

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of
Melbourne Institute of Technology

February 2010

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OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

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

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

This Report of the audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) of the Melbourne Institute of Technology (MIT or the Institute) provides an overview, and then briefly details the Audit Panel's main findings, and its commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A brief introduction to MIT, including its mission, vision and objectives, is given in Appendix A; the mission, objectives, vision and values of AUQA in Appendix B; membership of the Audit Panel in Appendix C; and abbreviations and definitions used in this Report in Appendix D.

It should be noted that this particular audit was performed concurrently with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) review process for the re-registration for MIT to operate as a higher education provider in Victoria. A separate report on the re-registration process has been prepared by the VRQA.

The Audit Process

AUQA bases its audits of non self-accrediting HEPs on each organisation's own objectives, together with the MCEETYA *National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes* (National Protocols, available at: <http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya>), the DEEWR *Audit Handbook for non self-accrediting Higher Education Providers* and other relevant legal requirements or codes to which the organisation is committed. The programs or courses of NSAIs are accredited by government accreditation authorities, so quality audits of HEPs do not include a detailed examination of the academic quality assurance processes for programs of study.

HEP audits under the HESA consider institutional actions and performance in relation to, firstly, the institution's objectives, and secondly, a group of criteria collectively known as 'Quality Audit Factors' (QAFs). The four QAFs are set out in the Handbook referred to above (and in the AUQA Audit Manual). Their primary purpose is to provide the HEPs with a framework for the review of certain aspects of institutional performance. In the report of its self-review (the Performance Portfolio or Portfolio), the Institute reported against each of the QAFs. The sections in this Report use the four main topic headings provided by the QAFs. Within each section, all the criteria for that QAF are addressed, but usually in a holistic way rather than criterion by criterion.

On 23 July 2009, the Institute presented its submission to AUQA, comprising a 25-page report against the individual QAF criteria and 22 Appendices, together with the Institute's re-registration application to the VRQA. While this approach was comprehensive, it did result in a good deal of repetition (because

QAF criteria overlap with re-registration criteria and because the same evidence was sometimes used for both external quality assurance processes. NSAI HEP audit panels generally meet by teleconference, but as all members of this Panel are based in Victoria, the Panel met in Melbourne on 25 August 2009 to consider these materials. The Panel then requested a significant number of supplementary materials on issues of relevance.

MIT has its main campus in Melbourne, but also has English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students operations in Sydney, which were outside the scope of this audit. On 8 October 2009, the Audit Panel visited the Melbourne campus located in the CBD for the main Audit Visit. During this visit, the Panel spoke to the owners of the Institute and a wide range of MIT staff, students and other stakeholders. In all, the Audit Panel spoke with 60 people during the Audit Visit, including managers, senior staff, adjunct staff, students and external stakeholders. Sessions were also available for any member of the MIT community to meet the Audit Panel, but no one took advantage of this opportunity.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 9 October 2009 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 the Institute, as well as information gained through interviews, discussion and observation. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the Institute'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 audit findings together with lists of commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A commendation refers to the achievement of a stated goal, or to some plan or activity that has led to, or appears likely to lead to, the achievement of a stated goal, and which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. A recommendation refers to an area in need of attention, whether in respect of approach, deployment or results, which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. Where such matters have already been identified by the Institute, with evidence, they are termed 'affirmations'. AUQA indicates that some recommendations and affirmations have a high priority. It is acknowledged that recommendations in this Audit Report may have resource implications.

Quotations taken from the Portfolio are identified as (PF p).

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. Other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report. The findings of the concurrent re-registration process are contained in a separate report prepared and approved by the VRQA.

Introduction to Findings

MIT's mission is to respond to the needs of the changing workforce through innovative and high-quality education in business and information technology (IT) with clear vocational benefits to both overseas and domestic students. AUQA commends the Institute on its strong student-focus and vocational orientation, its high-quality staffing profile, and the extent and quality of its support for students.

The Panel believes that the self-review and Audit Panel processes served as a major developmental tool for MIT in re-thinking its governance, management, planning, and its quality assurance structures and processes. In the light of MIT's growth and planned development, and in the context of the self-review for this audit, MIT has committed to strengthening its institutional and academic governance, and its quality management systems.

Although MIT has a strong student focus, vocational orientation and learning support systems, MIT lacks a comprehensive overarching approach to these activities. AUQA encourages MIT to develop a Teaching and Learning Plan that would provide an effective mechanism for integrating its teaching, learning and support activities. Although MIT has good processes for identifying and supporting students 'at risk', MIT needs to strengthen its capacity for cohort analysis and for improving cohort progress rates.

MIT's current student evaluation and feedback surveys are not suitable for supporting high-quality analysis and course improvement strategies. AUQA encourages MIT to review and redesign its system for collecting and using student feedback as part of its management of teaching and quality assurance and improvement.

Following its discontinuance of Turnitin™, MIT has largely devolved the detection of plagiarism to individual academic staff. AUQA encourages MIT to develop an institutional approach to academic integrity that encompasses protocols for assignment design, education about plagiarism and a comprehensive set of detection strategies.

