for Section 2 below and elsewhere in this report. Suffice to record here that the Audit Panel noted that plans for improved feedback instruments and practices, and the SFS in particular, were the subject of five of the seven actions listed in the Consolidated Action Plan in the Teaching and Learning section of the

2004 Performance Portfolio, and that the remaining two actions related to improvements in the review of courses.

The Audit Panel formed the view that this duplication and allocation in part, at least, reflects the fact that (apart from the University-wide self-review and trial audit) there is currently no structured or formal process in place to regularly review the overall performance of organisational units at JCU (such as schools, faculties, and divisions) which are integral to the QAS. JCU senior management did indicate that there were plans to introduce a system based on the review of University-wide functions or processes. Such an approach may be a useful way to address this deficiency in the QAS, though the performance review of organisational units is usually simpler to plan, execute, and to follow up than functional or process-based review systems.

### **Recommendation 3**

**That JCU introduce a systematic cyclical program to review the performance of schools, faculties, and divisions; and introduce a system for the regular review of important University-wide functions and processes.**

#### **1.6 *Performance Measures for Quality Assurance***

One of the key conclusions from the University's self-review process was that whilst there was quite a lot of monitoring of basic performance indicators on Teaching and Learning, and Research and Research Training, 'this was irregular and not studied in a systematic way by the Academic Board or Senior Management Group' (PFp16). The Audit Panel learned from the Performance Portfolio that following the trial audit a 'work plan' had been drafted to ensure better use of performance measures, and noted a list of Key Indicators for the monitoring of Teaching and Learning and also of Research & Research Training (PFpp17-18).

This initiative is entirely in keeping with another of the University's own self-review findings that it needed 'to achieve more effective monitoring of performance indicators by Executive Deans and Pro Vice-Chancellors on actions initiated in response to monitoring' (PFp7). The AUQA Audit Panel agrees that this Self-Review finding is consistent with its own observations. However, it was not clear in the Portfolio, and neither was it satisfactorily explained during the Audit Visit, exactly how the monitoring of the Key Indicators for Teaching and Learning would be managed, and how this activity of itself could help to improve quality. This aspect of the QAS is discussed further below in sub-section 2.2.

#### **1.7 *Quality System Development: Next steps***

The Audit Panel learned of 'a detailed plan for a Quality Management System for AusAID' from the Portfolio (PFp32). The Panel then requested and reviewed the JCU International Student Centre Quality Management System, which draws heavily on the QMS for AusAID. This is a very comprehensive document, in terms of Quality Control, being replete with flow charts and procedures, such as those required to ensure compliance with an external standard such as ISO9001:2000.

During the Audit Visit to James Cook University Singapore (JCUS – see Section 2.5) the Audit Panelists were given a demonstration of a 'Training Management System' being developed quite separately from the QMS, but which was also auditable, having similar process maps, and well-developed documented policies, procedures and work instructions.

The Audit Panel members were advised of plans to develop a complete organisational self-review program for JCUS based on the Singapore Quality Class (SQC) award. This award is a local quality program run by the Singapore Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING – see also Section 2.5 for details), and its adoption by JCUS would not only be understandable, but highly

appropriate. The SQC award framework is similar in structure to the Australian Business Excellence Framework.

However, during the Audit Visit to JCU campuses in Australia, there was no mention of either of these JCUS quality system initiatives, or the need for them to be integrated with the QMS being developed at the Australian end. This prompted the Audit Panel to make the following recommendation.

**Recommendation 4**

**That JCU and JCU Singapore liaise closely to ensure that the quality management systems being developed at each location are harmonised in order to work effectively, both separately and together.**

## 2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

The Millennium Document includes the following strategies and desired outcomes with respect to Teaching and Learning under Priority Objective 1: Reputation:

- Continually evaluate the quality of the teaching and learning experience in providing successful outcomes for our stakeholders.
- Critically review the relevance and pedagogical frameworks of the curriculum against international standards and strategically align resources in support of sustained excellence in teaching, research and scholarship.
- Curricula are contemporary, relevant and resource-effective.
- Teaching is of the highest quality.

These same statements are also to be found in the University-wide Operational Plan.

### 2.1 *Curriculum, Program Design, Development, Monitoring, Review and Revision*

In the Performance Portfolio, under the heading 'Quality Objectives' it is stated that the key goals of JCU in Teaching and Learning are to provide an environment in which:

- Students develop skills, understanding and values generic to university education and specific to the disciplines and field in which they elect to focus their studies; and
- Staff find rewarding opportunities for personal and professional development as educators.

These 'key goals' were unreferenced in the Portfolio but are in fact drawn from the University's Teaching and Learning Plan, itself contained in the JCU – Quality in Teaching and Learning Policy (p9). The 'enactment' of these goals is considered below

#### 2.1.1 Curriculum, Program Design and Development

The Teaching and Learning Plan sets out the criteria that Academic Board has outlined for the development of subject and course proposals. Through its Standing Committee, Academic Board scrutinises all course proposals, undergraduate and postgraduate, to ensure that they contribute to the mission, aim and objectives of the University, as well as address the previously approved generic skill attributes (postgraduate-specific attributes are in brackets):

- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving;
- Interpersonal Understanding (and Communication);
- Literacy and Numeracy;
- Information Technology; and
- Learning Achievement (Project Management).

On the basis of the review of a sample of curriculum proposals for new courses, the Audit Panel noted that due attention is being paid by the Academic Board to the development of graduate attributes at a University-wide level. This kind of monitoring is now fairly standard in Australian universities. In line with the devolved structure for decision-making at JCU, as documented in the Portfolio 'curriculum design and development originates at School level with Faculty involvement occurring when an inter-School or inter-Faculty development is proposed' and it is recognised that it is important that 'Schools maintain flexibility in matters relating to curriculum and program design and development, as judged relevant to their particular disciplines' (PFp22).

These observations again illustrate recognition by JCU of the need for there to be a balance between having 'a System' to ensure minimum or uniform quality requirements, and yet retain the flexibility to customise programs at the local level for different client groups and needs.

The Audit Panel reviewed a number of JCU course documents, including course outlines, teaching plans, assessment schemas, and teaching and learning resource materials. During the Audit Visit the Panel met students and staff drawn from the same sample of course areas, and concluded from the information obtained from these sources that the University's curriculum and program design and development processes are effective in producing outcomes which meet both the consistency and flexibility criteria. In practice this means (especially with respect to the flexibility criterion) that JCU has the capacity to develop courses for niche markets. The most notable example is the JCU School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine which has tailored its degree programs specifically to cater for the health needs of rural, remote and Indigenous communities located in the tropics. Not surprisingly given its unique profile the School takes its community engagement responsibility seriously and as such is a founding member of the Centre for Rural and Remote Health, which is based at Mt Isa.

Another example of program flexibility for different client groups and needs is the way that the School of Indigenous Australian Studies (SIAS) has been encouraged to develop its programs so that not only are they effective in meeting the needs of the local Indigenous communities, but also have attracted a number of non-Indigenous students, including some International students. This approach has helped transform SIAS from the status of a centre dedicated to serving the needs of Indigenous Australians, to that of a School of the University in its own right.

It should also be noted in this respect that in 2003 the Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences adopted a new requirement for all courses in the Faculty to include Indigenous Australian content taught by an Indigenous Australian and the Audit Panel looks forward to positive outcomes resulting from this recent initiative. This strategy is yet to be put in place across other Faculties.

#### **Commendation 4**

**AUQA commends the Academic Board of JCU for sustaining an appropriate balance between consistency and flexibility in the processes used to accredit and review course proposals which enables staff to customise courses and course materials to meet regional, international, and Indigenous needs.**

With respect to the curriculum development process, the Audit Panel learned that some Schools have external advisory committees, especially for courses that are subject to statutory, or in some cases voluntary, external accreditation by professional accreditation bodies. The Panel also noted that in areas that are not covered by external course accreditation or approval processes, some Schools had put in place 'liaison committees' to assist them to identify client and stakeholder needs. The Audit Panel considers from what it learned of the value of the advisory function of these committees that these should become a uniform or 'core' requirement of the Quality Assurance System for Teaching and Learning.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**That JCU ensure in areas not covered by external course accreditation or approval processes that 'School Liaison' advisory or review committees are established so there is external input across all areas of the curriculum.**

### 2.1.2 Monitoring, Review and Revision

In relation to monitoring, it was noted in Section 1 that (together with the GCCA CEQ & GDS data) the in-house Student Feedback about Subjects (SFS) and Student Feedback about Teaching (SFT) systems are the primary means by which the quality of Teaching and Learning is monitored at JCU. Prior to the introduction of these systems in 2000, there was a comprehensive, if somewhat labour-intensive, 'paper-based' student feedback system in place.

Though the SFS / SFT dual feedback path represents an improvement over its predecessor, it was clear to the Audit Panel that the web-based SFS in particular is not an effective QA mechanism, if only because of the limited up-take / response rate by students making the data collected highly questionable in terms of reliability and representation.

The 2004 Performance Portfolio clearly states that 'the University's Self-Review process revealed a number of areas where 'use of SFS data was inadequate or inconsistent' and that a number of issues needed to be addressed, such as 'reporting / retrieval mechanisms' and 'appropriate University/School benchmarks and feedback loops' (PFp10). Together with recognition of the need to improve its use of CEQ data, this culminated in the University including the following five actions in its Consolidated Action Plan for Teaching and Learning:

- Improve feedback structure for CEQ;
- Improve feedback structure for SFS;
- Encourage students to complete SFS;
- Schools to develop formal mechanisms for informing students of SFS outcomes; and
- Teaching staff share SFS feedback with each other.

The Audit Panel strongly affirms the need for JCU to implement these actions as a matter of some urgency.

#### **Affirmation 1**

**That JCU implement the Consolidated Action Plan in relation to SFS / SFT and CEQ / GDS; to increase student participation, use data systematically, and to be able to properly monitor and improve outcomes in relation to Teaching and Learning.**

In addition, the Audit Panel makes the observation that it will take more than just 'encouraging students to complete SFS' to raise the web-based survey's response rate to adequate levels that would ensure proper data reliability, and that therefore the University should seriously consider examining or re-visiting alternative means of data collection.

