

AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of
Victoria University

December 2006

AUQA Audit Report Number 49

ISBN 978 1 877090 66 0

ISBN 1 877090 66 2

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

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OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

In 2003 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of Victoria University.

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

The Audit Process

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

On 5 July 2006, Victoria University presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) to AUQA, including 61 supporting materials. The Audit Panel met on 9 August to consider these materials. The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to Victoria University on 8 September. During that visit, the answers to questions and additional information requested by the Panel were discussed, as well as the Audit Visit program.

A visit to four partners of VU in the delivery of offshore programs was conducted from 14 to 21 September 2006. A written report of these activities was circulated to the full Audit Panel prior to the main Audit Visit.

The main Audit Visit to VU's Footscray Park and St Albans campuses in Melbourne took place between 2 and 5 October. In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 350 people in the course of the audit, including industry partners, employers, alumni, other external stakeholders, the Vice-Chancellor, the Chancellor and members of Council, senior management, academic and general staff and undergraduate and postgraduate students. Despite invitations to students being issued by the University, several interview sessions with students were poorly attended, in particular the sessions at the St Albans campus. Open sessions were available for any member of the University community to meet the Audit Panel but no one took advantage of this opportunity.

The University's approach to the AUQA audit was open and transparent, which assisted the Audit Panel in its task. AUQA expresses its appreciation to VU for the efficient and professional assistance provided by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Institutional Services), the General Manager, Quality, Information and Planning, the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) and staff of Governance Policy and Planning Services.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 5 October 2006 and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently, although it makes significant reference to commitments approved by the University Council just after the Audit Visit. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by Victoria University as well as information gained through interviews, discussion and observation. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the University's activities

encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

This Report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations, 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 Victoria University, with evidence, they are termed 'affirmations'. It is acknowledged that recommendations in this Audit Report may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for the University. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise these recommendations, and recognises that it is the responsibility of the University to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

Victoria University is a dual-sector institution, providing both higher education and vocational education and training (VET). In keeping with AUQA's objectives (see Appendix B), the Audit Panel concentrated its attention on the higher education sector of the University. Activities and functions that are common to both higher education and VET, such as joint boards and infrastructure and support functions, also come within the scope of the Audit. Programs and operations that are solely VET are subject to separate quality requirements of the Victorian State Office of Training and Tertiary Education (OTTE), the ISO 9001:2000 quality system and the national Australian Quality Training Framework.

The Audit Panel has structured this Audit Report to broadly reflect the structure of the University's Performance Portfolio.

CONCLUSIONS

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

Introduction to Findings

Victoria University is a dual-sector institution with a distinctive mission to serve the western region of Melbourne. In October 2006 the University announced a significant reshaping of its teaching and research over the next 10 years, focused around five areas of commitment. This reshaping seeks to differentiate the University nationally and globally, while supporting targeted initiatives in both teaching and research to make a tangible difference to the lives of people in Melbourne's west. The announcement represents the culmination of several years of research and reflection by the University on how it can best contribute both within and beyond the region as a dual-sector provider.

The University is commended for its evidence-based approach to understanding the changing nature of the western region. VU has also given considerable attention to understanding the profile of its students, more than half of whom come from outside the western suburbs of Melbourne. The establishment by VU of an integrated management structure and a single Education and Research Board reflects the University's commitment to realising the advantages of being a dual-sector provider and thereby achieving new opportunities for students.

The 'New School of Thought' commitments build on a number of well-established partnerships in the western region, for which the University is commended. These commitments will assist the University in the further development of a strategy for community and industry engagement, one element of which should be a set of focused and measurable performance indicators.

Over the past few years the University has reviewed many areas of its operations, particularly in relation to planning and academic quality assurance. A quality and planning framework has been established, although this is yet to be fully embedded. The University has identified a range of improvements to its strategic planning processes to ensure better alignment among plans at various levels and improved management reporting.

It is evident that the University Council is well-informed of the strategic challenges for Victoria University. Council is commended for its effective involvement in consideration of strategic issues, for its close working relationship with the Vice-Chancellor and for its attention to risk management, which includes areas of academic risk. The Vice-Chancellor is commended for her leadership and for her communication of a vision for VU.

If VU is to achieve its 'New School of Thought' commitments, it will require sustained attention to leadership, development of staff, and a greater focus on the use of information technology coupled with a comprehensive IT strategy. As leadership and sound decision-making will be particularly important, the University's introduction of leadership training for heads of school is affirmed and its Women in Leadership program is commended. As well, it is suggested that VU strengthen the direct involvement of executive deans and their TAFE counterparts in strategic discussions and decision-making. It is also recommended that the University pay particular attention to recruitment decisions and, in particular, that the University consider additional measures to recruit and retain research staff.

The University's performance on available indicators of teaching and learning is mixed, although it rates well on several Course Experience Questionnaire measures and on measures such as retention and progress rates, the University has made noticeable improvements over the past few years. Academic quality assurance is one area in which the University is making a sustained effort to improve. Since a

major external review of academic policies and processes in 2003 revealed a lack of University-wide policies, VU has developed a learning and teaching policy framework, revised existing policies and developed new ones. The University is commended for the commitment to quality assurance it has demonstrated in implementing the recommendations of the external reviews. In 2006, the University has concentrated its efforts on the rollout of the new policies and it is also commended for initiatives in this regard. However, the University will need to ensure that staff have sufficient commitment to these policies to be able to take ownership and implement them successfully and consistently, and future policy development should allow enough time for workload implications to be fully considered. It is recommended that the Education and Research Board keep under active review the implementation of new policies.

There continue to be a number of areas for improvement in academic processes. Better management of professional accreditation requirements is one in particular that VU is addressing. It is strongly recommended that the University implement a mandatory process for student evaluation of teaching. As well, the University needs a system to track the number and proportion of students articulating to and from higher education and TAFE. There is also a need for more robust consideration of various matters in the course approval and reapproval process, including risk management.

Other areas for improvement identified by VU and affirmed include the embedding of core graduate attributes and development of an e-learning strategy. In revising its policy on academic honesty, the University is encouraged to consider the educative uses of plagiarism detection software.

The University recognises that achievement of its mission relies on its ability to deliver effective applied research and, in addition to establishing research institutes and centres, has made a major funding commitment to selected projects that are aligned with its 'New School of Thought' commitments. There is, however, a need now to clarify the relationship between research institutes, centres, priority research areas and their alignment with selected courses, and to more clearly explain the funding support for research that is available. The development by VU of a metrics-based approach to identifying active researchers, the Research Active Index, is commended as it will assist the University to focus research effort and better manage academic staff workloads. Some improvements are recommended to processes in relation to human research ethics clearances.

The development of adequate support for all research students, including provision of a vibrant intellectual climate, is a challenge for Victoria University, as for many new universities. While the programs for research students provided by the Office of Postgraduate Research are commended, it is recommended that VU allow students a systematic opportunity to provide confidential feedback on the quality of their supervision and provide a statement of minimum resources that addresses physical space.

Internationalisation is an important element of VU's operations. The University aims to increase its internal exchanges and is starting to examine ways in which internationalisation of the curriculum may be advanced. Each offshore program at VU was audited by an external reviewer between 2004 and 2006 and the University is commended for identifying the risks associated with offshore programs and for systematically working to implement recommendations of these audits. While VU is commended for maintaining strong relationships with several well-regarded partners in the delivery of offshore programs, it needs to pay additional attention to some issues of equivalence. For this reason, it is recommended that VU review the degree of equivalence between onshore and offshore programs in relation to academic requirements, including assessment and feedback to students, and the student experience.

A significant workforce renewal process is under way at Victoria University and a new academic workload model has been developed. VU is commended for its new online Staff Performance and Development Plan for performance management and it is suggested that this be extended to include sessional and casual staff. It is also recommended that the University develop an overall strategy for the management and support of sessional and casual staff consistent with its strategic directions.