MIT is currently strengthening its academic governance arrangements and developing more explicit decision-making processes, including those for policy formation. In the past, MIT's processes for developing and approving policies have varied from policy to policy, and the statuses of some policies – and the level of consultation that has taken place – are not clear. This uncertainty is particularly apparent for those policies derived from other higher education institutions. AUQA encourages MIT to strengthen its internal policy development, consultation and approval processes, and to establish a comprehensive, structured 'Policies and Procedures' manual/database. The acknowledgement of external sources for derived policies and the management of more systematic dissemination should be key elements of the system.

Through careful selection and support of staff, MIT has established a high-quality staffing profile that has underpinned its achievements in quality teaching and support. MIT staff is enthusiastic, professional and concerned about student progress. MIT has also demonstrated its commitment to student welfare

and support through a range of high-quality initiatives. In particular, its student mentoring program is highly regarded by students. MIT also has well-developed library and IT resources.

MIT's quality management processes currently operate effectively but as separate, generally uncoordinated, processes. AUQA encourages MIT to establish a more integrated and systematic Quality Assurance and Improvement (QA&I) system, which has strong academic leadership and links with academic decision-making bodies. MIT also needs to strengthen its benchmarking processes to link it with its QA&I system, and to strengthen and integrate its approach to corporate and academic planning.

A summary of commendations, affirmations and recommendations follows. They are listed below in the order in which they appear in the Report.

Commendations

1. AUQA commends MIT on its student-focused and vocationally-oriented approach to learning and teaching in higher education.9
2. AUQA commends MIT on its careful selection, and support, of staff and the resultant high-quality staffing profile.15
3. AUQA commends MIT on the quality of its approach to staff induction; the provision of professional development; and staff performance planning and review.....15
4. AUQA commends MIT for the extent and quality of its Student Mentoring Program.16
5. AUQA commends MIT on the range and level of student support it provides, including the Assessment Collections Centre, study skills support, English language support and the Melbourne Institute of Technology Recruitment Agency.....16
6. AUQA commends MIT on the quality of its Library and IT services, and encourages continuing attention to the review and provision of resources.17

Affirmations

1. AUQA affirms MIT's decision to formalise the operation of the Board of Directors and to define more explicitly the decision-making roles of the other bodies involved in the governance of the Institute.....8
2. AUQA affirms MIT's decision to establish the Academic Board, the Quality Management Committee and external course advisory committees.8
3. AUQA affirms MIT's decision to adopt the Course Experience Questionnaire, and integrate its use into its Quality Assurance and Improvement system.....11
4. AUQA affirms MIT's increased attention to the development of scholarship and research capabilities as evidenced by the decision to develop a Research Plan.....12
5. AUQA affirms MIT's introduction and implementation of an academic promotion policy as part of its commitment to a high-quality staffing profile.15

Recommendations

1. AUQA recommends that MIT develops a Teaching and Learning Plan that will provide a framework to guide curriculum design initiatives that integrate graduate attributes into the learning outcomes and assessment and that are informed by student feedback.10
2. AUQA recommends that MIT strengthens its capacity for routine collection, analysis, reporting and implementation of strategies for tracking student progress rates.....10
3. AUQA recommends that MIT reviews and redesigns its system for collecting, analysing and using student feedback data as part of its broader teaching management and Quality Assurance and Improvement.10
4. AUQA recommends that MIT develops a best-practice approach to academic integrity, including: policies and educational programs for students about appropriate academic values and conduct, and the nature of plagiarism and other forms of misconduct; protocols for designing assignment/assessment tasks to reduce opportunities for cheating and plagiarism; and, procedures for deterrence and detection.....11
5. (urgent) AUQA recommends that MIT strengthens in-house capability for the development of academic policies, procedures and systems, including formal development, consultation and approval processes.....14
6. (urgent) AUQA recommends that both MIT management and committee roles and responsibilities for policy development and dissemination be clarified.14
7. (urgent) AUQA recommends that MIT establishes a comprehensive, structured ‘Policies and Procedures’ manual (possibly electronic), including consistent application of document and version control, acknowledgement of sources for derived policies, and systematic dissemination management.14
8. AUQA recommends that MIT establishes a more integrated and systematic Quality Assurance and Improvement system with strong academic leadership and with effective linkage to the academic decision-making committees.....18
9. AUQA recommends that MIT adopts a formal approach to benchmarking with Australian partners.....19
10. (urgent) AUQA recommends that MIT reconsiders its current approach to corporate and educational planning to ensure an integrated and coordinated approach to planning, linked with a systematic approach to quality assurance and improvement.....19

1 INSTITUTIONAL AND EDUCATIONAL OBJECTIVES AND INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE

First established in 1996, the Melbourne Institute of Technology (MIT) gained registration as a higher education provider in Victoria in 2004. MIT is a private company that is owned by MIT Group Holdings Pty Ltd which has two shareholders who serve as the two MIT Directors, and as the CEO and Marketing Director.

Initially MIT had a business partnership delivering business and IT courses for Edith Cowan University and the University of New England. MIT currently delivers a number of higher education courses for the University of Ballarat at MIT's Melbourne and Sydney campuses. MIT itself offers industry-oriented programs in business, accounting, IT and networking for diploma-pathway, undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and this Audit Report deals only with the MIT higher education programs accredited through the VRQA. According to statistics supplied by DEEWR, there were 140 equivalent full-time students enrolled in these MIT programs in 2008. Currently, the MIT student body is mainly international students, although its undergraduate course enrolment has a significant proportion of domestic students and there are plans to considerably expand the domestic student profile. During the audit, MIT also announced expansion plans for the development of a new \$80 million campus in the Melbourne CBD.