In relation to Review and Revision processes, as noted above, the review of courses is the other major aspect of the Quality Assurance System. In its Self-Review JCU had identified at least two actions designed to improve the way the system currently operates:

- 'Review timetable and follow-up procedures of Course Reviews'; and
- 'Develop Review of Postgraduate Courses' (PFp33).

In particular, AUQA affirms the decision by JCU to introduce 5-year systematic reviews of Bachelor courses in the first cycle. However, noting that this is a relatively late initiative, and given the statements by the University of how important it is for the Quality Assurance System to now include processes to close 'the action loop' the Audit Panel affirms the need for Academic Board to ensure that due attention is given so that all courses are reviewed adequately within what is in essence the first full review cycle.

## **Affirmation 2**

**That in line with the University's stated commitment to introduce systematic course reviews, the JCU Academic Board put in place appropriate mechanisms to ensure that the formal review of all JCU courses is completed within the first five-year cycle.**

### **2.2 *Monitoring of Teaching, Learning and Assessment***

From a Quality Assurance perspective a critically important part of the Teaching, Learning and Assessment cycle is assessment. Typically the focus in this part of the cycle is on student achievement, and especially the assessment of achieved student learning outcomes. The work being done by JCU towards achieving enhanced undergraduate and postgraduate outcomes has already been noted.

The 2004 Performance Portfolio emphasises that the University realises that 'assessment is an essential part of the teaching and learning process', that properly selected and designed assessments influence approaches to study, and that 'constructive and timely feedback helps students to gain a sense of achievement' (PFp27). Moreover, from a QA perspective, it is crucial for JCU, given its multi-campus character, to have proper moderation processes in place to check the validity of assessment processes, for courses conducted at different locations, and for different kinds of cohorts. As this issue is particularly important for the off-shore cohorts, comment on the effectiveness of these arrangements at JCU is reserved for the section on Internationalisation (see sub-section 2.4.2 below).

As noted above JCU aims to create a supportive and nurturing learning environment for its students. Notwithstanding areas for improvement indicated in other parts of this report, from its interaction with students and staff while at JCU, and from its review of course materials including teaching, learning, and assessment materials, the Audit Panel formed the view that, generally speaking, JCU has succeeded in creating a positive teaching culture and learning environment.

While aware of other difficulties such as access to computer labs, students consistently spoke favourably about the 'open door' policy of staff, their friendliness, and willingness to offer helpful advice. The JCU learning environment was often described as low key, relaxed and supportive. Many staff, not only those directly involved with teaching, expressed commitment to students, their welfare and the need to encourage a culture focused on learning. This cultural dimension of teaching and learning is in itself deserving of commendation.

#### **Commendation 5**

**AUQA commends JCU for nurturing a student-centred teaching and learning culture and environment.**

Specific Teaching and Learning initiatives which in the Audit Panel's opinion have been particularly conducive to the creation of this culture and environment are the Mentoring Program introduced for first year students, and the Induction to Teaching and Learning program offered by Teaching and Learning Development to all new academic staff. The Audit Panel encourages JCU to consider making participation in the Induction to Teaching & Learning program a compulsory requirement.

#### **Commendation 6**

**AUQA commends the JCU Mentoring Program for first-year students and the Induction to Teaching and Learning program offered to new academic staff by the Teaching and Learning Development group.**

However, commendations 5 and 6 should not be construed as indicating that the Audit Panel believes that the quality of Teaching and Learning *across* JCU cannot be improved. It was noted for example that JCU experiences a higher student attrition rate than the average for Australian universities, the root causes of which need to be identified and addressed.

One of the Audit Panel's greatest areas of concern was the apparent differences between the experience of students studying at Townsville, and those studying at the Cairns Campus. Accordingly, a specific recommendation is made in relation to this finding below. In addressing that particular recommendation the University is also urged to consider making the practice of internal benchmarking a much stronger feature of its developing Quality Assurance System for Teaching and Learning, including for example consideration of the significance of such key indicators as comparative rates of student retention and attrition.

In line with JCU's Priority Objective to maintain and protect its 'reputation', the student learning experience at each of its campuses needs to be similar or equivalent, in respect of its culture, level of academic rigour, and access to resources, including library materials. Where there is evidence that this is not yet the case then JCU must be prepared to look critically at the sources and nature of any variation, and address any shortcomings in a timely and systematic manner. The Audit Panel suggest that a potentially powerful way to do this in an organisational culture that values a devolved academic decision making process is to encourage the development of internal benchmarking about academic matters.

### **Recommendation 6**

**That JCU use the set of key Teaching and Learning quality indicators, which together constitute the minimum standards for Teaching and Learning at JCU, to internally benchmark the nature of the student learning experience across the University, and in particular between the Cairns and Townsville campuses and in respect of all off-shore locations.**

See also Affirmation 5 in relation to student attrition and Recommendations 10 and 11 in Section 4 in relation to other aspects of the inter-campus issue from both a research training and student support services perspective.

## **2.3 *Online Development and Other Flexible Forms of Delivery***

The Teaching and Learning Development (TLD) group, working with the Teaching and Learning Quality Development Group (TLDQG) leads the development of flexible delivery, including such strategic initiatives as adoption of the LearnJCU (Blackboard-based) platform for Online learning, and the development of resources for flexible delivery.

The Audit Panel noted that uptake of LearnJCU has expanded rapidly from the initial trial in 2001, to the stage where all students are now enrolled in their subjects in LearnJCU, whether their subject is taught online or not. Students in general spoke positively of their experience of using LearnJCU. Distance Education is another noteworthy strand of flexible delivery at JCU, and the valuable contribution that both Online and DE make to providing services to rural, remote (including offshore) and Indigenous communities should be noted in relation to Commendations 4 and 5 above.

## **2.4 *Internationalisation***

### **2.4.1 Policies**

The *Millennium Document* cites Internationalisation as a Priority Objective for JCU:

*'To reflect the increasingly globalised nature of society and international competitiveness by developing the international dimensions of the University's teaching, learning, research and culture.'* (p20)

The 'desired outcomes' of Internationalisation strategies listed in the plan are:

- A culturally diverse and internationalised culture that permeates all aspects of university life
- An internationalised learning experience
- Increased incidence of international collaboration amongst teaching and research staff.

These outcomes are further articulated and given an operational context in the JCU Internationalisation Strategic Plan 2003 – 2008. There is also a companion policy document entitled Management of Off-Campus Academic Programs, where it is explicitly stated that 'This paper (sic) does not apply to JCU Singapore given that JCU Singapore is subject to a number of separate agreements, except in formulating ways in which the University and JCU Singapore may coordinate their activities.' (No page reference given.)

The QAS has been configured at JCU in such a way that 'Internationalisation' was fully incorporated into the Teaching and Learning section of 2004 Performance Portfolio, rather than treated separately as a topic in its own right. This is consistent with JCU's stated approach to quality assurance.

#### 2.4.2 Quality Assurance for Off-shore Teaching

Since January 2004 the QA arrangements for off-shore teaching have been governed by the Management of Off-Campus Academic Programs Policy.

This policy relates to 'the establishment and management of joint venture arrangements for the off-shore delivery of JCU programs wholly or in partnership with universities, or other educational institutions, whether in Australia (AUQA's emphasis) or overseas', making the policy's scope broader than just off-shore teaching. The policy encompasses twinning, franchising, joint degree arrangements, but not arrangements based solely on articulation or student exchange. As the key objective of the policy is to ensure a policy environment for 'all off-campus academic programs' the QA arrangements described apply equally to JCU's onshore partners as to those located off-shore.

For the quality assurance of Teaching and Learning they include, *inter alia*:

- Quality of curriculum, curriculum development, teaching practices, assessment of students and Course Review; and
- Quality of critique and evaluation, including team approaches, feedback of students, peer review and external accreditation.

Under these broad headings are such matters as the development and customisation of courses, the coordination of the provision of up-to-date course outlines and appropriate teaching and assessment materials; the setting and correction of examinations, and the moderation and oversight of non-invigilated forms of assessment; and the collection and analysis of student feedback on the quality of teaching and learning.

The audit of JCU involved members of the Audit Panel making visits to three organisations that offer JCU accredited courses and speaking directly with teaching staff and students at these locations: JCU Singapore, another partner organisation in Singapore, and Holmes College, an independent business college in Melbourne. In addition, during the Audit Visit the panel was able to interview JCU Australia staff directly involved in the delivery of the sample programs, and

held a teleconference with staff of another JCU off-shore partner – the Systematic Education Group International SEGi, based in Malaysia. In preparation for the site visits the Audit Panel requested and received the latest available moderation reports of assessments for sample courses delivered by these providers, and compared them to the moderation reports for Townsville and Cairns.

The Audit Panel concluded from its observations that the new policy was being observed and had been implemented effectively. Although some variation in mark distribution was noted at some locations, it was clear from the records that these had been duly noted and checked by those with responsibility for overseeing the moderation process across these locations.

On balance the Audit Panel was satisfied that in these early days of the current QA policy regime, JCU is paying appropriate attention to ensuring the consistency of academic standards in the same program across different locations, both onshore and off-shore.

#### **Commendation 7**

##### **AUQA commends JCU for having put an appropriate Quality Assurance framework in place in the form of the Management of Off-Campus Academic Programs Policy.**

In making this commendation the Audit Panel does not wish to imply that there is no further need for vigilance in respect of JCU's offshore operations. Given the evidence of various "teething problems" encountered by members of the Panel during their site visit there is a clearly a need for ongoing monitoring and moderation in line with the JCU policy. There is also the need to do more work to ensure that all staff involved in off-shore operations are fully aware of their role, obligations and the cultural issues which may arise. See below in Section 6 for a recommendation related to this issue.

#### 2.4.3 Internationalisation of the Curriculum

In the 2004 Performance Portfolio it is stated that 'Internationalisation of the curriculum is an important aspect of Internationalisation at JCU' (PFp32).

