

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of
Monash College
Victoria

June 2007

AUQA Audit Report Number 80

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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. Since the creation of HEP status, AUQA has been the only body so named.

In 2007, it was envisaged that DEST (the predecessor of DEEWR) might agree that this authority could be taken up by other agencies, under appropriate conditions. Therefore, the Victorian Office Training and Tertiary Education sought this authority. This required a HEP to volunteer to be audited by the Office, with a monitoring process in place, and Monash College volunteered. A careful audit process was created, with AUQA auditors as a panel member and as an observer. The audit was judged to be equivalent to an AUQA audit for the purpose of Monash College's audit to satisfy HESA; and OTTE was judged to have carried out the audit in such a way as to be authorised by the Federal Government to perform HEP audits in the future.

In 2009, however, the Federal Government decided not to permit other agencies to be added to the HEP Guidelines. The AUQA Board therefore considered the 2007 audit report of Monash College and, in view of AUQA's involvement in the planning, execution and monitoring of this audit, agreed to endorse it as satisfying Monash College's HESA requirement.

HEP audits under the HESA consider institutional actions and performance in relation to a group of criteria collectively known as 'Quality Audit Factors' (QAFs). Their primary purpose is to provide the HEPs with a framework for the review of certain aspects of institutional performance, and the auditor with a frame of reference for reporting.

As indicated on page 4, this audit was conducted as part of an integrated quality audit and re-registration process. However, in line with HESA requirements, only the quality audit findings are publicly reported on by AUQA.

**Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development
Victoria**

Office of Training and Tertiary Education

Higher Education and Regulation Division

Integrated Quality Audit and Re-approval Report

Monash College

June 2007

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a Report produced by a Panel appointed by the Higher Education and Regulation Division of the Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development to carry out an integrated HEP quality audit and State re-approval¹ process in accordance with the provisions of the Commonwealth *Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA)*. What was then Monash College Group Pty Ltd (the Company) trading as Monash College volunteered to participate in this pilot HEP integrated quality audit and re-approval process. The four courses involved are Diplomas of Engineering Studies, Information Technology, Art and Design Studies and Business. The audit was independently observed for the additional purpose of ascertaining whether the Victorian agency should be added to the list of quality auditing bodies included in the Higher Education Provider Guidelines.

The Panel opted for the AUQA model² of 'commendation', 'affirmation' and 'recommendation' for the audit report, and the principal findings are shown below. In each category the findings are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report.

Commendations

1. The Panel commends Monash College for its expeditious, clearly organised and well presented Portfolio and Supplementary Material that could well serve as a model for subsequent HEP Audit and Re-Approval processes.
2. The Panel commends Monash College for the way in which its clear educational objectives appear to permeate its activities at all operational levels.
3. The Panel commends Monash College on the quality of its systems for distributing information among prospective and current students.

¹ This term is used to denote the Victorian processes involved in re-accreditation and re-authorisation to conduct higher education courses and for the re-endorsement of institutions to enrol overseas students.

² The relevant definitions are as follows:

- 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 the panel's view is particularly significant;
- an 'affirmation' is made where the panel agrees that there is evidence that a matter in need of attention has been identified by the auditee in the self-assessment process, and there are plans to act on it; and
- a 'recommendation' refers to an unsuitable approach, a faulty deployment or a lack of success in relation to a stated goal, and which in the panel's view is particularly significant. Recommendations indicate matters in need of attention, possibly with suggestions for action.

(DEST Draft HEP Pilot Audit Handbook, April 2006)

4. The Panel commends Monash College for its commitment to the continuous enhancement of its teaching performance as part of a wider determination to maximise the learning experience of its students.
5. The Panel commends Monash College for its emphasis on introducing students to a different culture of learning based on critical inquiry and self-directed problem solving, in preparation for University studies.
6. The Panel commends Monash College for its efficient and well-resourced support for student learning.
7. The Panel commends Monash College on the steps being taken to maintain and enhance consistency in standards, policies and practices across campuses in Melbourne, China, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

Affirmations

1. The Panel affirms the decision to remove the Group of 8 logo from College publications.
2. The Panel affirms Monash College's intention to increase the proportion of continuing academic staff.
3. The Panel affirms Monash College's stated intention to rebalance its professional development programs to allow for more discipline specific as well as pedagogical development that will further enhance the quality of staff scholarship.
4. The Panel affirms the steps being taken by Monash College to integrate performance evaluation with professional development and to introduce 360 degree review for senior staff.
5. The Panel affirms the College's commitment to the development of a more integrated and formal quality assurance system in accordance with contemporary quality assurance and management practices.