The MIT sets out its vision, mission and values in its Strategic Plan, its Student Prospectus, and most recently, in the Strategic Priorities within its Business Plan 2009–2014 (Appendix A).

1.1 *Institutional and Educational Objectives*

MIT has defined its objectives in terms of responding to the needs of the changing workforce through innovative and high-quality education in business and information technology with clear vocational benefits to both overseas and domestic students.

As part of its self-review process, MIT recognised that its mission and educational goals needed to be more formally articulated and communicated to students and staff. MIT has commenced a strategic planning process of updating its mission, clarifying its key strategic objectives and strengthening its business plan. MIT's strategic priorities have recently been updated in consultation with senior managers, and will be further discussed and refined at a planning retreat scheduled for December 2009.

The recent self-review has led MIT to set out a mission *to be the best private higher education provider in Business and Information Technology in Australia*. Its strategic priorities include a seven-year plan to achieve self-accrediting status and then university college status. Details of MIT's mission, key objectives and strategic priorities can be found in Appendix A of this Report, along with a table of general statistics.

The Panel believes that the Institute's state of transition in clarifying and defining its aspirations are important contextual considerations, and that the audit process was viewed by the Institute as a major developmental tool to achieve its purposes. The Panel acknowledges MIT's commitment to more rigorous and formal institutional and strategic planning.

1.2 ***Institutional Governance***

During the course of the self-review process, MIT recognised the need for its corporate governance to become considerably more structured and formalised, and for its academic governance to be strengthened. In the past, the two joint owners of the company have set out the corporate mission and goals, including the broad educational and institutional objectives. The Board has met as considered necessary and the owners have met regularly with the General Manager, sometimes in session as the Board, but more frequently as a three-person Executive Committee.

The Executive Committee invites and/or receives submissions from academic and administrative heads on educational, resource and administrative matters. The main role of the Executive Committee is to consider and implement decisions of the owners, and provide a ready and relatively informal mechanism for consideration of suggestions and proposals from academic heads and staff.

Issues of academic governance, teaching and learning, and scholarship are delegated to the Curriculum Committee to ensure a degree of separation of corporate and academic governance. The Curriculum Committee has 'primary responsibility to advise on strategic policy, academic planning and quality assurance in relation to curriculum matters and teaching and learning'. At the next level of academic governance, a Courses Committee, which reports to the Curriculum Committee, is responsible for ensuring that courses are administered in accordance with MIT policies. The Courses Committee is also responsible for reviewing courses and making recommendations on course changes.

1.2.1 Plans to Strengthen Governance Arrangements

With the growth and development of the company, and in the context of the self-review for this audit, both institutional and academic governance are undergoing a transformation. The owners have acknowledged that a more formal process of corporate governance is needed and appropriate changes are under consideration.

The new governance arrangements will also provide for the formalisation of the Executive Committee and an expansion of its membership to include independent advice. The services of a senior adviser, with higher education industry and regulatory experience, have been already obtained.

MIT is establishing an Academic Board to exercise full oversight of academic decision-making processes. The Academic Board will include senior academics from other higher education institutions, with an external Chair and a majority of external members. The Institute is also establishing a Quality Management Committee, reporting to the Academic Board, which will develop and implement academic aspects of quality, including course development and review, and reviews for external regulatory and professional bodies.

Responsibility for academic programs, staff and management has been organised into schools of business and IT, which in academic matters the Academic Board will be responsible for. Course advisory committees are also being established to advise schools and the Academic Board. The panel noted the Institute's commitment to the appointment of experienced senior academic staff, and the role of these staff in formalising and documenting its policy-making and governance.

MIT is confident that these governance and management initiatives will strengthen its developing quality management system.

The Panel regards these developments as positive and important steps for the Institute's governance and quality management, and for its future development towards its strategic objectives.

Affirmation 1

AUQA affirms MIT's decision to formalise the operation of the Board of Directors and to define more explicitly the decision-making roles of the other bodies involved in the governance of the Institute.

And, with particular respect to MIT's academic governance, the Panel affirms the need for a more formal, structured approach at this stage of the Institute's development, in line with typical academic governance practice found across the higher education sector.

Affirmation 2

AUQA affirms MIT's decision to establish the Academic Board, the Quality Management Committee and external course advisory committees.

2 ACHIEVING EFFECTIVENESS IN TEACHING, LEARNING AND OTHER CORE FUNCTIONS

2.1 *Teaching and Learning*

MIT does not currently have a Teaching and Learning Plan (or a similarly-titled document). However, the current Strategic Plan for MIT lists the following proposed outcomes for teaching and learning:

- the quality of programs offered
- the quality of graduates
- graduate employability prospects
- the quality of teaching
- the student learning support and experience provided to students
- the quality of facilities, resources and learning environment provided to students
- commitment to continuous improvement of all functions.

The findings in this and the following section of the Audit Report relate to these aspects of teaching and learning at MIT.