In March 2003 the Academic Board endorsed the discussion paper, Internationalisation of the Curriculum. This paper proposed a number of principles and guidelines for the development of course structures and designs, course and subject goals and objectives, course and subject content, teaching and learning strategies, materials, assessment strategies; and learning support services and strategies. The discussion paper emphasised the role of Academic Board Course Review 'as a quality assurance feedback loop to examine how policy is finding expression in curriculum practice' (PFp33).

In discussing with teaching staff what 'Internationalisation of the Curriculum' might mean, especially in practical terms, the Audit Panel also detected that there was a variety of opinions and still a fair degree of uncertainty, suggesting that there is still some way to go in communicating this policy effectively.

The Audit Panel did note that Internationalisation was one the fifteen key questions of Course Review since 2001, and encourages the University to follow-up on this Priority Objective across all JCU courses in the first full cycle of Course Reviews (see Affirmation 2 above).

The Audit Panel also noted favourably that JCU programs to be delivered at the JCU Singapore (JCUS) campus are subject to these same Course Review requirements. However, given the embryonic status of JCUS the Audit Panel did not review the course documentation being used at this location.

## 2.5 *James Cook University Singapore*

### 2.5.1 Establishing a JCU Hub in Singapore: JCUS

Similar to many Australian universities, JCU's first involvement in off-shore program delivery was through initiatives begun at the Faculty or School level.

The University made some strategic decisions at its 2002 and 2003 Management Planning Conferences to 'establish a new paradigm for international marketing based on a whole-of-University approach' (2002 - A New Approach to the International Program, p6), and to concentrate its offshore effort through a joint venture with a suitable partner and thus establish a campus in Singapore, both to recruit locally, and to provide the hub of a recruitment network – i.e. to act as 'a launching platform' into Southern Asia, South East Asia, and the Peoples Republic of China. JCU recognised that the success of this strategy depended on: (i) the selection of a suitable local majority partner for the enterprise; and, (ii) the establishment of an appropriate operational base in Singapore for the development of a 'JCU Singapore' (JCUS) campus.

The Audit Panel confirms that the University has met these initial, critical conditions. However, there are now further strategic issues to be addressed regarding JCU's contractual agreement with another Singaporean partner and the next stage in the expansion of the JCUS campus.

### 2.5.2 Contractual arrangements for JCUS

The Audit Panel reviewed the contracts between JCU and the majority Singaporean partner for the JCUS initiative, the PSB Corporation, a highly-respected local operation, with strong links to the Singapore Government through the Standards, Productivity and Innovation Board (SPRING) and which has its own Academy. The contract documents sighted by AUQA were unsigned and undated copies, but the Audit Panel noted that the contractual documentation was extensive and *inter alia* specified a principled framework for the establishment and maintenance of facilities, corporate governance, and the delivery and quality assurance of JCU academic programs.

At the time of the visit to JCUS, there were only 67 students enrolled in total, with small cohorts studying the JCU BBus / MBA, BEng (E&E), and Degree and Certificate programs in Education and Psychology. The expansion of JCUS is to be staged, with teaching of the first full-time cohorts in BPsych, MBA and MIT from July 27 2004, with full-time B Bus and BIT commencing November 2004, and subject to confirmation, that a Master of Public Health would also begin then. A BNSc (Post Registration) and the MPsych/DPsych were planned for commencement in 2005.

During their visit to Singapore, the Audit Panel members learned that the Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) had required JCUS to change the initial advertising so that it did not give the impression that JCUS was a fully-fledged 'Campus' of an Australian university. The Audit Panel was able to confirm that this change had been achieved to the satisfaction of the Ministry.

The Audit Panel was also advised that it was a Singapore MOE policy requirement that foreign institutions only deliver a course through one local provider.

The Audit Panel noted that JCU also had a current 'Retainer Agreement' contract with another provider in Singapore, Washington Business School, to deliver the JCU Bachelor of Business and MBA. On the basis of a visit to this provider, which included meeting students and staff as well as examining relevant resource material, library and other student facilities, the Audit Panel concluded that the provider appeared to be a very sound operation from both an educational and a quality assurance perspective. As this audit finding aligned with the University's own assessment of the provider as an offshore partner of several years standing, JCU was confronted with the dilemma of not only meeting the respective contractual and Government requirements, but also

deciding which provider was best suited for on-going delivery of the JCU BBus / MBA program in Singapore.

It is reasonable to expect that JCU would have been aware of the MOE requirements prior to the establishment of JCUS and that in the event that these meant that a change to existing provider arrangements was necessary, appropriate transition arrangements would be put in place in a timely manner. The Audit Panel is aware that this issue was under active discussion at the time of the Audit Visit to the University. Accepting the University's commitment to a timely resolution the Audit Panel makes the following affirmation.

**Affirmation 3**

**That JCU in resolving the issue of the long term off-shore provider for its Bachelor of Business and MBA programs put in place appropriate transition arrangements for students to protect the quality of the programs and the reputation of JCU in Singapore.**

2.5.3 Plans for Expansion of JCUS: Library, IT and Student Support

Noting that they are still in the very early stages of development, the Audit Panel inspected the arrangements for Library, IT and Student Support services for JCUS students and staff at both the existing Toa Payoh Campus, and the newly acquired facilities located in the SPRING building. The arrangements at the latter location appear to be much more satisfactory, particularly since JCUS has negotiated an agreement with the PSB for access to some of the student support facilities currently available to PSB Academy students. As JCUS expands, JCU senior managers need to continue to independently monitor the quality of the teaching and learning environment for students and staff in Singapore, as elsewhere, to ensure that there is the parity with the 'JCU experience' offered to students in Australia.

### 3 RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING

The *Millennium Document* includes the following statement with respect to Research as a distinctive characteristic of JCU:

*'It is one of the most successful research universities in regional Australia, and receives high levels of international recognition for a number of its areas of research. It also has a relatively high proportion of research students.'* (p6)

The *JCU Research Training Strategic Plan* states that JCU's research training mission is to produce:

*'Internationally competitive graduates who achieve their employment goals in industry, academia and research institutions'*

#### 3.1 Performance as a Tropical University

The 2004 Performance Portfolio states that the University has a 'vision, unique among the Australian universities' to be 'one of the world's leading tropical research universities. This vision is driven by the University's unique tropical location, particularly its close proximity to the World Heritage-listed areas of the Great Barrier Reef and the Wet Tropics rainforest, and its links with tropical industries and peoples' (PFp37). The question of whether this vision is indeed 'unique' or not aside, the real test is how well the available evidence supports the claim.

The University states that its commitment to research excellence is reflected in the University's mission, its strategic plan and its research policy. As already noted in Section 1 above, but worth restating here, the revised Strategic Plan establishes a bold vision for the University's role as a tropical research university:

*'We aim to be acknowledged by 2010 as one of the top five universities of the world enhancing life in the tropics through education and research.'*

In order to assess its performance as 'a tropical research university', JCU undertook international benchmarking analysis, using information from two reputable sources:

- *The 2003 Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute for Higher Education survey of the world's 500 leading research universities; and*
- *The Thomson ISI Essential Science Indicators (ESI) database of scientific performance.* (PFp37)

Using these two approaches, JCU's benchmarking analysis shows that:

- JCU is ranked 13 for research performance amongst the 15 universities located in the tropics that are listed by the 2003 Shanghai Jiao Tong University survey of the top 500 universities, and is ranked 3 for the number of articles in the science journals *Nature* and *Science* after the University of Hawaii and National University of Singapore; and
- JCU is ranked 11 for the number of citations amongst the 57 institutions located in the tropics listed in the ESI database.

Furthermore, in the tropical universities category, for citations in the specific research fields of Ecology/Environment and Plant and Animal Sciences, JCU is ranked second behind the University of Hawaii, and in Geosciences, JCU is ranked third.

On this basis, JCU claims that the evidence supports ‘the University’s vision to be one of the top three tropical universities, at least in its fields of excellence.’ (PFp39)

The Audit Panel considered it important to independently validate this claim by reviewing the international benchmarking results in conjunction with other JCU research performance data. The Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute for Higher Education surveys and the Thomson ISI Essential Science Indicators (ESI) database of scientific performance are both highly reputable and internationally recognised resources. At the time of the Audit Visit, the ESI database (which requires a subscription to access for benchmarking purposes), shows that JCU had improved from 4<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> for citations per paper in Plant and Animal Science, but in Geosciences had slipped from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> for citations per paper and for papers, but was still in third position for citations. In addition, there were positive citation trends for JCU in the three selected fields named above, and also in Clinical Medicine, but declining trends in Social Sciences, General, and comment is made on this at 3.3.1 below. The results of the latest Shanghai Jiao Tong University Institute for Higher Education survey were not available at the time of the Audit visit.

The Audit Panel concluded from the evidence available that the University was effective in achieving its research mission to facilitate high-quality research of international standing focused on areas of research strength aligned to needs of regional industries and communities in northern Queensland, and was addressing issues of global importance to tropical communities and industries.

### **Commendation 8**

**AUQA commends JCU for establishing a research profile that meets the needs of the northern Queensland region and for making substantial progress towards achieving its vision as a world-class tropical research university.**

There is further comment on JCU’s areas of research specialisation at sub-section 3.3 below.

## **3.2 *Research Management and Coordination***

### **3.2.1 Research Services**

Overall responsibility for the management of research, research training and policy implementation lies with the Pro-Vice Chancellor (Research and International), the Research Services Office and the Graduate Research School. There is also a University-wide Research Committee (and Executive Committee), and a Board of Postgraduate Studies.

Research Services supports research grants, ethics, industry liaison, innovation, commercialisation, policy development and research legal services. During the Audit Visit there was opportunity to inspect the records of the University’s two Ethics Committees (Human and Animal) and the ethics clearance documentation was found to be in good order. From the self-review it was also noted that Research Services has been allocated responsibility to increase success rates in national competitive grants.

In addition to providing services to research students and their supervisors and acting as a focal point for research training, the JCU Graduate Research School was established in 2002 with the aims of:

- Increasing the profile of research training at JCU; and
- Enhancing the quality of research training through policy development, performance monitoring, targeted skill development and effective program administration.

The Audit Panel notes that there is now the potential for some overlap in the distribution of responsibility between these two research-oriented support units to assure and enhance the quality of research and research training at JCU. Therefore there is a need for close liaison between them, especially in their communications about research planning with the faculties, schools, and research centres, and to follow up on issues identified by the surveys of HDR students. The Audit Panel noted that the most recently available survey data included in the 2004 Performance Portfolio was from the 2002 HDR survey and that although there was a high satisfaction rating by HDRs, the response rate had dropped to 32%, which though low is still above some comparator institutions. The Audit Panel affirms the University's realisation that it needs to be more systematic to ensure that it closes the feedback 'action loops'. There is further comment on this aspect of the quality system under Research Training at sub-section 3.4 below.

### 3.2.2 Application of Research

JCU states that it is 'strongly committed to maximising its commercial income from research, and to providing benefit to regional industries and businesses through partnering' (PFp47). Research Services plays an important support role in the commercialisation of research and IP through the Research Innovation and Development Office. JCU has spun off two biotechnology companies in recent years and is currently looking at other ventures. At this early stage in its commercialisation strategy the Audit Panel was satisfied that JCU has appropriate mechanisms in place to undertake due diligence, to assess risk, and monitor return on investment.

The Audit Panel noted that the University was in the process of developing what it described as 'a comprehensive policy framework for commercialisation and management of IP' to strengthen quality assurance in relation to these areas. It encourages JCU to implement this framework as soon as practicable.

## 3.3 *Research Focus: Specialisation and Collaboration*

As noted above, the Audit Panel found that the University has been very effective in achieving competitive, world-class 'tropical research university' performance in at least three areas of research focus and specialisation, drawing primarily on its strengths in: Ecology / Environment; Plant and Animal Technology; and Geosciences. Another distinctive aspect of research at JCU is the strong focus on collaborative research, with the University being actively involved in ten .

### 3.3.1 Specialisation

In the 2004 Performance Portfolio the University argues that 'One of the greatest challenges facing regional universities is establishing the necessary critical mass to address major research issues of regional, national and in some instances international importance' (PFp42), noting that in JCU's case the problem is compounded by the distance from major metropolitan centres.

The University's identified areas of research strength are:

- Marine Science;
- Earth Science;
- Tropical Biology and Conservation;
- Bio-Technology and Molecular Sciences;
- And since 2003, People, Identity and Place.

In addition, there are two emerging areas of research strength:

- Sustainable Technologies for the Sugar Industry; and
- Rural Health and Medicine in the Tropics.

In terms of forward development, it is important that the University maintain an appropriate balance between research concentration and diversity, and in this respect the Audit Panel looked favourably at several aspects of the University's research development strategy.

Firstly, the Audit Panel believes that the University deserves credit for identifying its competitive areas of research strength, based on criteria of scope, cross-disciplinary structure, critical mass, and international significance:

#### **Commendation 9**

**AUQA commends JCU for the process it has developed to establish Areas of Research Strength and specialisation, and which are managed well.**

Secondly, with respect to the need for balance between concentration and diversity, and hopefully to address the declining citation trend in Social Science noted above, the Audit Panel noted the specific case of a recently developed area of research strength.

In 2003 the University Research Committee endorsed a proposal by the Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences (FAESS) and the Faculty of Law, Business and Creative Arts (FLBCA) to establish an Area of Research Strength in 'People, Identity and Place'. In the 2004 Performance Portfolio, the aim of this Area of Research Strength was described as 'to encourage collaboration and increase productivity across the University and especially in FAESS, and to have JCU recognised internationally for its research in this area' (PFp45). 'People, Identity and Place' has its own Strategic Plan 2004-2006, subtitled 'Intellectual, Social, Economic and Cultural Dynamics'. The Audit Panel was able to confirm that as a result of establishing this Area of Research Strength there is new collaborative research work in train which has the potential to be of national or even international significance over the longer term.

The Audit Panel not only noted that this initiative created scope for areas outside the 'traditional' JCU areas of strength in 'tropical sciences' to raise their research profile, but also found strong evidence of genuine synergy between the established specialised areas of research strength, such as Marine Science and research into tropical rainforests, and an emerging area, such as Rural Health and Medicine in the Tropics, as well as collaborative initiatives generating new research opportunities in such diverse fields of study as archaeology, business, creative arts, and law.

#### **Commendation 10**

**AUQA commends JCU for the establishment of the innovative and inter-disciplinary Area of Research Strength – 'People, Identity and Place', which is in line with the strategic goals of the University.**

### 3.3.2 Collaboration

A further challenge identified by the University is 'JCU's commitment to providing research and research training that serves the needs of regional industries and communities and, more broadly, addresses the issues of global significance in the tropics' (PFp42), and it argues that a critical element in addressing adequate responses to these research challenges is 'capacity building via partnerships and other collaborative arrangements with other institutions and industry' and that for this reason 'the University has adopted a proactive and strategic approach to collaboration in research' (PFp42).

The University claims that the most successful vehicle for fostering collaboration has been the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) program, and that on a per capita basis JCU's involvement in the CRC program is the largest amongst Australian universities, with JCU receiving 39% more CRC funding than the next highest ranked institution. In addition, the Audit Panel discovered independently from its review of the Performance Portfolio that according to data available from

the AV-CC on Category 4 Total CRC Funding, in 2002 JCU was ranked fifth outright after the University of Queensland, Monash University, UNSW, and the University of Sydney (in that order), and ahead of the University of Melbourne. This data is consistent with the JCU claim.

The Townsville region is a major centre for marine research, and the University claims ‘the largest single grouping of tropical marine scientists and other professional staff in the world based at JCU, Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS), the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority, and CRC Reef’ (PFp43), and that this collaboration culminated in the signing of an MOU between the University and AIMS for ‘a Commonwealth-sponsored framework for the formal affiliation of the two institutions’, announced by the Minister on 17 June 2004. During the Audit Visit the Audit Panel was informed that 17% of JCU students have some association with CRC Reef and that it was responsible for 43% of scientific papers produced. However on this occasion the Audit Panel was not able to verify these claims independently, but on the information available at the time sees no reason to doubt them.

Cairns on the other hand is the major centre for research into wet tropical rainforests and home to the Cooperative Research Centre for Tropical Rainforest Ecology and Management (Rainforest CRC), a product of collaboration in the 1990s between JCU, the Wet Tropics Management Authority (WTMA), CSIRO, University of Queensland and Griffith University, and various tourism, conservation, and Indigenous bodies. This collaboration has led to the establishment of the Australian Tropical Forest Institute (ATFI) which is to be constructed on the University’s Cairns campus as a partnership between JCU and CSIRO.

The Audit Panel sought clarification regarding the likely impact of pending CRC funding decisions on the two above-mentioned CRCs in particular, and more broadly, for the University’s strategy of focusing on collaborative research. During the Audit Visit the Audit Panel learned of the close collaboration between CRC Rainforest and CRC Reef to establish the ‘Catchment to Reef’ program that is now providing knowledge and tools to minimise the downstream effects of agriculture to improve the ecosystem health of the World Heritage listed Great Barrier Reef Marine Park.

In the light of the expected changes to funding for CRCs, JCU pointed to plans to merge the centres and relinquish their CRC status. In their view the ATFI ‘institute model’ with funds from other sources is the way forward. Indeed the University advised that jointly-sponsored initiatives such as the ‘Catchment to Reef’ program could help bring the Townsville and the Cairns-based researchers, and thus the two regional communities, closer together. The Audit Panel found that JCU’s strategy of a collaborative approach to research to be successful and wholly commendable. It is satisfied that the University had made appropriate contingency plans in case of changes to the current funding arrangements for the CRC program so that this approach can be sustained.

### **Commendation 11**

**AUQA commends JCU for its engagement with CRCs and for having a focus on collaborative research which also positively contributes to community engagement in northern Queensland.**

In making this commendation, the Audit Panel encourages JCU to consolidate these achievements by participating in other meta-type research institutes along the lines of the ATFI, as opportunities arise.

There is further comment on other community engagement aspects of JCU in Section 5: Service to the Region and Community.

### 3.4 **Research Training**

Under research training the JCU 2004 Performance Portfolio states that ‘Students undertaking research masters and doctoral degrees perform a significant amount of the University’s research and produce many important research outputs’ (PFp48)

The Audit Panel noted that research students in fact constituted just over 5% of the total student load, which is the 17<sup>th</sup> highest nationally, and International research students from 49 countries comprise 20% of this load, the 11<sup>th</sup> highest nationally.

The Audit Panel also requested and reviewed data on participation, retention, and completions by Indigenous UG and PG students and noted that despite the numbers being reasonably small, the trend data was generally positive, including that for Indigenous HDRs. Furthermore, the positive experiences cited by the Indigenous HDR students who were interviewed about their research training at JCU during the Audit visit led the Audit Panel to form the view that JCU’s research training for Indigenous HDRs was being successful and is likely to be sustainable given the support services in place across the University. Although the total number of Indigenous HDR students is still modest, the Audit Panel was impressed with the JCU commitment and capacity to build from this base.

#### **Commendation 12**

##### **AUQA commends JCU for success in providing effective research training opportunities for Indigenous HDR students.**

However, more generally it was apparent to the Audit Panel that there was a consistent pattern of dissatisfaction among JCU research students with the variability between different parts of the University in terms of resources available for their research training and support, despite the fact that the University has a policy entitled Policy on Minimum Standards of Resources and Facilities for HDR Students. This policy covers: physical facilities; financial assistance; participation in school / faculty research culture; orientation; and access to resources and support such as email, telephone, office supplies, university vehicles etc. The 2004 Performance Portfolio also states in unambiguous terms that ‘All Heads of School are required to guarantee that they will implement the policy before the University accepts a student’ and that ‘the student is required to report on the project support received in his/her annual report to the Graduate Research School’ (PFp55).

The Audit Panel therefore concluded that the source of the dissatisfaction lay not with the policy itself (the front end of which *was* being implemented by the Heads of School). Nor was there a general level of dissatisfaction with the standard of research supervision at JCU, since the University’s research training surveys show the level of satisfaction with supervision to be high. Rather, the problem appears to lie in the failure to ‘close the feedback loop’, that is, to ensure compliance with the policy and to undertake the remedial action to address gaps in provision of the necessary resources.