Recommendations

1. The Panel recommends that the Monash College Business Plan be renamed in such a way as to reflect its broader emphasis on strategic educational as well as business objectives and that its key strategic status in this respect be made clear to all staff.
2. The Panel recommends that the terms of reference of the College Board of Studies be reviewed in order to ensure appropriate alignment with the Academic Committee and other reporting arrangements.

3. The Panel recommends that Monash College prepare a clear statement of its reporting and accountability structures.
4. The Panel recommends that student grievance procedures specify accurately the external agencies to which student complaints can be addressed.

AUDIT REPORT

Background

The Integrated Process

A number of Victorian non-university higher education providers are also Commonwealth approved Higher Education Providers (HEPs) under the *Commonwealth Higher Education Support Act 2003 (HESA)*. One condition of continued HEP status is for the non-university provider to agree to be audited on a regular basis. This audit can be carried out by AUQA, the body that already audits self-accrediting providers, or it can be conducted by a State or Territory approval authority (an agency audit) in conjunction with its already existing re-approval processes. The choice of which audit approach to use is determined by the auditee. In the first instance such agency audits are being conducted on a pilot basis under DEST 'observation' to ascertain whether the relevant State or Territory agency should be added to the list of approved HEP quality auditors.

Monash College has opted to undergo 'agency audit' under the auspices of the Higher Education and Regulation Division of the Victorian Department of Innovation, Industry and Regional Development, integrating re-approval of its courses with an audit of its institutional performance against its own specified objectives and the criteria specified by DEST as Quality Audit Factors (QAFs). Re-approvals for Diplomas of Engineering Studies, Information Technology, Art and Design Studies and Business are required by early June 2007.

A high level of alignment was mapped between the information required under designated quality audit factors and the information required for re-approval purposes. For administrative convenience, however, it was deemed better to compile separate reports from the integrated process. The report on re-approval follows the Audit Report.

Monash College

Monash College was described in the Portfolio Document (PD) as 'one of a suite of businesses that fall under the company umbrella, Monash Group Pty Ltd.', a company wholly owned by Monash University and prior to June, 2006, known as Monash International Pty. Ltd (PD, p.5). In April 2007, Monash College Group Pty Ltd changed its name to Monash College Pty Ltd. Monash College, as one of the Company's operating arms, previously focused exclusively on providing pathways into Monash University for international students. With the introduction of FEE-HELP there has been an increase in domestic Australian students who now comprise 20% of the approximately 1,300 effective full-time students studying at the College.

Monash College has been approved to offer the courses listed above since 2002. In 2004 the College also gained approval to offer a Diploma of Arts (Communication and Human Behaviour). The College delivers its courses from three locations within Melbourne (the Clayton, Caulfield and Peninsula campuses of Monash University) as well as through four offshore partners (in China, Singapore, Jakarta and Sri Lanka). Monash College continues to operate and to advertise itself as a 'pathway college' for entry to Monash University, Part One of a Diploma leading to admission to first year at the University level and Part Two leading to entry at second year level. These articulation arrangements are restricted to appropriate faculties and are dependent on marks achieved in Diploma studies.

The Audit Process

The Panel to conduct the integrated quality audit and re-approval process was established in November 2006, and its composition is shown at Appendix 1. Preliminary training for the Panel took place on 29th November, 2006, and the core document for both the audit and re-approval aspects of the process, a self-assessment portfolio document (PD), was submitted on 19th January, 2007. This document comprised 58 pages of text, 33 appendices of supplementary material (SM) pertaining to the audit part of the process, as well as further information related specifically to the re-approval process. A number of further documents were tabled at the site visit, most of them at the request of the Panel. Because of the urgency associated with the DEST trial Integrated Audit, the PD and its attendant documentation were prepared in an unusually short period of time for a process of this kind, were admirably organised and extremely easy to navigate. The Panel considered the College's presentation of its portfolio to be commendable.