2.1.1 Good Practice and Innovation in Teaching and Learning

MIT's approach to encouraging and disseminating good practice in teaching and learning involves a central focus on recruiting high-quality staff with extensive experience in higher education and/or industry. Academic staff are organised into course teams that exercise collective oversight of all aspects of course content, course delivery and assessment.

MIT's courses have been developed with external industry and academic input. The Institute's teaching model involves small classes, with individual attention and project-based learning with a focus on practical skills.

Commendation 1

AUQA commends MIT on its student-focused and vocationally-oriented approach to learning and teaching in higher education.

While MIT has a range of initiatives supporting good practice in teaching and learning, the Panel noted the absence of a comprehensive, overarching and integrated approach to its activities. The Panel considered that a Teaching and Learning Plan would be an effective mechanism for bringing together and strengthening MIT's activities in this area.

The Panel noted that MIT had already decided to develop a Research Plan, and considered that the development and adoption of an integrated Teaching and Learning Plan should be undertaken to address all the other affirmations and recommendations in this Report which relate to core teaching and learning activity (sections 2 and 3), and the further development of the quality management system at MIT (section 4).

Recommendation 1

AUQA recommends that MIT develops a Teaching and Learning Plan that will provide a framework to guide curriculum design initiatives that integrate graduate attributes into the learning outcomes and assessment and that are informed by student feedback.

2.1.2 Student Progress

MIT's progression data is not organised in a form that is readily amenable to analysis. However, currently, its progression rates appear to be consistent with sector norms.

At the individual student level, MIT has effective processes for monitoring performance and providing assistance for students identified as being 'at risk'. However, the Institute's approach to monitoring cohort and population progression data is not yet sufficiently developed to allow systematic analysis.

The Panel formed the view that MIT needs to strengthen its capacity for meta-analysis of student progression in order to effectively meet the needs of its student population as it grows and diversifies.

Recommendation 2

AUQA recommends that MIT strengthens its capacity for routine collection, analysis, reporting and implementation of strategies for tracking student progress rates.

2.1.3 Student Evaluation and Feedback

MIT routinely conducts Student Unit Progress Evaluation surveys in the first half of each semester and Client Satisfaction surveys near the end of each semester. Students are also surveyed at the end of their studies through an Exit Survey.

The survey instruments currently being used are not suitable for the purpose of collecting high-quality data about student perceptions of courses, units and teaching in a form that will allow in-depth analysis and the identification of appropriate improvement strategies. Suitable survey instruments need to be selected and customised to fit MIT's needs from among the recognised, well-tested and validated instruments available. This activity needs to be undertaken to improve the Institute's management of teaching and learning quality within the broader context of its commitment to strengthen its framework for quality assurance and improvement. To become an effective part of the QA&I system, the systematic monitoring and analysis of student feedback on teaching and learning needs to be managed in-house.

Recommendation 3

AUQA recommends that MIT reviews and redesigns its system for collecting, analysing and using student feedback data as part of its broader teaching management and Quality Assurance and Improvement.

In relation to graduating students, MIT reported that a student experience questionnaire had been administered in November 2008 to the first graduates of the Master of Professional Accounting (MPA) program. In discussion with the Panel, MIT indicated that it intends to adopt the national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ, available at: <http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/content/view/full/868>), undertake appropriate analysis,

and ensure that the findings are considered and acted upon by the Academic Board, heads of school and course coordinators.

Affirmation 3

AUQA affirms MIT's decision to adopt the Course Experience Questionnaire, and integrate its use into its Quality Assurance and Improvement system.

2.1.4 Academic Integrity and Plagiarism Policies

The Panel was aware that academic integrity and plagiarism issues are matters of concern in both the self-accrediting and non self-accrediting sections of the higher education sector. The Panel considers that, in accord with common practice in the sector, plagiarism should be treated, not as an isolated issue, but within the broad context of academic integrity. Utilising the concept of 'academic integrity' enables institutions to adopt a broad and positive approach to academic values and conduct, instead of a narrow focus on the detection of plagiarism and cheating.

The Performance Portfolio, registration documents and supplementary materials gave differing accounts of policy and procedures relating to academic integrity and plagiarism at MIT. Staff interviewed also gave inconsistent accounts of current MIT policies and practices. The Panel noted that MIT had adopted, and had since abandoned, the Turnitin™ system. It was apparent that choice of detection methods and ways of dealing with cases had now been devolved to individual academics. The Panel considers that this approach is not optimal and that best practice in higher education involves the development and implementation of a consistent, comprehensive and unified approach to all aspects of academic integrity and plagiarism. Such an approach would balance institutional-level responsibilities and those of individual academics, and cover both education about academic integrity and good practice and the detection of misconduct, including plagiarism and cheating.

Recommendation 4

AUQA recommends that MIT develops a best-practice approach to academic integrity, including: policies and educational programs for students about appropriate academic values and conduct, and the nature of plagiarism and other forms of misconduct; protocols for designing assignment/assessment tasks to reduce opportunities for cheating and plagiarism; and, procedures for deterrence and detection.

2.2 *Scholarship and Creative Activity*

MIT reported a range of initiatives that promoted scholarship and creative activity, including the support of PhD study, conference attendance and visiting appointments. Performance review procedures have also been introduced to incorporate scholarship, and a promotions system for academic staff has been approved.