#### **Recommendation 7**

##### **That JCU audit Schools for compliance with the Policy on Minimum Standards for HDR Students, make greater use of HDR student survey data, and take action in a timely manner where it is clear that minimum standards for HDR students have not been met.**

A related defect in the current quality system relates to the lack of feedback provided to postgraduate students in response to their participation in surveys, such as the Annual Survey of HDRs. Overall despite some efforts by JCU to improve access to resources for their postgraduate students there is a general lack of recognition by these students of such actions arising from the

survey findings. For postgraduate students to feel confident that JCU takes serious note of their views and issues as HDRs, gaps in provision need to be promptly identified and the necessary improvements made systematically with these changes reported back to students prior to the next survey.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That JCU provide timely feedback to postgraduate students on the results of the Annual Surveys of HDR Students, details of any subsequent improvements put in place and also foreshadow any likely future action to further improve the research training environment.**

### **3.5 Research Improvement**

The Research and Research Training section of the 2004 Performance Portfolio concludes with a Consolidated Action Plan. This plan lists five improvement actions, two of which are clearly in line with the Audit Panel's own findings in relation to research improvement priorities, other than those already listed above. These two are:

- Increased success rates in national competitive grants; and
- Benchmarking of research performance against selected Australian universities (PFp56).

With respect to the first of these findings, the Audit Panel noted that this was consistent with the research strategies and performance measures already incorporated into the JCU Operational Plan 2004-2006 and the Strategic Research Plan 2003 and affirms that these demonstrate both knowledge and understanding of the variables involved, and a commitment to improvement.

With respect to the second of these findings, the Audit Panel noted that this resonated strongly with comments made by the Vice-Chancellor in the opening session of the Audit Visit about plans to introduce an element of externality (using comparable national and international Universities) for the marking of honours theses. The Audit Panel was further advised in subsequent discussions with senior academic staff that a form of benchmarking was in place in some but not all Schools and that the nature of the actual "external" processes used varied. The Audit Panel is of the view that such a 'program benchmarking' initiative would complement the high-level benchmarking already in place to monitor the University's research performance as a tropical research university (see 3.1 above)

#### **Affirmation 4**

**That JCU consolidate plans to externally benchmark the standards of JCU honours theses against standards at other Australian and international universities, as appropriate.**

The other improvement priorities listed in the Consolidated Action Plan were to: establish a Clinical Research Committee; incorporate research planning into School strategic planning; and develop a policy framework for commercialisation. As useful as these somewhat piecemeal improvements may prove to be, the Audit Panel concluded that the University would gain more benefit in terms of improved research and research training performance, and an enhanced international reputation for research excellence, by providing greater incentives to encourage excellent research performance, such as publication rates or other appropriate measures, including the mechanisms used to allocate funds under the Infrastructure Research Grants scheme.

**Recommendation 9**

**That JCU implement the strategies identified to address the acknowledged decline in the rate of publications, and strengthen existing mechanisms to provide more performance-based incentives to individual researchers, as part of a strategic university-wide approach to improving research productivity.**

## 4 SUPPORT SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

The *Millennium Document* includes the following statement about the provision of service to students as one of the ‘Guiding Principles’:

*‘We will constantly seek to improve the service we provide for our students, so that they may reach their full potential in a supportive and student-centered learning environment.’ (p11)*

The Audit Panel observes that as a ‘Guiding Principle’ this is a general statement of intent rather than a specific objective. The *Millennium Document* also includes the following statement as a Priority Objective with respect to ‘Integration’:

*‘To foster an organisational environment which supports and values the work of all members of the University community as we seek to achieve our shared goals.’ (p16)*

However, despite the inclusive ‘*all members of the University community*’ in this statement, the Audit Panel noted that none of the strategies or desired outcomes listed for this (or for that matter any other) Priority Objective in the *Millennium Document* were aimed exclusively at the provision of services to students, but tended to focus on staff as members of the University community.

### 4.1 *Retention and the First Year Experience*

The 2004 Performance Portfolio includes a description of the work of an ad hoc Student Retention Working Group (SRWG): ‘The SRWG monitors retention rates for students and develops innovative strategies to improve retention through flexible delivery, study skills, the careers and employment service, and other areas of the University’ (PFp59).

The Audit Panel requested further information about the work of the SRWG and noted that for several years the University had been experiencing difficulty in reaching enrolment targets and had accepted that it was underperforming in relation to other universities with respect to the retention of students in some discipline areas. To this end the SRWG was set up in 2000 with reasonably broad terms of reference to: assess and report on the University’s retention performance and identify priority target student groups; recommend processes for the improved analysis of data; identify and review positive and negative practices or services; keep the University community informed; and improve the quality of the student experience of the University.

This approach was enacted in the form of the ‘ON-TRACK’ program. The University decided to focus on the first year undergraduate program (including the orientation program) in recognition that it was a ‘significant emotional, social and academic transition...to assist students’ adjustment to new ways of thinking, working and behaving’ (PFp60). The Audit Panel noted that student retention rates for commencing Bachelor Degrees had shown a small but measurable improvement in recent years, from a low of 68% in 1998, to a high of 74% in 2002 (with 72% for the latest available results in 2003).

However, the University’s Self-Review found ‘that while effective evaluation mechanisms exist for individual activities of the first year experience program, the program as a whole is not comprehensively evaluated’ (PFp60), and this became an action included in the 2004 Performance Portfolio’s Consolidated Action Plan. Given the high attrition rate noted above, the Audit Panel confirms that the issue of retention requires more concerted attention.

### **Affirmation 5**

**That JCU implement its decision to more systematically evaluate the first-year undergraduate program as a matter of priority, so that baseline data collected from 2005 can be used to develop strategies to continue to improve student retention.**

#### **4.2 Student Support Services**

The 2004 Performance Portfolio included coverage of a discrete range of services provided to JCU students, including: Counselling, Careers and Employment; Equity, and Information Services and Technologies. During the visits to both the Townsville and Cairns campuses, in addition to speaking with a range of students about these and other student services at JCU, the Audit Panel spoke with a range of staff directly involved in the provision of these services, including the ASPIRE and UNIPREP, and CONROD/ATE equity programs. Comment on the management arrangements for Equity at JCU has already been made at Section 1 above, and there is further comment on some of these programs, and the University's Priority Objective – 'Consolidation' in the section on Service to the Region and Community that follows.

From a quality assurance and enhancement perspective, the Audit Panel noted that in 2002 the University's Counselling Service conducted a survey of similar services being provided at other Australian universities, to identify standards for service provision and resourcing and that it now plans to conduct this benchmarking exercise every three years.

This particular survey found that JCU's personal-counsellor-to-client ratio was lower than the national average and the Academic Support Division increased counselling staff levels at Cairns in 2003 and Townsville in 2004 as a result. In addition, the Panel learned that Counselling and Careers and Employment Services at JCU participate in informal benchmarking. The Audit Panel noted in the 2004 Performance Portfolio that the University had given a commitment to 'Develop formal mechanisms for benchmarking standards in Counselling, Careers and Employment' (PFpp62 & 67), and affirms that this now provides a model for emulation by student service providers across the University, provided that the focus in future is on both processes and outcomes.

### **Affirmation 6**

**That JCU's commitment to undertake benchmarking of student services is an important aspect of the Quality Assurance System, and that the initiative of the JCU Counselling Service demonstrates a possible model for the other student service providers across the University to use.**

During the Audit Visit, members of the Audit Panel had the opportunity to interact with International students in a range of different fora. An activity that was consistently praised by these students was the survey of newly arriving International Students including the actions taken to address issues raised in the survey. In line with, but of a greater order than, the rise in first year undergraduate retention rates noted above, the Audit Panel noted that there had been a distinct improvement in the retention rates for International Students in first year commencing bachelor pass courses over approximately the same period, from a low of 55% in 1999/2000 to a high of nearly 70% in 2002 and 68% in 2003, the latest year with available complete data.

### **Commendation 13**

**AUQA commends JCU for systematically surveying its International Students on arrival as a proactive strategy to help reduce attrition in the commencing year of their studies.**

The Academic Support Division (ASD) provides Library and Information and Communication Technologies infrastructure and services, including: documentation; education; and assistance in the use of these technologies. With respect to quality assurance and the enhancement of service levels, the Audit Panel was informed that Information services has been conducting university-wide surveys since 1992 and that in 2002 the survey instrument was the Rodski Behavioural Research Group's Customer Library Survey, to which there were well over 1000 responses. A number of changes were made as a result of the findings of this survey, including the purchase of 80 additional computer workstations in the Library on the Douglas campus. JCU participates in the annual rankings conducted by the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) and in a Comparison with Benchmark University Libraries involving Flinders, Murdoch, Newcastle, Tasmania, and Wollongong universities on an annual basis.

The Audit Panel believes that these are appropriate benchmarking partners. The Rodski and CAUL benchmarking exercises are now well-established across the sector. However, with the exception of the new computer workstations at Douglas, the Audit Panel could not find significant evidence of systematic improvement actions to address the "access" issues, which were frequently brought to the attention of the Audit Panel by JCU students during the Audit Visit.

A consistent comment from students located at both Townsville and Cairns, and particularly from HDR students, was access to adequate Library resources, including both hard copy and electronic resources. The Audit Panel noted the introduction of '24/7 student access' in some designated computing facilities, and the acknowledgement by the University in the 2004 Performance Portfolio of the importance of taking 'the first steps towards a significant reconceptualisation of library space as "student centres"' and for 'JCU as a research intensive university' the 'creation of a virtual library' (PFp64).

It was clear to the Audit Panel from discussions with senior staff that the University is aware of the nature of the access problems being experienced by students, and was trying to address these difficulties within the means currently available to it. On balance, given the criticality of this issue for the quality of teaching and learning as well as research, the Audit Panel formed the view that it was now time for a more strategic solution and, that if necessary, the University should set minimum levels of provision for each campus by program area, which are then raised over time as resources allow.

### **Recommendation 10**

**That in expanding access to library resources (particularly for HDR students at both the Townsville and Cairns campuses), JCU establish improvement priorities annually, considering feedback from data from student surveys.**

The University's plans for improving the mechanisms for gathering and reporting student feedback have already been mentioned in other sections of this report, and although these plans refer primarily to revision of the SFS system, it should be noted that there are items in the SFS designed to capture student feedback on more than just subjects. It has also been noted in this section that different individual student service providers also survey their clients, and in addition that the University intends to conduct a University-wide survey of the first year student experience from 2005, with the explicit aim of improving retention.

In the Section of the 2004 Performance Portfolio on Support Services for Students, there is also an acknowledgement of the need for 'additional survey methods to be utilised, including focus groups' (PFp65).

Taking this diverse range of activities into account, there were certainly some pockets of exemplary practice in relation to capturing student feedback, but it was also not clear to the Panel whether all areas of the University (and in particular the more remote locations) were being covered adequately, and whether the existing and proposed separate and additional activities were piecemeal and may even be duplicative. Furthermore, the overall approach proposed for the gathering of student feedback seemed to the Audit Panel to lack University-wide coordination.

#### **Recommendation 11**

**That JCU assign responsibility at a senior level for the review of all existing and proposed mechanisms for student feedback and that these be streamlined, made comprehensive across campuses and locations, and be timed so as to regularly seek information from students on their levels of satisfaction with all aspects of their experience at JCU, including academic matters.**

#### **4.3 *Appeals, Complaints and Grievance Procedures***

AUQA Audit Panels do not involve themselves in following up on complaints made by individuals. However the panels are open to hearing comment from interviewees and other members of the University community about the effectiveness of an auditee's processes for the handling of appeals, complaints, and grievances.

While in the 2004 Performance Portfolio it is claimed that 'JCU informs students of the processes for appeals, complaints and grievance procedures through a variety of means' and that 'Heads of School and individual staff also maintain an open door policy to students' (PFp66), the Audit Panel also noted that the 'Self-Review identified that the student grievance processes though comprehensive were not well enough articulated or disseminated' (PFp67). The Audit Panel noted that the University intended to review its formal grievance procedures in the second half of 2004 and encourages it to do so.

## 5 SERVICE TO THE REGION AND COMMUNITY

The *Millennium Document* includes the following Priority Objectives with respect to Service to the Region and Community:

1. *Participation: 'To secure a level of funded places for JCU which responds to and reflects the needs of the region and to promote and facilitate the participation of those relatively under-represented in higher education, especially indigenous people.'*
2. *Engagement: 'To continue the process of engagement with our region so that the University is increasingly an integral and inseparable element of the economic, cultural and intellectual life of northern Queensland.'*
3. *Consolidation: 'To develop the full potential of the Cairns and Townsville campuses within a unified James Cook University identity, and to foster in our outreach sites an increasing sense of being integral parts of the JCU community.'*

Reference is made below to the relevance of these strategic Priority Objectives for the University's Region and Community mission.

### 5.1 *Region and Community*

The preamble to the Service to the Region and Community section of the 2004 Performance Portfolio emphasises the fact that 'James Cook University is the sole university in northern Queensland' and therefore that 'a high proportion of school leavers choose to come to JCU' (Participation). It then points to two 'complementary themes that reflect the University's tropical and regional location':

- JCU's research focuses on issues of global significance to industries and communities in the tropics' (Engagement); and
- The delivery of benefits to the northern Queensland community and more broadly, to the rural, remote and Indigenous communities in Australia (Participation and Engagement).

The Region and Community section of the 2004 Performance Portfolio concludes with a Consolidated Action Plan which lists the following Self-Review findings:

- External reviews of professionally accredited programs are to be forwarded to Academic Board (Participation and Engagement);
- Distribution and use of community relations template is to be developed by TESAG - Tropical Environmental Studies and Geography (Participation and Engagement);
- JCU Community Engagement Policy to be developed (Engagement);
- Development of the first stage of JCU Alumni Database – High Profile alumni; and
- Introduction of Email for life – for JCU alumni (Participation).

With respect to JCU's identity as the sole University in northern Queensland, prior to and during the Audit Visit, the Audit Panel received information about the attempt by a consortium of interests, including members of the Cairns business community and local government, to establish a private university based at Cairns. Although this proposal was not successful, it did alert the Audit Panel to the question as to whether the University enjoys broad community support across the northern Queensland region generally.

On the basis of the evidence before it, the Audit Panel considered that the University enjoys considerable support in the region, through achieving a reasonably strong alignment between its strategic Priority Objectives of 'Participation' in the region and 'Engagement' with its communities, and that these are reflected in the findings of the University's Self-Review. However, the Audit Panel considers that enactment of the strategic Priority Objective 'Consolidation' still requires attention, and that this is reflected in the lack of any 'consolidation' elements in the Consolidated Action Plan for Service to the Region and Community in the JCU 2004 Performance Portfolio.

As indicated in Section 4 above, during the course of its Audit Visit the Audit Panel became aware of student disquiet at variations in the quality of some services between the Townsville and Cairns campuses (see especially Recommendations 6, 10, and also 11). On the other hand the Audit Panel was made aware of several initiatives such as team teaching, parallel timetabling, use of on-line facilities, a 'floating collection' policy by the library, video conferencing and so forth, which the teaching and general staff at Cairns have put in place to attempt to ensure that their students are not unduly disadvantaged.

On balance, the Audit Panel was impressed with the progress JCU has made in implementing its *Millennium* strategy with respect to Participation and Engagement. Accordingly, in addition to the positive observations in other sections of this report (see especially Commendations 4, 8, and 11) the Audit Panel makes this general commendation.

#### **Commendation 14**

**AUQA commends JCU for the relationship that it has established with the northern Queensland region and its various communities; and especially for successful examples of the *Millennium* strategies being enacted in respect of its priority objectives for Participation and Engagement.**

Some examples of Participation and Engagement strategies that were brought to the attention of the Audit Panel, which it considered were effective, follow.

### **5.2 *Rural, Remote and Indigenous Communities***

The Audit Panel has already commended the University for the customisation of the JCU curriculum to meet more effectively the needs of rural, remote, and Indigenous communities in the section on Teaching and Learning (see Commendation 4), and for providing research training opportunities for Indigenous HDR students (see Commendation 12).

During the Audit Visit the Audit Panel spoke with a wide range of JCU staff actively engaged with rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

Two noteworthy examples of effective rural, remote and Indigenous community engagement reviewed by the Audit Panel are the Remote Area Teacher Education Program (RATEP), which is based on active collaboration with the local TAFE provider and the targeted initiatives of the School of Medicine.

RATEP was established as a joint initiative between Education Queensland, JCU and Tropical North Qld Institute of TAFE in 1992. RATEP is an innovative course that provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living in rural and remote communities access to the Bachelor of Education over five years and via distance education. TAFE delivers the front end of the program and JCU the final three years. TAFE and JCU collaborate on curriculum development to facilitate the articulation involved. Approximately 60% of Queensland's Indigenous classroom teachers are graduates of RATEP or its predecessor, the Indigenous Teacher Education Program (ITEP).

The Portfolio states: 'The School of Medicine is committed to graduating medical practitioners who are more likely to stay and serve northern Queensland regional community, especially its rural, remote, and Indigenous communities' (PFp77). To help achieve this objective, approximately 300 local GPs and specialist medical practitioners have been appointed to Adjunct academic positions to recognise their contribution to teaching and research.

To fulfill this commitment the Medical School targets students from rural and remote areas, with 50% of each cohort to have rural and remote backgrounds. There is also an annual intake target of at least five Indigenous students. This target has been met for the first five years of its operation. It was also noted that some Indigenous and remote students have entered the Medical program by articulating from the TAFE health worker training program.

Concerning the provision of Indigenous Education more generally, it was noted that JCU claimed that it has one of the highest percentages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students enrolled in its undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The DEST statistics confirm that in 2003 JCU was second only to Charles Darwin University in this respect. The focus for Indigenous Education at Townsville is the SIAS and the work of SIAS has already been commended in this report in the section on Teaching and Learning above.

### **5.3 Relationships with Schools and TAFE**

Information in the 2004 Performance Portfolio implies that relationships between JCU and TAFE are given high level direction through the JCU-TAFE Strategic Plan and are moderated through the JCU-TAFE Liaison Committee. The Audit Panel noted that there is no reference to, or allocation of responsibilities for this committee in the JCU-TAFE Strategic Plan, however a 'JCU-TAFE Liaison Management Committee' is referenced in the JCU Equity Plan 2003-2005, as working to 'improve the representation of pathways from TAFE to University in the information provided to local schools students' (p4). The Portfolio also highlights direct collaboration with the Barrier Reef TAFE to bring TAFE curricula into closer alignment in Business, IT, and Hospitality and Tourism. This strategy also received positive comment from TAFE and Hospitality and Tourism industry representatives interviewed by the Audit Panel.

Given the importance JCU places on 'Participation', 'Engagement', and 'Equity', as well as the concern about reaching enrolment targets, the Audit Panel encourages the University to continue to build on existing initiatives to improve articulation from the TAFE sector particularly for the benefit of members of rural, remote, and Indigenous communities.

### **5.4 Research and Research Collaboration**

The University claims in the 2004 performance Portfolio that staff and students are actively 'encouraged to engage in research collaboration with local and regional industry and government through the University's Research and Research Training Management Plans and Faculty research plans' (PFp80). Cited as evidence is the first meeting of the Cairns Region Research Collaboration Forum in 2003, and a range of other regional research initiatives, including: Engineering in the Community (sugar industry, wind, coastal, geotechnical and systems engineering); The Australian Centre for Tropical Freshwater Research; The Advanced Analytical Centre; and the Economic Geology Research Unit.

The University also points to its success in using its Cooperative Research Centres as vehicles to promote collaboration with the Region and Community. The Audit Panel accepts the validity of these claims and the success of this collaborative work has already been commended in the section on Research and Research Training.

### 5.5 *Economic and Cultural Development*

The final two sub-sections of the Performance Portfolio's section on Service to the Region and Community focus on economic and cultural development and the Audit Panel noted that the University has made the attraction and recruitment of International Students to study at Cairns a strategic priority.

The University's claims it is making a 'significant' contribution to the economic development of the region and its communities through employment, capital works, and research collaboration. As evidence of this, the University cited a study carried out in 1996 by the Centre for Applied Economics Research and Analysis but then points out that 'this comprehensive study is now out of date' (PFp83). Given the length of time since this survey the Audit Panel suggests that JCU update this information and review the current situation regarding economic impacts in the light of the implementation of the Millennium strategies.

In terms of cultural development, the University points in a positive fashion to the activities of the College of Music Visual Arts and Theatre (COMVAT) which is currently located at the Vincent Campus in Townsville, involving: dance; orchestral, choral, and vocal competitions; musical performance workshops and festivals; and various theatrical and community arts performances.

The Audit Panel also learned that plans for the relocation and refurbishment of facilities for COMVAT had been planned at JCU for some time, and that they were now at the head of the Campus Development and Management Planning list (see also comments in the next section). Apart from noting the *prima facie* value of these activities the Audit Panel did not collect sufficient information to make any further judgement.

### 5.6 *Service to the Region and Community – Conclusions*

Overall, the Audit Panel found there to be distinctive pockets of excellence, such as the contribution that the work of the makes to the northern Queensland region, and much good community engagement work being done, all of which reflects strong alignment with the University's strategic objectives for Participation and Engagement.

However, notwithstanding these positive findings, in speaking with staff, students and community representatives, the Audit Panel formed the distinct view that much of the good regional and community engagement work was a product of the sometimes unrecognised labour of enthusiastic and capable individuals working in different locations and situations, rather than a product of a coordinated and systematic approach.

In short, there is a need for more system development work to be done to ensure that effort by JCU staff in pursuit of the University's Service to the Region and Community Priority Objectives gain the recognition that they warrant. The Audit Panel noted a commitment in the Consolidated Action Plan to develop a JCU Community Engagement Policy, but that this would be the responsibility of the PVC (Corporate & Commercial), rather than someone with specific carriage of a Community Engagement portfolio. Moreover, although there have been some useful discussion documents developed to date, at the time of the Audit Visit, JCU did not have a formal Policy document which could be used as a framework to determine priorities, to allocate resources and responsibilities, and to monitor outcomes, and a designated member of the Senior Management Group with specific responsibility for them.

#### **Recommendation 12**

**That JCU be more systematic in the consolidation of its Participation, Engagement, and Consolidation Priority Objectives, by developing a coherent policy framework, with allocated responsibilities, reporting on**

**these regularly, and linking them more explicitly to the criteria for promotion.**

## 6 RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

The *Millennium Document* includes the following Priority Objectives for Resources Management, in the order below:

1. *Integration: 'To foster an organisational environment which supports and values the work of all members of the University community as we seek to achieve our shared goals'.*
2. *Self Determination: 'To diversify the sources and expand the scale of the University's income, and strategically manage expenditure to increase our independent ability to pursue our priorities'.*

The first of these priorities is clearly related to human resource management, while the second applies to the management of the University's financial and capital resources.

### 6.1 *Financial and Business Management*

In the Quality Systems and Structure section of its 2004 Performance Portfolio JCU states that its approach to 'Strategic Planning is linked closely to the cyclical annual University Budget Process' (PFp3). As evidence of this JCU cites that 'from the deliberations of the annual Management Planning Conference, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor develops the University budget determining several major substantive budget elements: (i) operating budgets to the Faculties, Divisions and the Chancellery, (ii) Strategic Initiatives and Major Equipment, (iii) Research Programs, (iv) Library Materials, and (v) Infrastructure Provision' and that then 'Draft versions of the budget are reviewed with Executive Deans, Pro-Vice-Chancellors individually and in the Senior Management Group'(PFp3).

In the Resources Management section of the Portfolio, there is a sub-section devoted to the more operational aspects of the Financial and Business Management processes and it is preceded by a statement that 'JCU has an excellent record of endorsement of its resource management practices from the Queensland Government Audit Office' (PFp87). However, the Auditor General's latest report also included a recommendation that 'JCU should give priority to implementing a suitable University-wide integrated risk management system including timely identification, analysis, assessment, treatment, monitoring and reporting of all risks relevant to the University' (Section 2 Executive Summary, p10). The Audit Panel noted that, in response to these findings by the Auditor General, the Consolidated Action Plan for Resources Management included the provision of a series of risk management workshops for Senior Management Group and Divisional Directors in November 2003 and for Heads of School in 2004.

Recommendations and observations in Section 1 above highlight the need for JCU to improve its approach to academic planning and to maintain a University-wide system of organisational unit or process reviews. In regard to its Financial and Business Management systems and processes, the Audit Panel found that JCU had begun implementation of a University-wide costing model for financial and budget planning, and that it had put in place costing models for new initiatives (e.g. the International program). In terms of structural issues the Audit Panel observed that form now generally followed function in line with the devolution of various support functions, for example, there are Human Resources, Finance, IT Infrastructure, staff located in Faculties rather than solely in central administrative units.

Further to the issue of Governance which has already been commented on favourably above, the Audit Panel also acknowledges the work that has gone into placing the University in a sounder financial position, especially given the seriousness of the financial plight it faced in the mid-to-late 1990s, but urges the University to continue to show due diligence in matters of financial management.

### **Commendation 15**

**AUQA commends JCU for achieving recovery from the mid 1990s financial difficulties, through adoption of an effective, transparent and University wide budget process that is performance-based.**

#### **6.2 *Campus Planning and Development and Assets Management***

In 2002, JCU embarked on the preparation of a Campus Development and Management Plan that supplemented and complemented earlier campus planning work. The Plan, which was included with the 2004 Performance Portfolio as a Supplementary Material, encompasses all JCU sites and has as its first two listed planning objectives:

- (i) To provide an adaptable framework that will facilitate orderly and efficient academic activity through the provision of suitable buildings and supporting services;
- (ii) To cater for varying rates of growth, changes in the scope of academic disciplines and changes in the relationship between them.

The Audit Panel noted the stated commitment to gear the approach to Campus Planning and Development with the University's academic planning requirements and affirms this as an appropriate planning orientation.

#### **Affirmation 7**

**That JCU continue to consolidate and integrate academic planning considerations into its approach to campus planning and development.**

The Audit Panel also noted a commitment by JCU to undertake physical audits of space allocations and usage, and that this would enable it to maintain an upgraded space database.

The Audit Panel concluded that, in line with one of JCU's own stated objectives in the 2004 Performance Portfolio, the Campus Development and Management Plan 2003 is indicative of a development and management framework which is not only sufficiently robust to provide guidance for the coming decade, but also sufficiently flexible to respond to changing initiatives, interests and circumstances.

### **Commendation 16**

**AUQA commends JCU for the thoroughness of the Campus Development and Management Plan 2003, especially with respect to its linkage to academic planning, and for the University-wide process of consultation in its development.**

#### **6.2.1 Information Technology Infrastructure**

The Audit Panel noted that the University had put in place an Information Technology and Resources program and that there was an ongoing process of review and maintenance of the IT Infrastructure Upgrade and Replacement Program. In addition, there had been some recent initiatives, namely: to establish an annual allocation of software licences at the University-level; plans for the expansion of additional 'General Access and Teaching Computer Facilities'; and, to implement a rolling program for hardware and system upgrades.

Despite these initiatives, one of the greatest areas of student complaint heard by the Audit Panel during the Audit Visit was access to IT facilities. The IT initiatives identified above are deemed appropriate and these and similar initiatives designed to improve access need to be fully implemented as a matter of priority. The Audit Panel recommends accordingly as follows:

### **Recommendation 13**

**That JCU review its current timetable and priorities for the IT Infrastructure Upgrade and Replacement Program so that any improvements deemed necessary are effected prior to the 2005 academic year.**

#### **6.3 Human Resource Management**

The other main area of Resource Management identified by the University in its 2004 Performance Portfolio was Human Resource Management (HRM). In the relevant sub-section of the Portfolio, the treatment of the University's performance in relation to HRM was descriptive rather than analytical, and the bulk of the supporting information provided was more quantitative than qualitative in nature.

However, the Audit Panel reviewed further material that it requested and heard enough through its interaction with JCU staff during the Audit Visit to form a range of conclusions with respect to the University's enacted approach to HRM.

##### **6.3.1 Indigenous Employment Strategy**

Firstly, despite the absence of any reference to staff in the Equity Plan 2003-2005, it appears that the University has made a commitment to attract Indigenous staff to work at JCU. In 2000 JCU was the first Australian University to have an Indigenous employment clause in its Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, with the aim of achieving Indigenous representation in the JCU staff profile at the same proportion as in the broader community, which was then 7.8%. At the time of the Audit Visit the proportion within JCU was 4.6%. Apart from a number of Indigenous staff appointments across JCU the University has appointed Indigenous support officers, and this initiative has provided some measure of peer support for incoming Indigenous staff and also direct support, to Indigenous students, especially in Faculties having a small but growing number of these students. The Audit Panel found this JCU-wide initiative to be effective.

### **Commendation 17**

**AUQA commends JCU for its Indigenous employment strategy, which has been implemented across disciplines, for both academic and general staff.**

##### **6.3.2 Industrial Relations and Workforce Planning**

When the Audit Panel asked more broadly about staff experience of the Enterprise Bargaining process, the prevailing view of the current negotiation round was that it was being done with good will, that issues were being clearly demarcated, and that there was willingness on both sides to negotiate freely and openly. The view was put that generally there was a constructive attitude by management about implementing HR policy across university, and there was mutual acknowledgement that there were a number of workload-related issues that needed resolution.

It was apparent that JCU has identified staff workload as an issue with implications for the quality of teaching and learning and that the University is attempting to address this through appropriate processes including the current round of enterprise bargaining.

During the Audit Visit the Audit Panel also asked about the University's approach to strategic workforce planning and received contrary indications. On the one hand, the Panel was advised that JCU was too small to have a succession program, but on the other that hand, that once the University had 'established baseline skills', that 'the next job is to move into strategic succession planning'.

Even staff positively disposed to the University's overall approach to HRM observed that they felt that the University could do more to address workload issues by for example being more prompt in filling positions when they fall vacant. The Audit Panel also noted that the staff-to-student ratio at JCU was above the average for Australian universities.

In addition, the Audit Panel noted that Townsville is currently the fastest growing regional centre in Australia in terms of population growth, and that the University also has expectations for considerable growth in student numbers at the Cairns campus, including some ambitious growth targets for International students. Apart from these factors, there are the issues relating more generally to the shifts in Australia's demographic profile which will also affect the potential for growth at JCU.

Bearing all these factors in mind the Audit Panel confirms the need for the University to increasingly pay more attention to workforce planning issues.

### **Affirmation 8**

**That JCU strengthen its approach to strategic workforce planning by including provision for succession planning.**

#### 6.3.3 Staff Development

The 2004 Performance Portfolio states that 'The majority of supervisors completed a basic people management skills package during 2002, as a first step in a comprehensive supervisor training scheme' (PFp96). With respect to management training for supervisors in employment practices and performance management, the Portfolio also indicated that all current Heads of School and Directors would have completed the successful six-day Executive Strategic Leadership Program (ESLP) by May 2004. During the Audit Visit it was stated that the majority of industrial relation issues that were coming up were problems between Heads of School and staff (particularly in regard to change management processes), and this prompted the University to offer the ESLP to the next tier of management down.

Also in the Portfolio, the Audit Panel noted reference to the introduction of an Online Induction package for all staff (due January 2004, but still being trialled at the time of the Audit Visit), and an Induction Program for Heads of School, as evidence of a 'comprehensive' approach to supervision in the Consolidated Action Plan provided for HRM.

Finally, with respect to the planning and provision of staff development *per se*, as an important part of HRM, the Audit Panel noted JCU's strongly stated commitment 'To foster an organisational environment which supports and values the work of all members of the University community' ('Integration' Priority Objective – emphasis is AUQA's).

Notwithstanding the positive steps noted above to provide staff, particularly senior and supervisory staff, with appropriate forms of development the Audit Panel concluded that the University should now become more systematic in its approach to staff development, to ensure that all categories of staff have access to opportunities for tailored development, with identification of needs being based on analysis of data collected for that purpose.

### **Recommendation 14**

**That JCU build on the success of tailored staff development programs such as the ESLP, by adopting a more systematic approach to staff development for all levels and categories of staff.**

#### 6.3.4 Staff Development for Offshore Delivery

In interviewing JCU staff involved in off-shore delivery, both those based in Australia and those contracted locally to tutor or teach it became apparent that there is considerable variation in their experience of induction for off-shore teaching, and opportunities for staff development. While some staff were very well-briefed and supported in terms of access to JCU academic and support staff and staff development opportunities, others were not so. This variation was not only, as might be expected, between Australian and locally based JCU staff, but also between Schools. Given the early stage of development of JCUS, and the importance of ensuring that all staff involved in delivering offshore programs can be adequately prepared, the Audit Panel recommends as follows.

##### **Recommendation 15**

**That JCU introduce formal induction programs for all JCU staff teaching off-shore, including cross-cultural training, and that some tailored staff development opportunities be provided for locally recruited staff so there is a sense of ‘integration’ with JCU Australia staff and knowledge of JCU systems and expectations.**

#### 6.4 *Staff Feedback*

Another observation about the HRM quality system by the Audit Panel was the lack of commitment to systematically surveying staff, or campus organisational / work climate.

At the Audit Visit the Panel learned that an initiative of this sort was developed by the Schools of Psychology and Business in 2002, HR was asked if it would assist, and the survey was implemented across the whole University. Despite the apparent success of this local initiative, the Audit Panel noted that there was no commitment in the HRM Consolidated Action Plan to continue to undertake these surveys in order to monitor satisfaction with the level of service being provided to clients within the University (i.e. by internal support services, such as HR, IT, etc.).

##### **Recommendation 16**

**That JCU, in line with its ‘Integration’ Priority Objective, regularly undertake and review results from staff surveys, including a focus on the quality of services provided within the University, and on organisational climate, as part of the University’s Quality Assurance System.**

#### 6.5 *Performance Management*

The University introduced a Performance Management Program (PMP) in 2001, ‘to improve communication between managers and their staff, regarding job expectations’ (PFp96). In 2001 PMP training was sponsored by Human Resources and the Audit Panel was advised that since that time the take-up rate has been growing but it is not yet universal. It was explained that the supervisor meets at least twice a year to review a person’s performance. That is then written up and agreed by the persons involved, and within that performance management process, the staff member can request support for staff development. Such a request is considered by the Head of School and a recommendation is made by the supervisor in terms of what can be done to assist the person.

The Audit Panel was further advised that reports could be provided by Deans and Heads of School, but it was not clear if they could be provided for staff at lower classification levels. The Audit Panel affirms the work done by JCU to introduce the PMP. These observations prompted the Audit Panel to make an affirmation, and to include a suggestion with respect to improving performance management at JCU.

**Affirmation 9**

**AUQA acknowledges the progress achieved at JCU towards building a performance-based culture through the introduction of a Performance Management Program, but affirms that to be effective it needs to be rolled-out systematically across the University and its impact reviewed after full implementation, including the way that it is linked to other HR strategies designed to improve or reward performance.**

## APPENDIX A: JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

### History and Location

James Cook University is a multi-campus, medium-sized Australian regional university with a broad curriculum and a very strong research focus. Established in 1970, JCU is the second oldest university in Queensland. Its mission places particular emphasis on subjects of special relevance to the people of the tropics, and in 2003 it was recognised as one of just 15 universities located in the world's tropics to rank in the top 500 of all universities. JCU aims to maintain and enhance a worldwide reputation, at the same time as serving its regional community.

James Cook University is centred in northern Queensland and includes JCU Townsville and JCU Cairns; teaching sites in Mackay, Atherton, Mount Isa and Thursday Island; and joint ventures in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane.

In 2003, the creation of JCU Singapore was a major step in the evolution of JCU from a regional university to an institution with strategic educational links with Asia.

### Academic Profile

James Cook University offers over 300 undergraduate and graduate courses delivered via four Faculties:

- Arts, Education and Social Sciences
- Law, Business and the Creative Arts
- Medicine, Health and Molecular Sciences
- Science, Engineering, and Information Technology

Within the Faculties are twenty-one Schools.

### Key Statistics 2003

Total Student Enrolments (at 31/08/03):		13,587 students
Research Student Enrolments (at 31/08/03):		687 students
International Student Enrolments (at 31/08/03):		1,640 students
Total Student Teaching Load (at 31/08/03):		9748.8 EFTSU
Total Staff FTE (at 31/03/04) not including casual staff):	Academic:	589
	General:	763
Total:		1352
Total Operating Revenues (end 2003):		\$179.2m
Total Operating Expenses (end 2003):		\$176.4m

## APPENDIX B: AUQA's MISSION, VALUES, AND FOUR OBJECTIVES

### 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 HE, and will assist in improving the academic quality of these institutions.

### 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.
- *Co-operative:* recognising that the achievement of quality in any organisation depends on a commitment to quality within the organisation itself, AUQA operates as unobtrusively as is consistent with effectiveness and rigour.
- *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.

### Objects:

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

**APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL**

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

Professor John Dearn, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic), University of Canberra, ACT

Professor John Gavin, Executive Director, New Zealand Cancer Control Trust, New Zealand

Adjunct Professor Susan Holland (Panel Chair), Institute for the Service Professions, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia

Mr Lyndon Rowe, Chair, Economic Regulation Authority, Western Australia

Observer

Mr Indhi Immanuel, Director, Institutional Reporting & Analysis Unit, DEST, ACT

## APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

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

AIMS	Australian Institute of Marine Science
ASD	Academic Support Division
ASPIRE	A program that targets students in urban and regional schools who have the potential but are unlikely to progress to university
ATE	Accessible Tertiary Education
ATFI	Australian Tropical Forest Institute
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
AV-CC	Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee
BBus	Bachelor of Business
BEng (E&E)	Bachelor of Engineering (Electrical & Electronics)
BIT	Bachelor of Information Technology
BNSc	Bachelor of Nursing Sciences
CAUL	Council of Australian University Librarians
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
COMVAT	College of Music, Visual Arts and Theatre
CONROD	Centre of National Research on Disability and Rehabilitation Medicine
CRC	Cooperative Research Centre
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EFTSU	Equivalent Full-time Student Unit
ESLP	Executive Strategic Leadership Program
FAESS	Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences
FTE	Full Time Equivalent
GCCA	Graduate Careers Council of Australia
GDS	Graduate Destination Survey
HDR	Higher Degree Research
HE	Higher Education
HoS	Head of School
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resource Management

ICT	Information and Communication Technologies
IP	Intellectual Property
ISI ESI	Thomson ISI Essential Service Indicators
ISO9001:2000	International Organisation for Standardisation's standard for quality systems
IT	Information Technology
JCU	James Cook University
JCUS	James Cook University Singapore
LearnJCU	JCU's on line study program
MBA	Masters of Business Administration
MIT	Masters of Information Technology
M/DPsych	Mater of Psychology/Doctor of Psychology
MOE	Ministry of Education (Singapore)
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
PSB	PSB Corporation – JCU's partner in the JCUS initiative (qv)
PMP	Performance Management Program
PVC	Pro-Vice-Chancellor
QA	Quality Assurance
QAS	Quality Assurance System
QMS`	Quality Management System
RATEP	Remote Area Teacher Education Program
SFS	Student Feedback about Subjects
SFT	Student Feedback about Teaching
SIAS	School of Indigenous Australian Studies
SQC	Singapore Quality Class
SRWG	Student Retention Working Group
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESAG	Tropical Environmental Studies and Geography, School of
TLD	Teaching and Learning Development
TLQDG	Teaching and Learning Quality Development Group
UNIPREP	Tertiary preparation course
WTMA	Wet Tropics Management Authority