Commendation 1

The Panel commends Monash College for its expeditious, clearly organised and well presented Portfolio and Supplementary Material that could well serve as a model for subsequent HEP Audit and Re-Approval processes.

The PD was distributed to Panel members, and a first meeting was held on 16th February. On the basis of that meeting an Issues Register (IR) containing identified issues and possible questions was compiled. Some questions and requests for advance documentation or response were also identified and addressed to the College, which responded with a further document containing additional information (AI). This was given to the Chair and Audit Director for circulation to the Panel when they visited the College on 27th March, 2007 to finalise arrangements for the Panel visit. The additional information was distributed to the Panel members well in advance of the site visit.

The site visit took place on 26th and 27th April, 2007. Meetings were held at the Clayton campus and, in all, more than 60 people were interviewed during 10 separate sessions. Due to the relatively small size of the Monash College senior staff group and the recency of some appointments, it was inevitable that the Panel should see some senior staff on more than one occasion. This may be a less than desirable feature of an ideal audit, but it is not one which the Panel felt in the end substantively compromised the objectivity of any of its findings. A separate session was set aside for visits by designated Panel members to the General Facilities on the Clayton Campus, the Art and Design Facilities at Caulfield and the Engineering Facilities at Clayton. At the same time the Audit Chair, Audit Director and one Panel member took the opportunity to speak with senior staff about the College's operations with offshore partners. On DEST advice this had not originally been included in the scope of the trial audit, but after discussion with the DEST observer it was agreed that, while full audit entailing offshore visits could not be undertaken, this aspect of the College's activities should be scrutinised to the extent that this could be satisfactorily done from the Clayton location. Findings from these discussions and from the associated documentation supplied by the College will be set out under a separate heading.

The Audit was carried out against the Quality Audit Factors (QAFs) specified in the DEST Handbook for Pilot Quality Audits. While the Quality Audit Sub-Factors were systematically incorporated into the planning for each meeting and subsequently used to help the Panel marshal its conclusions, the Audit Report is presented under the four major Quality Audit Factors set out in the Handbook. Additionally, at the end of its deliberations the Panel addressed the four meta-criteria for quality assessment specified at page 18 of the Handbook and produced a summary statement in relation to each. These summaries follow the Report against the Quality Audit Factors.

1 QUALITY AUDIT FACTOR 1

Institutional and Educational Objectives and Institutional Governance

The institution has clearly defined its purposes and its role in the higher education sector. It has educational objectives aligned with these purposes and its place in the sector. The institution is governed in an appropriate manner, displays academic integrity and operates according to sound business management practices. It fosters open intellectual enquiry and is committed to the promotion of student learning.

1.1 *Institutional and Educational Objectives and Governance*

At all levels within the College there was not just a clear but an enthusiastic commitment to its role as a high quality pathway provider for entry to Monash University. The educational objectives appeared to be known and understood throughout the organisation, as evidenced by meetings with Field of Study Managers (FOSMs), Subject Co-ordinators and teachers, as well as with senior management. Students in the most part seemed to be well informed about objectives and processes, and the whole organisational culture seemed to be firmly based on concern for learners and their education. A distinctive feature of responses was the view that resources presented no obstacle to pursuit and improvement of the capacity to achieve educational objectives.

Commendation 2

The Panel commends Monash College for the way in which its clear educational objectives appear to permeate its activities at all operational levels.

As a matter of factual record, the Panel felt that neither the materials provided nor the interviews conducted on site gave a clear picture of the complex network of structural relationships and accountabilities within which Monash College operates. This lack of demonstrated clarity, which appeared in interview to be shared by at least some senior staff, crystallised early on in the audit process around issues of the setting of educational objectives, strategic planning and committee structures. Thus, the Panel was perplexed by inclusion in the PD of what was referred to as a Monash College Strategic Plan which, *inter alia*, listed improvement of student academic outcomes as part of Objective 4 (PD p.7 ff). It was subsequently explained to the Panel that this document was in fact part of the Company Business Plan that, appropriately, takes a strong business focus. Other documents, namely, a Company Statement of Strategic Directions (SM34) and a College Business Plan (SM37) were produced to clear up this confusion, both of them listing educational objectives as the top priority. In subsequent dialogue, it became clear the Monash College Business Plan was the key College document in this respect and that, given its prioritisation of educational objectives, it might usefully be retitled and, if necessary, recast to reflect this broader compass.