The Panel noted that arrangements for visiting appointments were structured to support innovations in course content, delivery, assessment and benchmarking, and that support for individual MIT academics was well regarded among staff. Staff should be encouraged to disseminate the benefits of their experiences of professional development activities, such as higher degree study and attending conferences, to their colleagues as a means of contributing to innovations in course design and delivery. The Panel encourages MIT to consider mechanisms through which staff can do this.

Support for professional development is increasing and includes support for individual scholarly and research activities, including those resulting in scholarly publications. The Panel believes that MIT's development has reached the stage where a more formal approach to the development of research and scholarship should be placed within the context of a Research Plan.

Affirmation 4

AUQA affirms MIT's increased attention to the development of scholarship and research capabilities as evidenced by the decision to develop a Research Plan.

3 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURES, DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES AND RESOURCES TO SUPPORT TEACHING AND LEARNING AND OTHER CORE ACTIVITIES

The current Strategic Plan for MIT lists the following as means of achieving its objectives:

- employing highly qualified and experienced academics
- continuous improvement of its technology and infrastructure
- developing and delivering relevant academic programs
- having in place the best support to student learning
- benchmarking with the best in the industry.

The findings in this section of the Audit Report relate to these aspects of core activity at MIT, though benchmarking is deemed more relevant to section 4 and is dealt with there.

3.1 Organisational Structures and Decision Making

Organisationally, MIT has established 'schools' as the academic units for each of its two teaching areas – business and IT. The two heads of school, together with the administration and services managers, report to the General Manager who reports to the Managing Director. The individual academic programs are managed by program coordinators who report to the heads of school. Teaching staff are organised into course teams managed by the program coordinators. Educational development and delivery has been overseen by the Courses Committee which reports to the Curriculum Committee, which in turn comes under the Executive Committee and the CEO. However, the roles of the Curriculum and Courses Committees, and the academic community generally, have not been transparently defined and the academic governance arrangements are currently being revised.

MIT's plans to strengthen governance arrangements have been discussed in section 1.2. A more formal process of corporate governance is being introduced and an Academic Board is being established to exercise full oversight of academic decision-making processes. The Academic Board includes senior academics from other higher education institutions and an external Chair. The Institute is also establishing a Quality Management Committee, reporting to the Academic Board, to take responsibility for developing and implementing academic aspects of quality, including course development and review, and reviews for external regulatory and professional bodies. These changes, together with the organisation of academic programs and staff into the two schools, will enable tighter, more explicit decision-making processes to be introduced.

3.1.1 Decision Making and Policies

The Portfolio documents MIT's academic policies in a number of areas, including academic integrity, admission, assessment, student progress and exclusion, academic appeals, credit transfer, and course approval and review. The Panel notes that these policies have been developed in a piecemeal fashion. The processes for development and approval of policies have varied from policy to policy. The status of some policies, and the level of consultation involved in their development and approval, is not clear. This uncertainty is particularly apparent for those policies derived from models in other higher education institutions. The management responsibilities for the development, approval, promulgation and review of policies have not been made clear. The terms of reference of the Curriculum Committee delegate to it

responsibility for the strategic policy, but do not specify its role in developing and approving policies.

The total body of academic policies has not been systematised or placed within a coordinated framework, leading the Panel to make this related set of findings, which though inter-related, are reported separately, as each recommendation identifies a specific aspect in need of attention.

Recommendation 5

(urgent) AUQA recommends that MIT strengthens in-house capability for the development of academic policies, procedures and systems, including formal development, consultation and approval processes.

Recommendation 6

(urgent) AUQA recommends that both MIT management and committee roles and responsibilities for policy development and dissemination be clarified.

Recommendation 7

(urgent) AUQA recommends that MIT establishes a comprehensive, structured 'Policies and Procedures' manual (possibly electronic), including consistent application of document and version control, acknowledgement of sources for derived policies, and systematic dissemination management.

Given MIT's strategic intentions to gain self-accreditation and university college status, these three recommendations are identified by the Panel as being urgent and should be considered in relation to Recommendation 10 in section 4 of this Report.

3.1.2 Student and Staff Grievances

The policies and procedures for student and staff grievances are available on the Institute's website, and referenced in the student and staff handbooks.

The Institute reported that no formal student grievances were lodged in 2009. In response to the Panels' request for details of all complaints and grievances since 2004, MIT reported a total of four formal grievances and a total of 32 complaints/grievances of all types. The Panel noted the numbers and substance of the complaints/grievances was comparable or below other institutions, and was satisfied that the processes were operating effectively.

3.2 Academic and Administrative Staff

3.2.1 Staff Recruitment

The Institute has placed heavy emphasis on recruiting and retaining high-quality staff. Its strategies include staff involvement in decision-making, responsiveness to professional and resource needs of staff, and performance review and remuneration policies. Staff interviewed reported active and positive engagement with students, their teaching activities, their fellow staff, their scholarly area and the institution in general.

Recruiting a high-quality senior academic leadership group has received special attention. MIT's current senior academic group embodies a breadth and depth of higher education and industry

experience, and leadership capability. MIT has built a high-quality staffing profile, which is a cornerstone of its achievements to date and which provides a strong base for its future development.