Recommendation 1

The Panel recommends that the Monash College Business Plan be renamed in such a way as to reflect its broader emphasis on strategic educational as well

as business objectives and that its key strategic status in this respect be made clear to all staff.

The Panel noted that an Academic Committee has recently been created at Company level and considered this a step to be applauded. Some doubt was expressed, however, as to how this body fits in to the overall governance structure of Monash College and how exactly its terms of reference will align with those of the College Board of Studies, a body jointly constituted by Monash University and the Company and shown at p.6 of the SM as firmly located in Monash College. At SM 9, for example, the Academic Committee's terms of reference are shown as receiving reports relating to academic affairs from Boards of Studies, but the terms of reference for the Monash College Board of Studies (SM 17) show it as only reporting to the Board of the Company. In interview, senior staff observed that the Board of Studies would have to be adjusted and aligned in light of the advent of the Academic Committee. Moreover, at p.47 of the PD it is stated that the 'academic conduct of Monash College is monitored and assessed by Monash University through the Board of Studies'. The Academic Committee is a Committee of the Company which, the institution argues, is not the entity being audited. Inasmuch as this body takes decisions impacting on the academic performance of Monash College, it could be argued that it constitutes one important arena of decision-making that should be open to the audit process. The Panel's recommendation in this context is, however, restricted to the Board of Studies.

Recommendation 2

The Panel recommends that the terms of reference of the College Board of Studies be reviewed in order to ensure appropriate alignment with the Academic Committee and other reporting arrangements.

While the Panel fully understands the desire of Monash College and Monash College Pty Ltd to assert the clarity of structural arrangements and accountabilities, the Panel cannot resile from the conclusion that such clarity was not readily apparent from the audit process. It would assist both internal and external parties if there were a clear and accessible statement on these important structural issues.

Recommendation 3

The Panel recommends that Monash College prepare a clear statement of its reporting and accountability structures.

1.2 *Representation of Goals, Processes and Services to Students and Prospective Students*

The Panel was impressed with the information provided to prospective students, and, with the possible exception of some confusion over grievance policies (see 3.1, below), the students appeared satisfied with this aspect of the College's operation. The recent institution of a student newsletter was noted as a valuable addition to maintaining information flow with the student body and overall the Panel found the dissemination of information to prospective and current students commendable. It was noted, however, that the Group of 8 logo is currently included on College brochures and the website, and the Panel concurred with the decision that these should forthwith be removed.

Commendation 3

The Panel commends Monash College on the quality of its systems for distributing information among prospective and current students.

Affirmation 1

The Panel affirms the decision to remove the Group of 8 logo from College publications.

2 QUALITY AUDIT FACTOR 2

Achieving Effectiveness in Teaching, Learning and other Core Functions

The institution achieves its educational objectives through the core functions of teaching and learning, scholarship and creative activity. It is able to demonstrate that it discharges these core functions effectively and seeks ways to do so even more effectively.

2.1 Teaching and Learning

On the evidence available to the Panel, it is clear that Monash College has a commendable organisational commitment to achieving effectiveness in teaching and learning. Student progress is monitored and, significantly, the progress of Monash College students through their subsequent studies at Monash University is benchmarked against the performance of their non-College peers, with comparable and very satisfactory outcomes (PD p.17-18). The College encourages and disseminates good pedagogical practice through such mechanisms as a Developing Practice Conference held in 2006 and an Annual Curriculum Conference that has been running since 2003. The Panel was also impressed with the College's curriculum review process and with the Evaluation Action Plans arising from student evaluation surveys that it requested and was shown. There were numerous examples of the College identifying and addressing areas requiring improvement in the teaching and learning area. These included a study on attrition levels, a survey of 'local knowledge' addressed to the issues associated with the growing number of domestic students attending the College, a project on plagiarism, and the sophisticated Learning+ initiative designed to establish and implement the characteristics of 'best practice' in supporting student learning at the highest level. The Monash University's Monash Experience Questionnaire has been adapted for use by the College, and the recent appointment of a Deputy Principal, Student Experience further evidences the commitment of the College to the optimisation of the students' learning experience. A coherent academic planning process has been developed as an appropriate and natural progression from projects addressing particular issues.

Commendation 4

The Panel commends Monash College for its commitment to the continuous enhancement of its teaching performance as part of a wider determination to maximise the learning experience of its students.

Further audit findings of relevance to the quality and improvement of teaching and learning can be found in sections 3 and 4 of this Report.

2.2 Scholarship and Creative Activity

The Panel was extremely impressed by the extent of the recognition by staff at all levels within the College of the fact that many of their students, particularly those from overseas, were possibly being exposed for the first time to a different culture of learning, one in which critical inquiry and a self-directed search for relevant answers were more salient features of the learning experience. This approach was encapsulated in statements from staff who insisted that

they do not give students answers, but advise them about how to set about the business of finding answers for themselves.

Commendation 5

The Panel commends Monash College for its emphasis on introducing students to a different culture of learning based on critical inquiry and self-directed problem solving in preparation for University studies.

The HEP Quality Audit Factors do not require that teaching staff be research active, although some of the Monash College staff do engage in research. The situation with reference to scholarship is, however, much less optional, the College clearly recognising the necessity for its teachers to keep abreast of the most recent thinking, research and literature in their fields. Thus, Learning + and other teaching quality initiatives are clearly informed by the importance of pedagogical scholarship. The Panel was, however, much less impressed with progress to date on professional development in the respective discipline areas. The projected rebalancing of professional development towards disciplinary enhancement, in addition to the purely pedagogical, is therefore to be welcomed (see 3, below). In the meantime, oversight of course materials by staff of the relevant University Faculties and Annual Curriculum Conferences which provide a forum for Monash College staff to interact with Faculty staff involved in Part 2 subjects, may go some way towards redressing what seems to be the present imbalance.

Further comments on the issue of scholarship are made at 3.2, below. More generally, it would be helpful if Monash College developed a series of measures by which professional development might be measured (eg. conference attendance, course enrolment, co-authoring of papers).

3 QUALITY AUDIT FACTOR 3

Organisational Structures, Decision-making Processes and Resources to Support Teaching and Learning

The institution supports the achievement of its institutional purposes and educational objectives through an appropriate and effective set of organisational structures and decision-making processes, including the resolution of grievances, provision and development of academic staff, student support processes and information resources. These arrangements promote the achievement of its institutional purposes and educational objectives.

3.1 Organisational Structures and Decision Making

Despite the observations made at 1.1, above, the overall impression formed by the Panel was of clear, consistent and effective decision-making, in keeping with the institution's purposes.

The College is currently reviewing its student grievance policy and procedures in keeping with DEST guidelines, and grievance procedures for staff are embedded in Section 10 of the current Staff Enterprise Agreement 2006. With reference to the latter, the Panel received no adverse comments from staff or management. On student grievances, however, the Panel did encounter some expressions of student dissatisfaction in relation to the extent of knowledge of current procedures. The Panel also noted that the new draft policy does not appear to include all the relevant external bodies to which complaint can be made by students (e.g. the current Higher Education and Regulation Division of the Office of Tertiary Training and Education, soon to become part of the new Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority).

Recommendation 4

The Panel recommends that student grievance procedures specify accurately the external agencies to which student complaints can be addressed.

3.2 Academic Staff

The Panel was impressed with the commitment of academic staff members of the College to ensuring the quality of educational programs. The College has a commendably professional and transparent approach to the selection of suitably qualified academic staff, and its move towards progressively increasing the proportion of continuing staff as a means of enhancing the stability of academic support is laudable. All staff are required, as a condition of securing continuing status, to obtain a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education if they do not already hold an equivalent teaching qualification. There is what was referred to as a 'learning expert in residence' to assist with improvement in quality of teaching.

Affirmation 2

The Panel affirms Monash College's intention to increase the proportion of continuing academic staff.