Commendation 2

AUQA commends MIT on its careful selection, and support, of staff and the resultant high-quality staffing profile.

3.2.2 Staff Performance and Development

MIT has well-developed policies and procedures for performance planning and review. The approach focuses on performance and development activities that are important to the success of the academic program, the institution and the individual. Review takes place six-monthly and annually. Performance is reviewed against the duties of the position (Schedule A) and a set of key performance indicators (Schedule B).

The performance review process places obligations on both the individual staff member and the Institute. Progress and achievements are measured against the staff member's performance plan. The discussion of performance in the review is used to develop plans for the improvement of work systems, processes and practices, and opportunities for professional and career development. MIT's Professional Development Policy was revised in August 2009. This policy sets out definitions, purposes, responsibilities and types of opportunity that are available. The staff interviewed reported that MIT provided a good level of support for their professional activities. For academic staff, support is available for the improvement of their teaching and related skills, and for research and other forms of scholarly and creative endeavour.

Commendation 3

AUQA commends MIT on the quality of its approach to staff induction; the provision of professional development; and staff performance planning and review.

The Portfolio noted that a system of academic promotion was under development. The later supplementary materials reported that academic promotion policy and procedures had been approved in October 2009. The Panel noted that the introduction of an academic promotion system will complete the basic policy structure for staff development, review and recognition; help sustain MIT's staffing profile; and advance the Institute's commitment to selecting, supporting and retaining high-quality staff.

Affirmation 5

AUQA affirms MIT's introduction and implementation of an academic promotion policy as part of its commitment to a high-quality staffing profile.

3.3 Support and Student Learning

In general, students believe themselves to be well served by the academic and administrative staff, and small class sizes cater for student-oriented teaching strategies, including active learning and responsiveness to individual needs. Students are impressed by the access to staff and the willingness of staff to discuss issues as they arise. Students are generally comfortable in engaging with staff in their various courses. This is encouraged by small class sizes and the availability of counselling and support services to work with students in need of additional support.

MIT's recent statement of its mission sets out a commitment as a *caring organisation*. The Panel noted MIT's active response to the recent concerns about student safety was consistent with the commitment in its mission. The Panel considers that MIT should further emphasise its concern for student welfare and safety by strengthening the relevant areas of its Student Handbook and other publications.

MIT has placed particular emphasis on its Student Mentoring Program. Students can either register themselves for the Program, or are identified by their lecturers as being 'at risk'. When there is large demand for mentoring in a particular subject, MIT also organises additional tutorials on a class basis. Mentors are chosen by MIT's Professional Recruitment service (MITRA) from a group of students who have maintained a distinction grade in a particular subject. They are provided with training about their roles, which involves providing academic support and guidance to fellow students. Mentors meet with individual mentees on a one-to-one basis and complete reports on these individual sessions. Mentors and students who had experienced the program told the Panel that the program provided significant benefits to the Institute's students.

Commendation 4

AUQA commends MIT for the extent and quality of its Student Mentoring Program.

MIT's processes for monitoring attendance and performance, and its systems for providing support to students as learners, are well-developed. Among MIT's innovations is the development of its Assessment Collections Centre and its system for identifying and supporting students at risk. The Panel regards systems such as these as contributing positively to both quality assurance and to the quality of student support. MIT has also recently strengthened its focus on English language skills and support, and also its study skills programs. In addition, through MITRA, the Institute's students and graduates have access to work placements and a Graduate Intern Work Experience Program. Given the Institute's avowed focus on producing satisfactory vocational outcomes, the Panel viewed these initiatives positively.

Commendation 5

AUQA commends MIT on the range and level of student support it provides, including the Assessment Collections Centre, study skills support, English language support and the Melbourne Institute of Technology Recruitment Agency.

From the audit of another institution whose courses are being taught by MIT, the Panel was aware of a certain level of dissatisfaction with the standard of student recreational facilities available at the CBD Campus to those students, and so checked on these during the MIT Audit Visit. The Panel did not detect an undue level of concern by MIT students and was advised that recreational facilities available to students were gradually being upgraded.

3.4 Information Resources

MIT has well-developed and effective provision of library and IT resources, and an effective set of management policies, practices and structures supporting this provision.

The Library's approach to its collection involves providing 100% of textbooks and 80% of recommended readings for every course. The collection development policy is proactive and responsive, and follows systematic selection principles aligned to academic needs and resource

availability. However, some students interviewed expressed some dissatisfaction with the level of resources available, specifically the number of copies of some texts available during peak study times.

Generally, however, student access is well managed in terms of opening hours and in terms of an effective library management system. Access from outside the campus to allow students to search, renew and reserve items is under development.

MIT has well-equipped and well-maintained computer facilities to provide students with access to hardware and software required for their courses. This provision is supported by an effective asset management program. Students have access to computer laboratories during normal working hours, as well as evenings and weekends. IT services are supported by a Student Helpdesk Service.

There is also a student bookshop facility available on-campus.

Commendation 6

AUQA commends MIT on the quality of its Library and IT services, and encourages continuing attention to the review and provision of resources.