The induction materials provided for Melbourne staff were judged to be adequate, with several Panel members commenting on possible omissions and suggesting the College might usefully identify an induction folder exemplar from some other institution against which it might benchmark its own production. The professional development program of the College is undergoing change with the creation of a Professional Development Committee having taken place as recently as 2006. In that year emphasis was placed on pedagogy, with programs focused on developing teachers' awareness of the needs of the student cohort and building broader knowledge and utilisation of the range of teaching strategies available to meet student needs. While staff uptake of the relevant in-house programs was high, this still only led to expenditure of approximately 50% of the funds allocated for the year. For 2007, however, the addition of more discipline specific development is anticipated, and the capacity to accommodate this move testifies to the significant financial provision being made by the College in this area. Staff members are also being encouraged to join a professional association and the sum of \$1000 per academic staff member is being made available for conference attendance. The appointment of a Deputy Principal, Quality and Development may well further enhance the College's professional development activities.

Affirmation 3

The Panel affirms Monash College's stated intention to rebalance its professional development programs to allow for more discipline specific as well as pedagogical development that will further enhance the quality of staff scholarship.

Provision for performance evaluation is embedded in the Staff Enterprise Agreement 2006 at Section 47 where details of a Performance Enhancement Program (PEP) are set out. This program clearly links performance evaluation to relevant training and development opportunities in a desirable fashion, and thereby it can be expected to align performance evaluation with the increased emphasis to be placed on scholarship within the professional development program. In addition, 360 degree review is being introduced for senior staff down to the level of Field of Study Manager.

Affirmation 4

The Panel affirms the steps being taken by Monash College to integrate performance evaluation with professional development and to introduce 360 degree review for senior staff.

3.3 Support for Student Learning

The Panel found the steps taken by Monash College to apprise itself of and to make provision for the cultural diversity and differing learning needs of its students highly commendable. There is a good system for early diagnostic testing and support for students at risk, as well as a mentoring scheme. The Learning+ Project is designed to provide an overall review of the provision of appropriate learning support, and interviews with Learning and Student advisors confirmed the Panel in its view that the College provides a comprehensive and well-organised system for identifying and meeting the ongoing learning needs of existing students. This aspect of the College's operations is well resourced and initiatives like the institution of Learning Studies and the response to evidence of a desire for more online learning opportunities (eg. the appointment of a Monash University Studies Online Project Officer) were impressive. Overall, the Panel concluded that the College had demonstrated an admirably holistic approach to meeting the educational and, indeed, the associated social needs of its students.

Commendation 6

The Panel commends Monash College for its efficient and well-resourced support for student learning.

3.4 Information Resources

The panel is satisfied that the College provides adequate information resources for its educational purposes and notes the potential for upgrading in this respect with the progressive introduction of MUSO, which provides a Learning Management System, materials online and 24/7 access.

The College's access to Monash University data systems, and in particular to Callista, provides more than satisfactory capacity for the maintenance of academic records in a secure fashion. This is one of the many benefits that the College derives from its close association with the University.

4 QUALITY AUDIT FACTOR 4

Maintaining a Commitment to Quality Improvement

The institution considers evidence about how effectively it is accomplishing its institutional purposes and educational objectives. Such considerations inform the institution's strategic planning and its establishment of priorities within its component units, and may lead to the revision of institutional and educational objectives, approaches to teaching and learning, and planning and budgeting priorities.

4.1 Review and Evaluation

According to the Portfolio (p. 45), the Monash College Group (now Monash College Pty Ltd) is focusing on the development of its quality systems as a whole company in 2007. Monash College began its own self-review in 2005/6, reviewing the quality process itself in the latter year. Further collaborative discussion is taking place in early 2007 and, thereafter, the Deputy Principal, Quality and Development will put suggested changes to the Board of Studies. To date, moreover, as the Panel discovered at numerous points in the audit process, there are already excellent evaluative, tracking and remedial procedures in place. The use made of Monash University's Unit Evaluation, the Monash Experience Questionnaire, the MonQuest teacher evaluation process, the 90 Day Initiatives Process and the 2006 revision of the Monash College Quality Principles and Practices Manual are all good examples. In addition, it should be noted that Monash College takes advantage of its special relationship with Monash University to benchmark many of its review and evaluation activities against those employed by the University. The panel formed a clear impression from the interviews conducted that there was within the College, at all levels, a genuine culture of evaluative reflection and commitment to quality improvement. The Panel is confident that together with the ongoing meta-analysis of the current review process itself, the appointment of a Deputy Principal, Quality and Development as well as a Manager, Quality Compliance, will result in a more integrated and formalised quality assurance system for the College as a whole.

Affirmation 5

The Panel affirms the College's commitment to the development of a more integrated and formal quality assurance system in accordance with contemporary quality assurance and management practices.

4.2 Planning and Management for Quality

The main thrust of the Panel's views under this heading has already been expressed at 4.1, above. Indeed, the institution demonstrates a capacity to realign its planning and budgeting in a flexible fashion in accordance with its current multi-faceted and constantly evolving quality assurance system. For the future it is obviously imperative that an integrated process of change management with regard to quality assurance is reflected appropriately in the structural relationships between the College, the Company and the University.

5 REPORT ON OPERATIONS IN COLLABORATION WITH OFFSHORE PARTNERS

Monash College, through Monash College Group Pty Ltd (now Monash College Pty. Ltd), has partner organisations in Guangzhou (China), Jakarta (Indonesia), Singapore and Colombo (Sri Lanka) for the provision of Monash College diplomas in these locations. On DEST advice it had not originally been intended to include these offshore partnerships in the scope of the trial audit, not least because there are no Australian FEE-HELP students attending any of the offshore campuses. After discussion with the DEST observer, however, it was agreed that, while full audit entailing offshore visits could not be undertaken, this aspect of the activities of the College should be examined, to the extent that such scrutiny from a Melbourne-based audit would be possible. Accordingly, the Audit Chair, Audit Director and one Panel member took the opportunity to speak with senior staff about the operations with offshore partners, while colleagues were conducting site inspections of the various Melbourne facilities. The College kindly made additional documentation available at short notice in order to facilitate this process.

The Panel encountered a few areas where inevitably, the practices of offshore partners diverged somewhat from those followed in Melbourne (e.g. variations in academic and personal grievance procedures, separate performance management, discipline and induction procedures and documentation for staff). Staff employed in offshore locations are employees of the partner organisation, not Monash College, and appropriately, therefore, some staff terms and conditions vary from those offered by Monash College. In general, however, the Panel concluded that Monash College was successful in maintaining substantial consistency across the different campuses. All offshore partners operate under a common contractual licence, albeit with appropriate jurisdictional variations, and compliance with contractual obligations is regularly monitored. There are annual and triennial audits of various aspects of operational processes, staff appointments are scrutinised and 'signed off' from Melbourne, and all course guides are broadly the same. Offshore partners are represented on the Board of Studies, the main academic policy setting body for Monash College. Enrolment, progress and other data on offshore students are fed back to Melbourne for entry into the Callista system; offshore student evaluation surveys are routinely reported to the Board of Studies; and alignment of quality assurance processes across locations was confidently estimated by senior staff at 90%. This estimate was backed by evidence of the use of various common quality instruments and processes across all locations.

From the above examples, it can be concluded that Monash College does indeed maintain commendable control over consistency of standards among offshore partners. There is also an awareness that there is still room for improvement, and a number of laudable steps are in train. A general review of the interface with offshore partners is under way and a Global Summit is planned to bring key staff from each Monash College operation to Melbourne for wide-ranging discussions of academic and administrative matters, including further enhancement of uniformity in policy and practice. Active plans are being developed to secure commonality in discipline and grievance procedures. The timing of the Board of Studies meetings will be synchronised with the Annual Curriculum Conference to facilitate attendance by offshore partner representatives.

Commendation 7

The Panel commends Monash College on the steps being taken to maintain and enhance consistency in standards, policies and practices across campuses in Melbourne, China, Singapore, Sri Lanka and Indonesia.

What was not clear to the Panel, however, was the exact nature of the division of responsibilities between Monash College and the Company for the operation of offshore partnerships. At one level, all of the contracts under which offshore partners operate are in the name of the Company, and if the earlier assertion that this is not the entity being audited is correct (see p.7, above), then the audit Panel may be precluded from discussion of their content, operation or implications. On another level, the operations of offshore partners are clearly presented publicly as being those of Monash College. Students at offshore partner locations are Monash College students, their testamurs are in the name of Monash College, the Monash College Board of Studies sets academic policy for all partners, and the triennial quality reviews of offshore partners carry the Monash College title, even if they are instigated and carried out by the Company. In one of them, the 2006 Triennial Quality Assurance Review of Monash College, Singapore, it is recommended that Monash College Melbourne (MCM) 'send a further letter to TMC students clarifying the arrangements for the teach out of MU [Monash University] programs' (Recommendation 10, parentheses added). Moreover, from other documentation and interviews it was apparent that the staff of Monash College, the audited entity, shoulders very commendably much of the operational responsibility for offshore partnerships.

While it may be assumed that the legal and operational relationships between the Company, the College and the offshore partners are entirely appropriate, they were not readily transparent to the Panel. This is not something that the Panel can clarify without further investigation, although, once again, it assumes that the Company and the College share a common interest in ensuring that the capacity in which different parties are acting is at all times clearly specified. Nor could the Panel resolve the no less crucial question of what arrangements are made for the eventuality of offshore partner failure. Once again, it is stated that the standard template for contracts between the Company and offshore partners includes clauses specifying what actions are to be taken in the event of termination, this contractual context possibly putting the question beyond the scope of the present audit. On the other hand, in interview the Panel was informed that in the event of partner failure, 'high level negotiations' would have to take place with regard to arrangements for 'teaching out' students affected by the failure, a lack of specificity that would not be acceptable in the case of an onshore Victorian provider of higher education.

It is suggested that issues such as these, arising as they do out of the complexity of trading and contractual arrangements prevailing in the private sector, are matters that may not have adequately been taken into account in drafting the Handbook for Pilot Quality HEP Audits. Accordingly, it is proposed that these questions should be drawn to the attention of DEST observers in the course of the de-briefing sessions on the Pilot Audit process. In the meantime, Monash College Pty Ltd, trading as Monash College is counselled to ensure that satisfactory arrangements in connection with these issues are in place.

6 REPORT AGAINST META-ANALYSIS OF SELF-REVIEW QUALITY EFFECTIVENESS FACTORS

Evidence of a Genuine, Useful Self-review

From its study of the Portfolio, additional documentation and interviews, the Panel was convinced that a genuine and useful process of self-review had taken place as part of a continuing culture of reflection and commitment to quality improvement.

Validation of Data Presented

As a consequence of interviews and additional information provided by the College, the Panel was satisfied that the claims made by the College were supported by data that had been adequately validated.

Clarity with which Strengths and Weaknesses are Identified

The College has an ongoing and increasingly coordinated process of identifying strengths and weaknesses. Management is committed to continuous quality improvement and there is an opportunity for self-reflection and change where problems are identified in this process.

Appropriateness of Actions Proposed in Relation to Identified Weaknesses

In those areas where the Panel was made aware of a need for improvement having been identified, appropriate actions have been or are about to be taken.

APPENDIX: THE AUDIT PANEL

Audit Director:

Emeritus Professor W.G. Carson [chair]
Chair, Higher Education Advisory Committee and former Vice Chancellor, University of Auckland

Alternate Audit Director:

Ms Ewa Kuriata

Panel members:

Professor Barbara van Ernst [chair]
Deputy Chair, Higher Education Advisory Committee and Deputy Vice Chancellor, Learning and Teaching, Swinburne University

Mr Chris Avram

Faculty of Information Technology, Monash University

Dr Rob Haysom

School of Contemporary Arts, Deakin University

Professor Emeritus Greg O'Brien

Formerly Dean, Faculty of Law and Management, La Trobe University

Rev. Dr Harold Pidwell

Member, Higher Education Advisory Committee and former Dean, Melbourne College of Divinity

Ms Alison Rickard

Formerly Research Scientist, CSL Limited

Observers:

Professor Gus Guthrie, Consultant to Department of Education, Science and Training (Commonwealth)

Mr Emilio Costanzo, Higher Education and ESOS Recognition, Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology, South Australia

Executive Support:

Ms Jennie Wong

Mr Larry Isaac (alternate)