4 MAINTAINING A COMMITMENT TO QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

As already noted in section 3, the current Strategic Plan for MIT lists the following as means of achieving its objectives:

- employing highly qualified and experienced academics
- continuous improvement of its technology and infrastructure
- developing and delivering relevant academic programs
- having in place the best support to student learning
- benchmarking with the best in the industry.

4.1 *Review and Evaluation*

4.1.1 The Quality Management System

Most of the specific processes of MIT's quality management system operate effectively as separate processes. MIT currently monitors the quality of its courses through a range of performance indicators, including enrolment trends, pass and retention rates, student feedback, and graduate destinations. Courses undergo a formal review every five years and detailed guidelines have been established for the review process. A self-assessment is prepared by the Courses Committee and reviewed by the Curriculum Committee, which is structured to provide input from external academics, a recent graduate, a current undergraduate student and members of the profession/employers/industry.

MIT reported that the self-review for the AUQA/VRQA review process had been overseen by the Executive Committee and senior academic staff. During the audit process, MIT indicated that as part of its commitment to strengthening academic governance, a Quality Management Committee was being established as a subcommittee of the new Academic Board. As part of this process, MIT has drafted an Academic Quality Management Policy, and a Policy on Quality Teaching and Learning.

Building on this initial work, the Panel considers that MIT needs to set out in detail a systematic and integrated quality management system with more coordinated leadership and oversight, in order to achieve a continuous improvement cycle. The absence of such a system was particularly evident in the self-review Portfolio's lack of systematic analysis and evaluation of the institution's Quality Assurance and Improvement system.

Recommendation 8

AUQA recommends that MIT establishes a more integrated and systematic Quality Assurance and Improvement system with strong academic leadership and with effective linkage to the academic decision-making committees.

4.1.2 Benchmarking

MIT has indicated its commitment to external benchmarking of its courses. Progress has been made in relation to external moderation of academic standards through a review of assessment in accounting units in the MPA in 2009. The approach to external moderation involves a Stage 1, in which course materials including unit outlines, tests and assessment tasks are evaluated by an

external moderator. In Stage 2, the final examination, and a sample of examination scripts together with the unit results and grade distribution, will be provided to an external moderator for evaluation and comment. To date, this initiative has involved several units in the MPA and the appointment of an external examiner.

The Portfolio placed considerable emphasis on a specific benchmarking initiative with a UK university. Although MIT has established course franchising and credit transfer arrangements with several Australian universities, it has indicated that it is reluctant to enter formal benchmarking with other Australian institutions. Though perhaps understandable commercially, given MIT's strategic objective of ultimately gaining university college status, this reluctance is unfortunate. However, MIT recognises the importance of establishing comparability of course standards, processes and content. The Institute indicated in discussion, a willingness to consider involvement in a 'benchmarking club' if a suitable set of institutions was involved. It was considered possible that a relevant industry body could sponsor such an initiative.

The Panel was not satisfied that sufficient progress had been made in the area of benchmarking and considered that engagement with a single overseas institution was not sufficient. The Panel also suggests that MIT should explore the potential for comparing performance using data from the Graduate Destination Survey (available at: <http://www.graduatecareers.com.au/content/view/full/868>) and CEQ survey results.

Recommendation 9

AUQA recommends that MIT adopts a formal approach to benchmarking with Australian partners.

4.2 *Planning and Managing for Quality*

The self-review revealed that there is a lack of integration of planning, review and quality processes. It is clear to the Institute's management, and to the Panel, that greater integration and coordination is needed. Given the recent and projected growth of the organisation, the current ad hoc approach is not sustainable.

The Panel considered that the efficacy of the informal planning and management procedures in place at MIT at the moment derives from the Institute's high-quality senior staff. However, the Panel believes that these informal procedures would not continue to be sufficient as the institution grows in size and complexity.

Recommendation 10

(urgent) AUQA recommends that MIT reconsiders its current approach to corporate and educational planning to ensure an integrated and coordinated approach to planning, linked with a systematic approach to quality assurance and improvement.

The Panel notes that this recommendation is urgent, and that the adoption of an 'integrated and coordinated approach' should be considered in relation to the work to be undertaken relating to Recommendation 1 in section 2, and recommendations 5, 6 and 7 in section 3 of this Report.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: MELBOURNE INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

In the August–September 2009 update of its Business Plan, MIT redefined its mission:

Our mission is to be the best private higher education provider in Business and Information Technology in Australia through:

- *very caring and highly personalised services*
- *empowerment and involvement of the staff and students in all aspects of teaching and learning experience*
- *continuous improvement of teaching and learning programs and facilities*
- *academic programs with long-term employability skills and high value for money*
- *proactive response to changing client and market needs*
- *progressive work-ready graduates.*

MIT also defined its core values of:

- *accountability*
- *transparency*
- *integrity*
- *excellence and scholarship.*

MIT's 20–30 year vision is for the Institute to be *as equally well known as mid-range universities in Australia. The Institute will be a worthy alternative to universities in the area of Business and Information Technology. Its programs will be well sought-after due to their industry relevance, long-term employability, caring and personalised service.*

MIT sets out 23 key objectives for the short term. These include strengthening review processes, its quality management system, corporate structure and governance, planning processes, HR systems, support services, support for scholarship, capital development, and external linkages.

MIT also sets out clear strategic priorities for 2012, 2014, 2017 and 2020. In the shorter term, these include gaining self-accrediting institute status, and further strengthening the academic staff profile, research and scholarship, and academic governance. In the long term, MIT seeks to increase its student population, in stages, to 2400 students (with 50% domestic students); to fully develop its new campus; and to gain university college status.

For a table of MIT General Statistics 2008, please see overleaf.

MIT General Statistics 2008

Broad Field of Education	Level of Course	Type of Attendance	EFTSL	Count
Information Technology	Diploma (AQF)	Full-time	25	42
		Part-time	1.125	2
	Diploma (AQF) Total		26.125	44
	Master's by Coursework Total	Full-time	11.5	23
Information Technology Total			37.625	67
Management and Commerce	Diploma (AQF)	Full-time	37.875	61
		Part-time	1.375	8
	Diploma (AQF) Total		39.25	69
	Master's by Coursework Total	Full-time	63.125	85
Management and Commerce Total			102.375	154
Non-award courses Total	Non-award courses	Part-time	0.625	4
Total			140.625	225

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

Mission

AUQA is the principal national quality assurance agency in higher education with the responsibility of providing public assurance of the quality of Australia's universities and other institutions of higher education, and assisting in enhancing the academic quality of these institutions.

Objectives

AUQA is established to be the principal national quality assurance agency in higher education, with responsibility for quality audits of higher education institutions and accreditation authorities, reporting on performance and outcomes, assisting in quality enhancement, advising on quality assurance; and liaising internationally with quality agencies in other jurisdictions, for the benefit of Australian higher education.

Specifically, the objectives of AUQA are as follows:

1. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of:
 - the quality of the academic activities, including attainment of standards of performance and outcomes of Australian universities and other higher education institutions;
 - the quality assurance arrangements intended to maintain and elevate that quality;
 - compliance with criteria set out in the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes;and monitor, review, analyse and provide public reports on the quality of outcomes in Australian universities and higher education institutions.
2. Arrange and manage a system of periodic audits of the quality assurance processes, procedures, and outcomes of State, Territory and Commonwealth higher education accreditation authorities including their impact on the quality of higher education programs; and monitor, review, analyse and report on the outcomes of those audits.
3. Publicly report periodically on matters relating to quality assurance, including the relative standards and outcomes of the Australian higher education system and its institutions, its processes and its international standing, and the impact of the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes on Australian Higher Education, using information available to AUQA from its audits and other activities carried out under these Objectives, and from other sources.
4. Develop partnerships with other quality agencies in relation to matters directly relating to quality assurance and audit, to facilitate efficient cross-border quality assurance processes and the international transfer of knowledge about those processes.

Vision

To consolidate AUQA's position as the leading reference point for quality assurance in higher education in and for Australia. Specifically:

- AUQA's judgements will be widely recognised as objective, accurate and useful, based on its effective procedures, including auditor training and thorough investigation.
- AUQA's work will be recognised by institutions and accrediting agencies as adding value to their activities, through the emphasis on autonomy, diversity and self-review.
- Through AUQA's work, there will be an improvement in public knowledge of the relative academic standards of Australian higher education and an increase in public confidence in Australian higher education.
- Through AUQA's work with other quality assurance agencies, the international quality assurance requirements for Australian higher education institutions will be coherent and rigorous, avoiding duplication and inconsistency.
- AUQA's advice will be sought on quality assurance in higher education, through mechanisms including consulting, training and publications.
- AUQA will be recognised among its international peers as a leading quality assurance agency, collaborating with other agencies and providing leadership by example.

Values

In its external relations, AUQA will be:

- *Rigorous*: AUQA carries out all its audits as rigorously and thoroughly as possible.
- *Supportive*: AUQA recognises institutional autonomy in setting objectives and implementing processes to achieve them, and acts to facilitate and support this.
- *Flexible*: AUQA operates flexibly, in order to acknowledge and reinforce institutional diversity, and is responsive to institution and agency characteristics and needs.
- *Cooperative*: AUQA recognises that the achievement of quality in any organisation depends on a commitment to quality within the organisation itself, and so 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.

APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL

Mr Robert Carmichael, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency

Emeritus Professor Alan Lindsay, Consultant (Chair)

Professor Emeritus Greg O'Brien, La Trobe University (Deputy Chair – VRQA appointee)

Ms Sally Stafford, Audit Officer, Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority

APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

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

AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CBD	Central Business District
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
DEEWR.....	Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
EFTSL.....	equivalent full-time (student load)
FEE-HELP.....	FEE-HELP is a loan given to eligible fee-paying students to help pay part or all of their tuition fees
HEP(s)	higher education provider(s)
HESA	<i>Higher Education Support Act 2003</i>
IT	information technology
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (now MCEECDYA (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs))
MIT	Melbourne Institute of Technology
MITRA	Melbourne Institute of Technology Recruitment Agency
MPA	Master of Professional Accounting
National Protocols	<i>National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes</i>
NSAI(s)	non self-accrediting institution(s)
PF p	Performance Portfolio page reference
PhD	Doctor of Philosophy
Portfolio.....	Performance Portfolio
QAFs	Quality Audit Factors
QA&I	Quality Assurance and Improvement
VET.....	vocational education and training
VRQA	Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority