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

Commendations

1. AUQA commends Victoria University for its evidence-based approach to understanding the changing nature of the western region of Melbourne, and for the ways the University is using this understanding to determine how best it can contribute to the region's further cultural, social and economic development.9
2. AUQA commends Victoria University for the strength of its relationships with selected partners in the western region of Melbourne in the fields of sports science, health sciences and education.16
3. AUQA commends the Council of Victoria University for its engagement with longer-term strategic issues for the University, its oversight of risk and finances, and its close working relationship with the Vice-Chancellor.18
4. AUQA commends the Vice-Chancellor for her leadership of the University, and in particular for her energy and vision for Victoria University and for her commitment to communicating this vision within the University, and to its communities and nationally.19
5. AUQA commends Victoria University for its commitment to identifying and realising the advantages of being a dual-sector provider, through a management team that is integrated across higher education and TAFE and the establishment of a single Education and Research Board.20
6. AUQA commends Victoria University for its commitment to improved quality assurance for learning and teaching through the implementation of recommendations from external reviews of academic policies and processes.24
7. AUQA commends Victoria University for its consolidation of policies and for its promulgation and communication of new policies, as exemplified by the Blue Guide.24
8. AUQA commends Victoria University for its development and introduction of the Research Active Index, a metrics-based approach to assessing the research activity of staff.35
9. AUQA commends Victoria University for the support provided to research higher degree students by the Office of Postgraduate Research.37
10. AUQA commends Victoria University for establishing and maintaining strong relationships in the delivery of offshore programs with several well-regarded international partner institutions.40
11. AUQA commends Victoria University for identifying the risks associated with international partnerships and offshore teaching, initiating external audits to refine the risk analysis and systematically working to implement the audit recommendations.41
12. AUQA commends Victoria University for the development of the online Staff Performance and Development Plan process for performance management.45
13. AUQA commends Victoria University for its Women in Leadership and Career Development for Women programs.46

Affirmations

1. AUQA affirms Victoria University's quality and planning framework and its use of external reviews to identify initial areas for improvement, noting that it would be helpful for staff to be provided with examples of the application of the Plan-Do-Review-Improve quality improvement cycle in the ordinary processes of academic and administrative activities.11
2. AUQA affirms Victoria University's planned improvements to its strategic planning process to ensure better alignment of functional and operational Plans with the Strategic Plan.13
3. AUQA affirms Victoria University's intention to improve its data collection and management reporting, noting that better availability and use of data will be crucial to assessing the University's progress against new strategies.....13
4. AUQA affirms Victoria University's development of leadership training for heads of school and suggests the University consider the need for additional leadership and skills training for managers in view of the changes entailed by the University's 'New School of Thought' commitments.21
5. AUQA affirms Victoria University's revisions to its course approval processes but suggests the University introduce a more robust process to assess the viability and sustainability of courses at the outset and clarify authority to discontinue or not offer a course.27
6. AUQA affirms the role of the Student Career Development office at Victoria University in advising first year students how they can use core graduate attributes to build employment-related skills across their course.29
7. AUQA affirms Victoria University's revision of its policy on academic honesty and suggests the University include a statement on the educative use of plagiarism detection software and student access to such software.30
8. AUQA affirms Victoria University's development of an e-learning strategy and encourages the University to consider increasing the rate at which e-learning opportunities are being made available to higher education students.31
9. AUQA affirms the Victoria University's plans to clarify the relationship between priority research areas, institutes and centres and their alignment with market leading courses.34
10. AUQA affirms Victoria University's planning and initial implementation of the Workforce Renewal Project but suggests the University give greater attention to staff recruitment processes which reinforce its strategic directions.44

Recommendations

1. AUQA recommends that, in order to demonstrate that 'engagement is the essence of Victoria University', the University develop a new set of focused and measurable KPIs related to its goals for engagement.17
2. AUQA recommends that Victoria University develop a comprehensive ICT strategy derived from the University's Strategic Plan and provide stronger and more senior leadership of IT strategy.21

3. AUQA recommends that Victoria University, and the Education and Research Board in particular, keep under active review the implementation and effectiveness of new policies relating to academic standards.25
4. AUQA recommends that Victoria University develop as part of its four-year course review process a policy on course reapprovals that focuses on risks to the quality and viability of courses, including student satisfaction, and specifies a review process that ensures such risks are identified and managed.27
5. AUQA recommends that Victoria University rapidly develop systems to routinely track the number and proportion of students articulating from VET (TAFE) programs to higher education programs and vice versa and the number of students undertaking awards or subjects across both sectors.28
6. AUQA recommends that Victoria University implement a mandatory process for student evaluation of teaching, in order to monitor the quality of higher education teaching and thereby identify outstanding teachers as well as areas for improvement.29
7. AUQA recommends that Victoria University clearly document its financial support for research and ensure this information is readily available to staff within the University.35
8. AUQA recommends that, in order to achieve its aims for research performance, Victoria University consider additional measures to recruit and retain outstanding research scholars and those of proven research potential.36
9. AUQA recommends that Victoria University amend its policies for research students to allow students a systematic opportunity to provide confidential feedback on the quality of their supervision and that the University provide a statement of minimum resources that addresses physical space, among other requirements for study.37
10. AUQA recommends that Victoria University improve its processes for annual progress reports on projects with ethics clearance, to allow proper monitoring by the Human Research Ethics Committee, and that the University undertake further education of staff and students about ethics approval processes.38
11. AUQA recommends that, as further follow-up to its external audit of offshore programs, Victoria University analyse the degree of equivalence between onshore and offshore programs in relation to academic requirements, including assessment and feedback to students, and the student experience.42
12. AUQA recommends that Victoria University conduct a review of the employment of sessional and casual staff and develop a strategy for the management and support of sessional and casual staff in pursuit of the University's strategic directions.46

1 MISSION AND ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

From the time it commenced operation as a university in 1992, two distinctive aspects of Victoria University have been its mandate to serve the western region of Melbourne and its operation as a dual-sector institution, offering both higher education awards and vocational education and training (VET) awards through Technical and Further Education (TAFE). The University's mission, expressed in VU's Strategic Plan 2004–2008, is to:

transform the lives of individuals and develop the capacities of industry and communities within the western Melbourne region and beyond through the power of vocational and higher education.

Among the objectives of the University stated in its enabling legislation are encouragement of principles of equity and social justice and fostering participation 'in post-secondary education for persons living or working in the Western Metropolitan Region of Melbourne'.

1.1 *Organisational Context and Future Challenges*

VU was established in a period when many post-secondary and tertiary education institutions merged to form new universities and was created from a merger of the Footscray Institute of Technology and the Western Institute (until 2005 VU was formally called Victoria University of Technology). The University's TAFE programs were expanded after a merger with the Western Melbourne Institute of Technology (WMIT) following a rationalisation of vocational education by the Victorian State Government. In 2006, VU is actively celebrating 90 years of history of the University and its antecedent institutions.

The University is a member of the New Generation Universities (NGU) grouping of 10 newer universities across Australia and primarily uses NGU members, singly or collectively, as comparators in terms of overall performance.

1.1.1 Student Profile

VU is one of five dual-sector universities in Australia, and one of four located in the State of Victoria. Its course offerings range from VET programs offered in schools to doctoral degrees, and nearly half its students come from the western region of Melbourne. There is considerable cultural and linguistic diversity among its students.

VU is a middle-sized Australian institution in terms of higher education students, with a total student load of 13,945 EFTSL in 2005. When TAFE students are included, total student load approximately doubles. Around one-quarter of higher education students are taking postgraduate programs, mostly coursework. Over a quarter of higher education students are international students, including students in offshore programs, somewhat above the average for the sector. There are three higher education faculties, the largest of which is the Faculty of Business and Law, which also has the highest proportion of international students. The University operates on 11 campuses in the central business district and western region of Melbourne, with a 'headquarters' campus at Footscray Park. Seven campuses offer subjects for both higher education and VET students and the University has consistently emphasised that it is 'one university'.

1.1.2 Recent History

In late 2000, the University discovered evidence of fraudulent activity dating back some years in operations associated with the former WMIT. State government authorities were alerted and a series of criminal investigations and prosecutions ensued. The case attracted considerable

publicity: it was one of the larger fraud cases in Victoria and significant VU management time was required to assist police, improve systems and mitigate the associated reputational damage. The matter is finalised from the University's perspective, although some matters were still before the courts in 2006.

From 2003, VU attracted publicity over litigation with founding members of a company called IP3 Systems Limited who were employed by the University, and with IP3 Systems itself. The proceedings arose from VU's claiming intellectual property in eCommerce products developed by those founding members of IP3 while employed by VU. The academics were found to be accountable to VU for the intellectual property but not IP3 itself as it has ceased to be their private company and become a public company.

The University is justifiably proud of its successful foundation and its special role for the west of Melbourne but the fraud and intellectual property cases have cast a long shadow. With the finalisation of these matters, VU can now focus on the future.

1.1.3 Understanding the Western Region of Melbourne

During the last few years, and while the issues above were played out, VU has been considering its long-term sustainability, its mission for the west of Melbourne and how to obtain maximum benefits for stakeholders from being a dual-sector institution. Recognising the value of differentiation for successful branding and financial sustainability, the University has sought to identify features which are unique to VU or which VU can offer at least as well as other tertiary providers. This has involved an examination of the course profile and an institutional learning program with a benchmark university in America.

A major part of this process has been to consider the actual circumstances of the west of Melbourne. The University acknowledges the community perception of the western suburbs as socially and educationally disadvantaged. For some time, however, VU has been seeking to explain that the western region of Melbourne is far more diverse than is popularly supposed. Research commissioned by the University shows that the region is highly variable in character and is changing rapidly: old manufacturing industries are being replaced, large housing developments are under way and gentrification is occurring along road and river corridors. The stereotype, VU argues, needs to be replaced by a more sophisticated understanding of the variability of the west and its permeability to movements of groups to and from the region. Findings from several studies, including analysis of Victorian students' educational choices, are being used by VU to better identify the ways in which the University can best serve this region.

Commendation 1

AUQA commends Victoria University for its evidence-based approach to understanding the changing nature of the western region of Melbourne, and for the ways the University is using this understanding to determine how best it can contribute to the region's further cultural, social and economic development.

1.1.4 The 'New School of Thought' Commitments

The culmination of this period of review and reflection was the approval by the University's governing body of a major redefinition of the University's future strategies a few days after the Audit Visit. The VU 'New School of Thought' statement of differentiation builds on initiatives already introduced, such as VU's marketing and investments in research and partnerships of particular significance to the west of Melbourne. It contains five commitments, as follows:

1. All VU courses (programs) will be directed to 12 industry and community clusters, with high level Industry and Community Roundtables to advise on course redesign

2. All courses will have a requirement for at least 25% learning in the workplace, including service learning in the community
3. The provision of personalised learning plans for all students that allow students to combine learning from TAFE and higher education and provide seamless transitions for students
4. The establishment of two TAFE faculties focusing on new jobs and areas of skill shortage, with resources to ensure ongoing research and innovation in VET
5. Targeted initiatives to improve life in the western region in a tangible way, the first three of which relate to: access and success in education; prevention and management of diabetes; and sport, recreation and wellbeing.

At the time of the audit, the Audit Panel was aware of the elements of the statement from records of prior discussions within the University and, given its importance for the future, decided that it should be taken into account in this Audit Report. VU's commitment to these measures is a bold initiative that will have implications for all areas of the University's planning and operations and is consistent with actions taken by the University over the past three years. AUQA endorses the University's commitment to research and to quality in the statement of commitments.

The 'New School of Thought' commitments represent a very considerable drawing together of key features of the University's identity that should assist the University to productively align teaching and research with engagement. As its next action, VU will need to cost the implementation of these commitments, taking into account the possible impact of the 25 per cent workplace learning requirement on government funding and international student enrolments. Costings should not underestimate the disincentives and barriers posed by differing funding bodies, funding models, approaches to curricula and data requirements between higher education and TAFE.

Given the University's inadequate information systems and some issues with staff capabilities and leadership, there is a risk that the University will be unable to achieve these major changes by relying on its existing capabilities. VU must carefully consider the expertise and systems that will be required for the new approach and to make appropriate investments in human resources and IT infrastructure to minimise the risk of poor implementation.

1.2 *Quality Assurance*

VU's 2005 Quality and Planning Policy seeks to integrate the University's new planning processes (section 1.4) with a continuous quality improvement cycle. In the Policy, quality at VU is defined as 'a system of continuous review and improvement of all activities and processes (including teaching, research and administration) to ensure improved outcomes for students and other stakeholders by means of a Plan-Do-Review-Improve (PDRI) cycle'.

Adoption of the PDRI cycle in 2003 coincided with the start of a series of reviews of academic processes, using both internal course reviews and broader external reviews (section 4.3.1). The external reviews in particular have proved valuable for the University: they have established a baseline for change by demonstrating where the University's policies and processes were underdeveloped compared to most other Australian universities.

VU has also established deputy dean positions with specific responsibility for quality and risk management within its three higher education faculties to assist in the implementation of the Quality and Planning framework. The University Library, some administrative areas and the TAFE operations of VU are certified to ISO9001:2000.

As an improvement in support of operational efficiency and a 'single institution' approach, VU has commenced a project to examine the potential for alignment of quality approaches across both the higher education and TAFE sectors.

Further work is required to embed the quality and planning framework at VU, although the University's preparations for AUQA audit, which included a series of workshops and presentations, have given additional exposure to the PDRI model. VU may need to make this model salient for staff if it is to successfully embed quality assurance within its higher education activities; many academic staff with whom the Audit Panel spoke were aware that the University espouses a PDRI quality cycle, but far fewer have analysed how a PDRI approach might apply to their areas of individual or collective responsibility. That is, although there have always been champions of quality improvement at VU, as the University notes in its Portfolio, the understanding of PDRI remains largely abstract and is not yet a description of the actual processes implemented generally by staff in their work. To assist in embedding the PDRI cycle in the work plans of staff, it would be helpful for them to be given good practice examples of the application of the PDRI cycle in typical activities at various organisational levels.

Moreover, it is evident that the roles and accountabilities of deputy deans for quality assurance at faculty level have not been worked through and neither have the accountabilities of other faculty leaders, such as heads of school. VU should clearly state the responsibilities of academic managers and key committees for specific quality assurance actions and the application of the PDRI cycle to academic activities.

Affirmation 1

AUQA affirms Victoria University's quality and planning framework and its use of external reviews to identify initial areas for improvement, noting that it would be helpful for staff to be provided with examples of the application of the Plan-Do-Review-Improve quality improvement cycle in the ordinary processes of academic and administrative activities.

It is clear that VU is making considerable progress in linking strategic planning and quality assurance by use of internal review processes such as the Quality Improvement Reviews (section 1.3) and course reports (section 4.4.2). The Industry and Community Roundtables mentioned in section 1.1.4 will also provide valuable input to course redevelopment. However, there remains an ongoing need to ensure the University and its staff are able to engage in sector-wide discussions of professional academic practice, standards and disciplinary norms. In order to do so, VU will need to actively benchmark its courses and academic practices with those of other institutions. In an increasingly competitive higher education environment, academics will need to be well-informed about both competitors and potential collaborators. As well, the University should consider the need for additional benchmarking of administrative systems and processes. As part of the further development of the quality and planning framework, the Panel considers the University should develop a regular cycle for external reviews; these could be used as an alternative to internal reviews to minimise reporting load.

1.3 Strategic Planning

The University has given considerable attention since 2003 to establishing a sustainable planning framework that allows for the cascading of plans from high-level objectives to strategies at organisational unit level. The Strategic Plan 2004–2008 is divided into five sections addressed to key stakeholders:

- Students (see primarily chapters 4 and 6 of this Report)
- Staff (see Chapter 7)
- Industry and the professions (see Chapters 2 and 5)

- Community (see Chapters 2, 4 and 5)
- Governments and the Public (see Chapter 3).

Each section contains one high level objective and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), together with a range of strategies. While the structure of the plan allows it to speak directly to the main stakeholders groups and gives it an outward focus consistent with the University's mission, it appears less effective in guiding the University's approach to some key areas, such as concentration of research effort and internationalisation.

1.3.1 Functional and Operational Plans

To underpin the Strategic Plan, functional plans and operational plans were developed for the first time in 2005. The seven Functional plans are:

- Learning and Teaching Support Plan
- Staff Plan
- Engagement Plan
- Courses Plan
- Resources and Capital Plan
- Research and Research Training Plan
- International Plan

Each of the functional plans contains a list of actions and targets for the strategies in the Strategic Plan but each plan will also be reviewed and updated in 2007.

Operational plans have been developed for each of the University's three faculties and for management (or service) units. These plans map selected strategies in the Strategic Plan and functional plans onto unit goals and targets, which in turn are intended to be used in the development of individual Staff Performance and Development Plans. Performance against operational plans is assessed by an annual Quality Improvement Review (QIR) prepared by the relevant unit and reviewed through a collegial process with senior colleagues, with recommendations for improvement being available to the University community.

1.3.2 Integration of Planning, Quality Improvement Reviews and Budgeting

The development of functional and operational plans and QIRs by the University, although recent, is likely to assist VU in implementing its five 'New School of Thought' commitments (section 1.1.4) once all elements are brought into alignment. As VU admits, there is less than perfect integration of strategies and indicators between the Strategic Plan and functional plans. There is also no direct link between functional and operational plans, leading to a risk that major undertakings will not be implemented. To address these issues, the University intends to rewrite its Functional Plans and also to show, in a matrix, how key strategies are being implemented within each operational unit. It may also be helpful for the University to identify 'champions' for particular strategies, similar to its use of policy 'champions' in the rollout of new policies.

A Guide to Operational Planning has recently been released to assist managers in developing a plan. A further improvement identified by the University is better integration between the planning and budget cycles. The Panel has confidence that the University's senior management are aware of the improvements to strategic planning that are needed. A data framework (section 1.3.3) is being developed to align KPIs in the Strategic Plan and functional plans although, as VU comments, some KPIs are expected to change, such as those for community engagement.

Affirmation 2

AUQA affirms Victoria University's planned improvements to its strategic planning process to ensure better alignment of functional and operational Plans with the Strategic Plan.

The standard of operational plans is quite variable and the Audit Panel is not convinced that managers are effectively using the QIR process to identify and deal with areas needing improvement or opportunities for further development. The Panel suggests that VU continue the process of ongoing discussion among senior managers to share ideas and good practices.

1.3.3 Management Information and Performance Reporting

The University has acknowledged that until recently it has failed to provide adequate data for management decision-making: 'The use of data at VU has often been characterised by a lack of coherence in approach and access, and inconsistency in output... work is under way to improve both the robustness and reporting of data to stakeholder groups' (PF p29). Several examples of a lack of analysis of relevant data are noted in this Report.

To ensure that data reporting meets the University's needs for management information, business ownership of the Management Information System has been transferred to the Quality, Information and Planning Branch. The use of 'dashboard' reporting is being investigated and in this regard the Audit Panel encourages Victoria University to draw on examples of good practice in other institutions.

A comprehensive and consistent approach to overall data collection management and reporting are also being investigated by VU, and the Audit Panel urges that this project be given priority. A proposed University data framework will encompass: external statutory reporting (OTTE, DEST and other government agencies); KPIs; management indicators at a more fine-grained, local level; other statistical and planning information; and student data.

In early 2006, the University Council received its first comprehensive report on progress against KPIs in the Strategic Plan, together with previous years' data and some benchmarks from other universities. The Panel accepts VU uses different benchmarking partners because the University's characteristics 'mean that no single sectoral group – or even single institution – will be a good 'fit' as a benchmarking partner across all dimensions' (PF p26) and notes that VU has made international approaches for benchmarking to the University of Texas El Paso (a member of the US Coalition of Urban and Metropolitan Universities) and selected members of an equivalent group in the United Kingdom. Council has been advised that benchmarking partners and comparative data will be sought for all KPIs and the Audit Panel encourages Council to monitor this commitment. However, the rationale for the choice of comparator institutions should be made clear in each case.

Affirmation 3

AUQA affirms Victoria University's intention to improve its data collection and management reporting, noting that better availability and use of data will be crucial to assessing the University's progress against new strategies.

2 ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITIES AND INDUSTRY

The VU Strategic Plan 2004–08 includes the following objectives relating to engagement:

Community: To embrace the diversity and dynamism of the University's local communities and to assist these communities to build their capacity to meet local, national and international challenges.

Industry and the professions: Through strategic collaborations create new knowledge and applications for the benefit of students, staff, industry and the professions, and enhance the economic and social development of the western region of Melbourne and beyond.

The Engagement Functional Plan sets out a number of strategies across teaching, research and two-way interaction with local communities, including a need for staff to 'receive support, recognition and rewards for external engagement activities'.

2.1 *Reshaping Community Engagement*

The University's approach to engagement has been in a state of flux for some time, but is being progressively articulated. A 2003 review found that it was unclear 'how successfully VU's mission of engagement with the west was being addressed' (PF p11). Recognising the need for a more purposeful and strategic approach to engagement, the Vice-Chancellor has encouraged efforts in several directions. One thrust has been an active involvement with emerging international and national discussions on the meaning and value of community engagement for universities, informed by relevant literature. Victoria University has been strongly involved in the development of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance and is an active advocate for the recognition of engagement and regional 'impact' in government policy and funding for higher education. Findings from VU's research studies on the changing nature of the western region have provided a springboard for discussions with local communities.

A second element has been promotion of engagement as an integral element of VU's operations and an emerging theme of individuals' connectedness with the west across time and distance. The underlying premise is that VU's engagement agenda could include all people and groups whose identities are shaped by living or studying in the west of Melbourne. It resonates with the University's desire to be both locally and globally relevant but also with its support for immigrant communities in the west.

An additional element in the University's recasting of its involvement with the west, common to a number of Australian institutions coming to grips with community engagement, has been to assign leadership responsibility to selected senior managers. Responsibility for key components of the University's engagement strategies rests with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region). An Office for Industry and Community Engagement (OICE) was established in 2006 and its Director reports to the DVC (Research and Region). Recruiting for staff was being undertaken at the time of the audit and plans were under way to establish a database of existing engagement activities, which are many and varied. However, OICE's role is still being defined. To date, it has played a role in coordinating meetings of campus heads and Engagement Days: future activities may include acting as a clearing house and assisting in brokering new relationships (PF p14).

2.2 *Engagement as Physical Presence and Resource*

To signal its vigorous engagement with the western region, VU has for the past two years run Engagement Days at most campuses. More than just 'open days', the Engagement Days feature

forums and discussions on topics such as planning, transport and economic issues. The Engagement Days send a strong message about the physical presence of the University in local municipalities and VU's potential role in community development.

VU encourages community meetings on University campuses. Activities such as the provision by VU of space for the Horn of Africa Communities Network reflect a view of engagement as providing access to the resources of the university, evident to the Audit Panel in the discussions with VU staff.

The Engagement Days assist the University to work with local groups at a more strategic level than previous campus committees, which in some cases struggled to manage the expectations of local communities regarding future business development. The role of campus head has also been redefined by VU. As there appears to be some overlap of responsibilities for course delivery among deans, heads of school (some of whom are also campus heads) and campus heads, the separate responsibilities of each position may need to be better defined. Reporting relationships should also be clarified, as it was unclear to the Panel whether campus heads reported to OICE or to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Capital and Management Services).

2.3 *Engaged Teaching and Research*

The University's 2004 VoiceIT Survey found that staff were committed to VU's mission of service to the west of Melbourne. However, the University community's view of the meaning of 'engaged teaching and research' varies widely and it is clear that the concept is in need of additional consideration by VU. For some staff, 'engagement' is viewed passively as the offering of courses at locations in the western region. For others, such as the School of Education, engagement with regional communities permeates many aspects of its learning and operations. Although it may not be possible for all disciplines to engage as closely with the western region of Melbourne as, for example, education and health sciences, the University's 'New School of Thought' commitments (section 1.1.4) offer a fresh opportunity for VU to consider how best to equip its students with understanding and experience of local, national and global issues. The financial literacy initiative in the School of Accounting and Finance is one such example.

The University's research strategy is more obviously aligned with an engagement agenda and the Audit Panel applauds the University for recognising that its capacity to achieve its mission in respect of community engagement depends directly on its ability to deliver effective applied research. In furtherance of engaged research, in 2006 VU commissioned a study of the value of its research from a client perspective. Although the University's strategies for concentration of its research effort are also in a transitional stage, its four institutes (section 5.4) have clear relevance to the west of Melbourne.

2.4 *Engagement as Strategic Partnerships*

VU's external partnerships, encompassing the western region of Melbourne and other locations, have evolved over time. Predictably, many of the regional partnerships established in the early days of the University have dwindled or transmuted as newer partnerships have emerged. The University has reviewed each of its partnerships, both formal and informal, since 2003 and has continued those which fit well with its emerging strategies, such as its support for the Footscray Community Arts Centre, which is relevant to the University's creative arts courses.

VU's largest formal partnership agreement is with the Western Bulldogs Football Club. The agreement, which has twelve schedules of agreed activity, covers areas including: exercise and sport science services; sponsorship; education and training for players; and shared commitment to collaborative community building. A range of linkages and partnerships is developing between University's health sciences programs, local health agencies, such as Western Health and the

Westgate Division of General Practice, and community groups, and a business plan has been prepared for the creation of an Australian Community Centre for Diabetes.

The 'Access and Success in the West' project has been announced by VU as a major five-year project to improve the access and successful participation of young people in post-compulsory education through collaborative research and other partnership activities with schools. It is the centrepiece of the University's action to meet its commitment to enhance educational opportunity in the west and builds on several established engagement activities. These include the Partnerships Project between VU's School of Education and primary and secondary schools, one component of which is applied research into successful practices through the Researching Innovative Partnerships in Education initiative.

The University appreciates the need for ongoing relationship management to sustain strategic partnerships. In the further development of these partnerships, the Audit Panel observes the need for VU to develop robust relationship management plans that include strategies to mitigate risks to these relationships, such as the departure of key personnel. The University acknowledges as an area for improvement the need to seek feedback from partners and external stakeholders as a quality assurance measure.

Industry partners and community representatives to whom the Audit Panel spoke were enthusiastic and strongly positive about their links with VU, especially in relation to the larger partnerships mentioned above. They recognise that relationships must be two-way and are willing to be even more actively involved with the University in activities that meet their needs in education and applied research and development.

Commendation 2

AUQA commends Victoria University for the strength of its relationships with selected partners in the western region of Melbourne in the fields of sports science, health sciences and education.

2.5 Next Steps

The University's Performance Portfolio states that 'Engagement is the essence of VU' (PF p11). At present, this claim must be regarded as an intention rather than an observable feature of the totality of the University's practices. However, VU's engagement initiatives since its establishment have helped to build a strong platform for a mature approach to engagement, in which an emphasis on the west of Melbourne is combined with a willingness to embrace relevant partners in other places.

Until now, the University has found it difficult to fuse the various elements of engagement described above into a coherent strategy. Although the University is proud of its importance to the western region of Melbourne, not least as an 'aspirational symbol' (PF p11) and as the largest employer in the region, physical presence and an ethos of community service do not of themselves generate the types of sustained multi-layered relationships the University aims for.

The 'New School of Thought' commitments, by emphasising tangible outcomes, will assist the University to move from a community service focus to a deeper engagement with the west and the Engagement Functional Plan should be recast in this light. Local communities and partners in the west are ready for this change and, indeed, have been seeking direction from the University on opportunities for longer-term relationships. One challenge for VU is to ensure that it consistently projects these opportunities to current and prospective partners: the Audit Panel notes, for example, that the VU website does not provide an entry point for communities or organisations seeking to link with the University.

In 2005, the University developed a composite index KPI for industry engagement consistent with a previous KPI developed to measure community engagement. The composite industry engagement KPI, which will report on the University's 2006 performance, is designed to assess progress made by the University between 2005 and 2007 on a series of indicators, two examples of 2007 targets being:

- All levels of planning demonstrate that industry engagement is an integral aspect of teaching, learning and research
- Industry engagement is recognised and rewarded across the University.

The composite KPI represents a useful effort to assess engagement while the University's strategy has been evolving but should now be superseded by more focused and measurable KPIs relating to the University's commitments to the west and associated impacts of teaching and research. For example, at the Audit Visit the Panel was advised that a key measure of the University's success in engagement is its impact on increasing participation rates in post-secondary education in the west of Melbourne, which is entirely consistent with its 'New School of Thought' commitments. The Panel suggests these and similar measures of achievement be taken into account when new KPIs for engagement are being developed.

Recommendation 1

AUQA recommends that, in order to demonstrate that 'engagement is the essence of Victoria University', the University develop a new set of focused and measurable KPIs related to its goals for engagement.

3 GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

3.1 *Council*

The University's governing body, the Council, reviewed its structures, operation and focus from 2002 to 2004 in light of the requirements of the Australian Government's National Governance Protocols (NGP). A system of biennial reviews of Council operations has been implemented, with the next review due in late-2006.

A comprehensive range of improvements to Council's operations has been introduced. A Code of Conduct and Induction Handbook have been developed to guide Council members in their governance roles and, in accordance with the NGP, professional development is available for members. These improvements have been accompanied by greater access to information and openness in discussion between Council and senior management, a feature of which is the close working relationship between the Vice-Chancellor and Council. Long-standing Council members judge that the governance culture has also improved, with a high level of participation in meaningful discussions among Council members at meetings and in the two annual retreats. Council is actively involved in the discussion of strategic challenges for the University. Chairs of Council committees are very well-informed about these matters and future directions for VU.

The 'effectiveness of governing bodies' is one of the University's KPIs, with performance being measured by achievements against the annual objectives of Council and the Education and Research Board. While the Chancellor and Deputy-Chancellor pay close attention to the way Council is operating, Council could consider whether a more formal system for considering the performance of individual Council members should be adopted, as part of a comprehensive continuous improvement process for Council.

Council has four standing committees: the Chancellor's Committee, which handles remuneration and nominations; Strategy Committee, Resources Committee; and Audit and Risk Committee. The Audit Panel congratulates Council for its development of annual performance objectives and workplans for each of these committees.

As a result of the fraud investigation (section 1.1.2), VU made significant changes to its financial controls and is now satisfied that it has a robust system to protect against future attempts to defraud the institution. Similarly, VU has also invested substantially in a streamlined but effective system of risk management. The Audit and Risk Committee reviews at each meeting the highest level risks from the risk register, including academic and reputational risks.

Commendation 3

AUQA commends the Council of Victoria University for its engagement with longer-term strategic issues for the University, its oversight of risk and finances, and its close working relationship with the Vice-Chancellor.

3.2 *Senior Management Group and Executive Deans*

The aim of VU's governance and leadership remains 'the continuing improvement of the institution's teaching and learning, research, and external engagement' (PF p19). The Vice-Chancellor took up her appointment in 2003 and has taken a leading role in developing, articulating and advocating a vision for the University's future. Her public support for the recognition of community engagement as a differentiating feature of universities and active communication of a vision for VU has helped to engender understanding and acceptance of new ideas. Internally, a substantial restructure has been accompanied by a strengthened governance

and policy framework. The Audit Panel received positive comments from a wide range of stakeholders about the Vice-Chancellor's leadership.

Commendation 4

AUQA commends the Vice-Chancellor for her leadership of the University, and in particular for her energy and vision for Victoria University and for her commitment to communicating this vision within the University, and to its communities and nationally.

The University's top management structure comprises the five areas of: Education Programs, Education Services, Research and Region, Capital and Management Services, Institutional Services. Two Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellors are responsible for the first two areas, two Deputy Vice-Chancellors for the second two and there is a Pro Vice-Chancellor for Institutional Services. There are several other pro vice-chancellor positions, responsible for International, Students, Education Strategy and Enterprise and Teaching and Learning Support.

This structure integrates responsibility for TAFE and higher education. As an example, both faculty executive deans and TAFE associate directors report to the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education Programs). It reflects findings from external reviews of leadership and portfolio structures in the period 2003 to 2005, which emphasised the need for mutual respect and a balance of interests across VU's dual-sector operations.

Two Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committees, one for Scholarship and Skills, and one for Services, meet every three weeks to discuss major University business. A smaller Senior Management Group (SMG) has recently been re-established. Faculty executive deans and TAFE associate directors are not all members of the SMG; instead, one representative from each attends SMG. The Panel observes that the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education Programs) plays a pivotal role in the University structure, as the channel of communication to and support for the executive deans and through them all the academic staff. Moreover, this role will be central to the successful implementation of VU's 'New School of Thought' commitments (section 1.1.4), which will require detailed discussions with the executive deans. For this reason, the Panel encourages VU to consider ways to strengthen the direct involvement of executive deans and their TAFE counterparts in strategic discussions and decision-making.

3.3 *Education and Research Board*

The University's highest academic governance committee is the Education and Research Board (ERB), a single Board established in late 2005 that replaced the previous higher education Academic Board and the TAFE Vocational Education Board. The ERB is responsible to Council for academic oversight of the University's research, academic programs and courses of study in higher education and TAFE, including advice on the delivery of educational and research support services. The ERB is also entitled to offer advice to Council on aspects of the annual budget which are related to these areas of academic oversight.

AUQA commends VU for its initiatives to give visible recognition to the dual-sector identity of the University, and to encourage a culture of mutual respect and support across the TAFE and higher education sectors. These management and academic governance structures provide opportunities for both sectors to learn from each other and will assist VU in implementing its 'New School of Thought' commitments, especially in regard to courses.

Commendation 5

AUQA commends Victoria University for its commitment to identifying and realising the advantages of being a dual-sector provider, through a management team that is integrated across higher education and TAFE and the establishment of a single Education and Research Board.

Several features of the ERB's operations have been designed to ensure the Board is effective in fulfilling its responsibilities. As for Council, an assessment of how well the Board has met its objectives is one of the University's KPIs. The Board has an annual workplan and a professional development program to inform Board members of issues in both TAFE and higher education. As an example of ways in which the Board can contribute to quality improvements, the University cites work of the Board's Quality Teaching and Learning Committee in identifying gaps in comparative performance data across the two sectors and a project to assess the internationalisation of the curriculum.

For the ERB to provide authoritative advice on academic matters not only to Council but also to the VU community, the Board must ensure that its membership includes academic opinion leaders and those with a high degree of influence and credibility in good academic practice. The Panel encourages the University to explore ways of encouraging acknowledged senior leaders of teaching and research to take an active role in discussion and further development of the Board's activities.

3.4 *Leadership for Change*

The Audit Panel heard much about new policies and procedures at VU but much less about the centrality of people and unit-level leadership to achieving the University's vision. In particular, an emphasis on compliance within academic schools does not appear to be matched by an equal emphasis on proactive leadership, notwithstanding a Leadership Capability Framework approved by VU in 2005.

Council needs to be confident that VU's ambitious development plans are able to be implemented. To do so requires more than policies and procedures – it requires talented and capable staff, committed to ensuring that students, industry and communities benefit from the commitments the University has given. Managers must have a sense of ownership of and accountability for the consequences of their actions, as each decision made by an individual manager can either advance or retard the achievement of the University's plans. Managers must also possess skills in managing and developing the University's human resources.

Developments over the past three years are still being absorbed across the University and awareness of strategic issues is not consistently high within the three higher education faculties. As part of a restructure of faculties, the University has now strengthened the role of executive deans. There is a formal management development strategy for executive deans, heads of school and directors and a leadership program for heads of school is being developed jointly with Charles Darwin University. However, deans also need to take a stronger mentoring role to support heads of school in their crucial roles.

In considering training for strategic leadership, the University should examine how best to provide such training, including the role of the University's Staff College. In contrast to its current practice of responding to needs identified by individuals, the Staff College might be asked to consult deans or heads of school in order to develop team-based or unit-level programs.

Affirmation 4

AUQA affirms Victoria University's development of leadership training for heads of school and suggests the University consider the need for additional leadership and skills training for managers in view of the changes entailed by the University's 'New School of Thought' commitments.

3.5 *Leadership for Information and Communications Technology Development*

Effective information technology and services are crucial enabling factors in the University's ability to realise its vision. In 2006, the University commissioned the first stage of an external strategic review of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) support for its mission.

A report provided to the University by the external consultant identified many positive elements of current IT operations at VU, including the professionalism and high level of dedication of staff in Information Technology Services (ITS). Over the past few years ITS has made major improvements to physical, network and data security and undertaken major network infrastructure upgrades. Service Level Agreements have been developed with clients, an IT Advisory Network meets regularly, annual customer satisfactions surveys are conducted and a service management and quality system has recently been implemented.

At a strategic level, however, the external report found an almost total absence of longer-term planning and direction. The consultant found there was no proper ICT strategy, future directions being driven by a three-year ITS Operational Plan, and no comprehensive enterprise architecture. The report contains a number of recommendations to develop a strategic framework for ICT that is consistent with VU's Strategic Plan, to raise the profile of ICT within the University, to significantly improve the funding and budgeting process for IT projects and to improve project management and codify IT services.

It is timely that VU has recognised the need for an extensive and fundamental review of ICT. AUQA urges the University to act on this report because of the strategic importance of IT and also because of a number of systems and data issues that emerged during the audit and that reinforce the external consultant's findings. Some students said they had difficulties with systems crashing or freezing, including the University's WebCT™ learning management system. As the University has recognised, its student administration system, VUSIS, requires further development. VUSIS is an in-house system developed to address the complex requirements of catering for TAFE and higher education students. VU is currently examining options for further development, including systems used by other dual-sector universities. There is a pressing need for VUSIS to allow for reports on students who articulate from one sector to another and for students to be able to fully enrol and re-enrol online. The University should also examine opportunities for better integration of various systems for end-users, to avoid students having to remember many passwords when accessing VU services and course material.

At present, IT services and support are the responsibility of the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education Services), advised by an Information Services Committee. In view of the external review findings and the concerns heard by the Panel, AUQA finds there is a need for an overall IT strategy driven by the University's Strategic Plan. There is also a need for stronger and more senior authoritative leadership for ICT, typically found in a Chief Information Officer position that is part of or works closely with the senior management group.

Recommendation 2

AUQA recommends that Victoria University develop a comprehensive ICT strategy derived from the University's Strategic Plan and provide stronger and more senior leadership of IT strategy.

4 LEARNING AND TEACHING

The VU Strategic Plan includes the following objective of particular relevance to teaching and learning:

To inspire students to learn, and to promote a foundation for their careers and their effective participation in local and international arenas.

4.1 Learning and Teaching Plans

Both the Strategic Plan and the Learning and Teaching Functional Plan give emphasis to increasing retention and success rates, greater use of flexible learning, multiculturalism, meeting the needs of international students, and providing appropriate levels of learning support.

The Courses Functional Plan emphasises the strategic aspects of course development. Its strategies, which are consistent with the Learning and Teaching Functional Plan and VU's new commitments, include:

- Research and area reviews to identify emerging needs and ensure courses remain relevant
- Effective course management
- Learning in the workplace as a component of all courses
- Program advisory committees which include industry representatives.

Executive responsibility for learning and teaching rests with the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education Services), supported by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Teaching and Learning Support) and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students). Within faculties, associate deans (teaching and learning) have responsibilities for improving the quality of learning and teaching.

4.2 Learning and Teaching Outcomes

The University's KPIs for students (both higher education and TAFE) are:

- Graduate outcomes: Australian graduates employed full-time as a proportion of those available for full-time employment and in further full-time study as a proportion of all graduates in the cohort from the annual Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) data
- Graduate course satisfaction: 'overall satisfaction' index (OSI) score on the national Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) survey
- Demand: number of student preferences 1-3 from Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre data.

On these measures, the University is achieving mixed outcomes in higher education. While data provided by VU shows a significant improvement in graduate outcomes, including employability, between 2002 and 2005, the University's performance is below NGU and sector averages on Institutional Assessment Framework data for 2004. VU's employability results differ significantly among disciplines: the proportion of employed education graduates from 2004 data was well above NGU and sector averages, while graduates in natural and physical sciences performed poorly on this measure compared to cohort and sector averages. AUQA encourages VU to examine reasons for poor GDS outcomes in certain disciplines and in particular the extent to which potential employers believe the University's core graduate attributes are being met in these disciplines. The proportion of VU students in full-time study is comparable to average NGU performance.

The University performs well on the OSI. It has consistently been above NGU and sector averages, and significantly above average in several broad disciplinary fields including IT, education, creative arts and engineering. With the exception of the fields of nursing, health and natural and physical sciences, VU graduates report higher levels of satisfaction on OSI and other CEQ measures across all disciplines. Low response rates for VU graduates, however, cast some doubt on the reliability of the data over the past few years. The rates have improved after additional follow-up of graduates and the University is encouraged to devote additional resources to ensuring an adequate number of responses.

The University's tertiary entrance scores for local undergraduate students have been increasing but in general are below Victorian and sector levels. As the University's research shows, a significant proportion of the West's high-achieving school leavers choose to attend other institutions and many will attend another university within the state. Conversely, VU attracts some top students from other areas into its 'market-leading' courses.

On other indicators relevant to VU's mission and student profile, such as retention and progress rates, the University has made noticeable improvements over the past few years and is now close to NGU and sector averages. VU admits a substantially higher proportion of students from low socio-economic status backgrounds than other Victorian institutions and the sector overall, although its retention rates for this group of students are only slightly higher than for other institutions and success rates are around the same as for the sector. The picture is similar for students from non-English speaking backgrounds and also for students with disabilities, in that participation rates are not quite matched by progress rates. The University has only a small number of Indigenous students.

To assist Council and management to better assess outcomes, the Audit Panel suggests that the University's KPI reports include sector and cohort averages as well as comparisons with selected other universities for both GDS and OSI/CEQ performance. Moreover, although the Audit Panel appreciates the importance for all universities of reporting against graduate outcomes, the review of KPIs might consider including other measures such as post-secondary education participation rates and retention rates for students from the west of Melbourne, in order to more comprehensively track the University's performance in teaching and learning relative to its mission.

4.3 *Review of Academic Processes and Policy Rollout*

4.3.1 Lister Review

A major quality assurance initiative of the University in 2003, following the introduction of synoptic course reviews in 2001 and a review of the former Faculty of Arts in 2002, was the commissioning of a wide-ranging external review of procedures and practices for monitoring and improving the quality of higher education programs. The review was undertaken by Emeritus Professor Andrew Lister, who made 25 recommendations on matters such as:

- Statements of accountabilities for subject and course coordinators and clarification of the responsibilities of heads of school and deans in course approvals
- Changes to course approvals processes
- Annual monitoring of courses and a regular cycle of course reviews with external input
- A University-wide student assessment policy
- The need for an audit of offshore courses and for criteria for assessing proposals for new offshore courses, together with a need for offshore courses to be reviewed for equivalence
- More explicit policies on articulation, pathways and recognition of prior learning.

In response, the University established a taskforce to lead the implementation of recommendations. Progress was assessed at the end of 2004 by independent reviewers, who found that many recommendations had been addressed while drawing attention to the need to further embed changes in the University's mainstream processes. The Lister Taskforce completed a handover to management in June 2005 and the Audit Panel congratulates the Taskforce for its work in improving academic policies and processes at VU.

Commendation 6

AUQA commends Victoria University for its commitment to improved quality assurance for learning and teaching through the implementation of recommendations from external reviews of academic policies and processes.

Notwithstanding the achievements of the Taskforce, AUQA notes with concern that some recommendations accepted by VU have not been completely followed up and one recommendation, for a code of good practice in the employment of sessional and casual staff has not been addressed (see also section 7.1.4). VU should consider revisiting the Lister Review recommendations in the context of recommendations in this Audit Report.

4.3.2 Rollout of New Learning and Teaching Policies

Over the past three years, the University has aimed to develop a comprehensive suite of learning and teaching policies, covering topics such as: student assessment, articulation; induction for teaching; learning in the workplace; recognition of prior (or other) learning; plagiarism; credit points; student progress; academic review. An overall Learning and Teaching Policy describes the interrelationships among these policies and, in 2006, a working party is examining the policies to check they are comprehensive and consistent. The establishment of a consistent policy framework for learning and teaching was long overdue and AUQA endorses the University's actions in this regard.

Recognising a possible overload from the range of new policies, in 2006 the University is concentrating on ensuring staff are aware of the new policies. Within an overall strategy, policy champions have been identified in VU's Teaching and Learning Services (TLS) unit to provide a primary reference point for staff. Many workshops have been held and a Blue Guide has been produced to consolidate information on policies.

Commendation 7

AUQA commends Victoria University for its consolidation of policies and for its promulgation and communication of new policies, as exemplified by the Blue Guide.

It is evident that the short timeframe between policy development and approval in some cases has meant that relevant bodies have been unable to provide considered comment on draft policies or, for example, thoroughly consider their workload implications. The University should review the policy development process and determine what changes are required to allow adequate time for consultation and discussion of proposed new policies within the University community. This will assist in identifying areas of policy conflict or other unintended consequences of newly developed policies prior to their implementation.

Despite this point, the rollout process has been successful in achieving awareness of the new policies. At the same time, the Panel is concerned that the emphasis on policies, plans and procedures may be sending a message to staff that the mere presence of policies is an end in itself, rather than a means to ensure, for example, the fair and consistent treatment of students. Although the Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development has taken a proactive approach to embedding policies through initiatives such as a mini-conference on Quality in the Classroom,

it is not clear that all staff have sufficient commitment to these policies to be able to take ownership and implement them successfully and consistently within higher education schools. This concern is magnified for sessional and casual staff. As a next stage of the policy rollout, it may be helpful for the University to convene meetings of associate deans (teaching and learning) and heads of school to discuss implementation issues.

The Education and Research Board and its committees will need to be confident that new policies are working and have been fully implemented and might seek advice from the relevant policy 'champions' such as associate deans (teaching and learning). As an example, VU approved a new Student Assessment Policy in 2006 to ensure a consistent approach to assessment across the University. Given the importance of assessment for all students, AUQA urges the Education and Research Board to pay particular attention to the implementation of this policy, especially in regard to offshore students (section 6.4).

Retention and progress are important indicators of the University's success in addressing the needs of students from the west of Melbourne, its delivery of programs to international students and its commitment to learning support for all students. Although a number of initiatives to increase retention have been introduced at VU, such as a Transition Officer position, the retention and progress of various cohorts of students should be much more actively monitored than at present. The University currently has no routine processes in place to monitor or report on the progress of different cohorts of higher education students, such as domestic, international onshore and international offshore students, or students from different regions of the State of Victoria, although it plans to implement these. AUQA suggests that such reporting be introduced as a matter of urgency and that the data be monitored by the Education and Research Board.

Although the Board's Quality Teaching and Learning Committee will play an important role in reviewing new policies, it is critical that other members are able to contribute effectively. In order to take a leading role in policy review and development, and building on professional development activities already under way, the Board might usefully assess the need for additional knowledge and skills among its members of good practice and innovations in academic quality assurance.

Recommendation 3

AUQA recommends that Victoria University, and the Education and Research Board in particular, keep under active review the implementation and effectiveness of new policies relating to academic standards.

4.4 *Delivery, Review and Approval of Courses*

4.4.1 Conduct of Health Sciences Courses

There have been a number of issues at Victoria University since 2004 relating to course content and external accreditation in specialised areas of health sciences. In 2004, VU was notified by the Nurses Registration Board Victoria of a failure to comply with requirements in its accredited midwifery course in relation to the number of clinical hours. Although the matter was resolved and students were able to graduate and be registered, investigations by the University revealed a serious lack of coordination between external professional accreditation and course approvals.

A similar set of problems emerged in relation to a VU course in Traditional Chinese Medicine, where students were under the impression that graduates would be eligible to be registered as meeting the requirements of the Chinese Medicine Registration Board of Victoria. When the course was finally accredited, it included additional requirements not identified in the original course structure, adding to study loads and completion times. A third case relates to a new course in Naturopathy and Homeopathy, which was to be offered as a joint TAFE and higher education

program leading to a bachelor's degree. The TAFE component complied with an existing national training package but VU received advice after the course had commenced that the degree program was unlikely to be externally accredited by the Australian Natural Therapists Association. It was decided not to teach the higher education component of the course but to seek alternative arrangements for students. Student complaints in regard to these two courses were heard through VU's Student Grievance Committee processes and, as a result, a number of recommendations were made and are being implemented by the University under the management of a critical incident team.

These three cases raise serious questions in regard to course approval processes at VU and the advertising of courses, including a lack of effective oversight and management of courses at school and faculty level and a failure to involve members of the Senior Management Group at an early stage of the process: some issues were only drawn to their attention when the student grievance procedures were invoked. Reviewing the history of the Naturopathy and Homeopathy course, the University concluded that the course had underlying weaknesses and that accreditation was not sought quickly enough. It is significant that annual course reporting processes (section 4.4.2) did not pick up any of these issues and that one reason for this was the absence of an official, accurate record system for courses and accreditation requirements. This point is being addressed through the implementation of a Course Approval and Management System and a requirement for external accreditation to be managed at faculty rather than school level. The faculty restructure implemented in 2005 also resulted in a number of changes to structures and personnel. One important lesson for the University is the need to effectively respond to student concerns before they reach the stage of a formal grievance hearing.

Although the University believes that new course approval processes will prevent a recurrence of similar situations, several matters described below should be addressed to ensure a robust process. In addition to these observations, the University's experience with the three courses suggests a need for additional checking by VU of all course advertising.

4.4.2 Course Reporting and Review

At a strategic level and consistent with its 'New School of Thought' commitments, the University has initiated a course renewal process designed to ensure that courses are aligned to industry needs, market demand, pathways between sectors and plans for engagement. The concept of 'cornerstone' and 'market-leading' courses has been introduced: the former are courses which support the continued development of the western region of Melbourne, while the latter are designed to attract students more broadly. The Audit Panel suggests that responsibilities for furthering the course renewal process within VU be clearly delineated, in accordance with action that is needed to clarify processes for course discontinuation.

Since 2002, the University has had a system of annual course reports. Data on key indicators of demand and outcomes are provided to faculties and a report on each course, using a standard template, is prepared for review, previously by Academic Board. From 2006 the course reports will be included in Quality Improvement Reviews with a subsequent report to ERB. In 2005, the first annual overall course report to council was presented, which allows an assessment to be made of the overall profile of VU's large number of courses.

The course reporting process allows issues for each course to be raised and discussed and some reports include independent academic comments on the curriculum and standing of the course, such as the mechanical engineering course in the School of Architecture, Civil and Mechanical Engineering. From 2007 onwards, all courses at VU will have endorsement for four years. The Panel suggests that where course report data on demand, quality or other indicators suggest that a course needs substantial revision, the review of the course should involve external academics with relevant expertise.

Recommendation 4

AUQA recommends that Victoria University develop as part of its four-year course review process a policy on course reapprovals that focuses on risks to the quality and viability of courses, including student satisfaction, and specifies a review process that ensures such risks are identified and managed.

The course report process may not adequately pick up concerns about the way a course is being implemented, the issues discussed in section 4.4.1 being a case in point. The Panel heard concerns from postgraduate students about studying with undergraduate students and also heard of students from different year levels studying together without having been advised in advance of this. VU should ensure that the reasons for students of different levels studying together are clearly explained to students in course outlines. Although the new Student Feedback and Complaints Policy may assist in identifying matters of concern to students, the University needs to pay attention to issues of delivery through the course reporting process, bearing in mind AQF requirements and the learning needs of different groups.

4.4.3 Course Approvals

The University has been progressively revising its course approvals process: new templates have been introduced and a new policy has been developed. An internal audit of course approval processes was undertaken in 2005–2006, as these changes were being implemented. The audit drew attention to a number of further issues in relation to responsibilities for accreditation, inconsistent practices across faculties and the treatment of offshore courses.

AUQA notes the improvements in the course approval process but notes the lack of a policy framework to discontinue or to not offer courses and urges the University to rectify this. VU should also consider a more stringent process to assess the sustainability of a course, including ways to better identify market demand, although its Industry and Community Roundtables may assist in this process. The availability of suitably qualified and experienced teaching staff should also be evaluated before a course is approved.

Further, in view of VU's aim of encouraging students to combine awards and subjects across the higher education and TAFE sectors, the University should consider the impact of differences in learning outcomes and pedagogical approaches between the two sectors, advise students of relevant features, and amend the course approvals and review process to take account of this.

Affirmation 5

AUQA affirms Victoria University's revisions to its course approval processes but suggests the University introduce a more robust process to assess the viability and sustainability of courses at the outset and clarify authority to discontinue or not offer a course.

4.4.4 Learning in the Workplace

VU has a long history of learning in the workplace (LiW) in specific programs and in 2005 approved a revised Policy to provide a University-wide approach to LiW. The University uses a broad definition of LiW, including longer and shorter-term placement in work or community settings and also projects undertaken in a student's current workplace. Internal research undertaken by VU gives an inventory of current practice and from this the University estimates that 55% of TAFE awards and at least 51% of higher education awards have units or modules that include LiW. Advice and support for staff on the use of LiW, and a contact point for external members of the community is provided through a Learning in the Workplace unit within Student Career Services.

The University's commitment to 25% LiW for all courses will require further revisions to course planning and approval processes. As part of the University's consideration of these changes, AUQA encourages VU to develop and implement quality assurance arrangements for all higher education LiW activities.

4.5 *Articulation Arrangements*

VU is very clear that pathways between the higher education and TAFE sectors must be two-way, whether they involve students within the University or transfers between VU and other institutions. However, compared to many other institutions, the University has been slow to develop policies in respect of credit transfer, RPL and articulation from TAFE to higher education or vice versa, and slow to document and approve pathways. An Articulation Policy was approved in mid-2005 and since that time the University has been considering ways 'to develop a more streamlined, accessible and effective approach to articulation arrangements' (PF p41). A database for pathways is being developed.

There is some external data for 2003 available, which shows that the proportion of articulating TAFE students at VU is around 14%, the fifth highest of Australian universities and the second-highest among dual-sector institutions. There are well-known difficulties in measuring the proportion of students articulating between the two sectors but the University should have been tracking the data.

The University's commitment to a new course network for students with multiple entry and exit points will require a comprehensive mapping of pathways and their approval by the ERB. This may allow the University to catch up or surpass other institutions in the use of pathways to maximise student choice, but only if appropriate information systems are available.

Recommendation 5

AUQA recommends that Victoria University rapidly develop systems to routinely track the number and proportion of students articulating from VET (TAFE) programs to higher education programs and vice versa and the number of students undertaking awards or subjects across both sectors.

4.6 *Evaluation of Learning and Teaching*

The University has for some time run Student Evaluation of Unit (SEU), and Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) surveys. All subjects must be evaluated using SEU once every two years but SET is an optional survey, with results reported only to individual teachers, although they are also used as supporting material for internal teaching awards and promotions. Because the application of SEU/SET has been inconsistent across the University, a new process commenced in 2006. However, the Audit Panel was told during the Audit Visit that the improved system had been placed on hold, pending further improvement to the survey instruments. There appears to be considerable uncertainty over responsibilities for moving forward with the new SEU/SET process and VU should clarify this.

SET results are reported to Council in the form of a composite Quality of Teaching indicator but reporting of results is unlikely to provide the Council with an accurate picture while participation in SET remains voluntary. The lack of comprehensive systematic information on higher education teaching makes it difficult for VU to identify areas of excellence in teaching as well as areas requiring attention. As an example, it would be useful for VU to know whether the collegial and supportive approach evident among staff in the Schools of Education and Hospitality, Tourism and Marketing, among others, translates into effective teaching by using more fine-grained and recent data than the CEQ. The absence of such information must be regarded as a risk given the University's future commitments to students. AUQA therefore recommends that

the University put in place a comprehensive student evaluation of teaching program and ensure that it is used by heads of school and the executive leadership team in the faculties to monitor the quality of teaching and thereby identify both areas requiring of improvement and outstanding teachers.

Recommendation 6

AUQA recommends that Victoria University implement a mandatory process for student evaluation of teaching, in order to monitor the quality of higher education teaching and thereby identify outstanding teachers as well as areas for improvement.

As with the student evaluation of units, the University should determine how often student evaluation of teaching should be undertaken for each course and subject.

4.7 Core Graduate Attributes and Academic Integrity

4.7.1 Core Graduate Attributes

The University expects all graduates to have developed five core graduate attributes (CGAs) as follows:

1. be an effective problem solver in a range of settings, including professional practice
2. locate, evaluate, manage and use information effectively (including critical thinking, ICT and statistical skills)
3. communicate effectively as a professional and as a citizen
4. work both autonomously and collaboratively as a professional, and
5. work effectively in settings of social and cultural diversity.

Although VU has a Core Graduate Attributes Policy, it admits that the embedding of CGAs in the higher education curriculum has not been achieved throughout the University. AUQA encourages VU to ensure that course and curriculum reviews undertaken in support of the University's 'New School of Thought' commitments require evidence to be provided of the ways in which CGAs will be achieved. VU is also encouraged to ensure that students are aware of the value to future employers of being able to demonstrate the achievement of the CGAs. In this regard, the Audit Panel was favourably impressed by the 'in class' work of the Student Career Development office in alerting first year students to the ways in which students can use the CGAs to build employment-related skills across their course.

Affirmation 6

AUQA affirms the role of the Student Career Development office at Victoria University in advising first year students how they can use core graduate attributes to build employment-related skills across their course.

4.7.2 Academic Integrity

The University implemented a Policy on Academic Honesty and Plagiarism by Students and Staff in 2004 and has run workshops for staff on related matters, such as designing assessment tasks to minimise the likelihood of plagiarism. Students in both onshore and offshore programs are well-aware that VU states that it regards plagiarism as unacceptable but some students feel they have

heard this message so many times that it has lost meaning. Despite the University's intention of taking an educative rather than a punitive approach, the Audit Panel is not convinced that the University has adequately addressed the opportunities for learning provided by a deep consideration of the issues raised by practices of plagiarism or collusion. This is particularly the case for students in offshore programs where local lecturers may not have opportunities to discuss at length the meaning and practical implications of VU's approach and may themselves be uncertain of its implications (see also section 6.4). The University has not stated a position on the use of plagiarism detection software, and in particular whether students should be allowed to submit their work to such software and learn from the feedback prior to submitting an assessable piece of work.

The current Policy, which has an expiration date of mid-2006, was being reviewed at the time of the Audit Visit to clarify, among other matters, the authority for taking particular types of decision and the courses of action open to decision-makers. AUQA endorses this revision of the Policy and its emphasis on excellence and honesty in academic life. As part of this revision, VU should consider including a statement on the educative use of plagiarism detection software and a position on student access to such software.

Affirmation 7

AUQA affirms Victoria University's revision of its policy on academic honesty and suggests the University include a statement on the educative use of plagiarism detection software and student access to such software.

4.8 E-learning

VU describes its approach to flexible delivery and e-learning as 'evolutionary', and 'low key', pointing to a number of factors such as a low rate of student access to home-based internet, especially for students from the west, the proximity of the institution to its communities in Melbourne's west, an emphasis on student support through face to face interaction and the level of technological literacy of teaching staff. The University has previously offered Curriculum Innovation Grants and now offers Flexible Learning Enhancement Sustainability Initiatives grants for development of alternative delivery models. As well, Teaching and Learning Services offers workshops to staff for the development of new subjects or redevelopment of existing subjects for flexible learning. The University states that uptake of the WebCT™ learning management system has increased between 25–30% annually since 2003 and in 2005 around 15% of undergraduate and postgraduate units had some WebCT presence. This will increase as e-learning content offered by the Faculty of Business and Law through an in-house system is progressively transferred to WebCT.

An e-learning strategy is currently under development, informed by a 2003–2004 Flexible Learning Taskforce Report that recommended adoption of a 'blended' model of learning, combining e-learning and face-to-face delivery.

Notwithstanding the University's comments above, it appears that the effective use of e-learning by VU would be welcomed by students and could help overcome the challenges faced by students with poor access to transport. E-learning also appears suited to the University's multi-campus environment. The Panel notes that many TAFE courses are already available online through the TAFE Virtual Campus.

In regard to internet access by students, the ready availability of computers on many University campuses, other than the CBD and Footscray Park, indicates that some VU students may find it more convenient to access online course content at a campus close to their homes than the one at which their course is offered. For these reasons, the University should increase its use of e-learning for higher education in the context of an overall strategy.

Affirmation 8

AUQA affirms Victoria University's development of an e-learning strategy and encourages the University to consider increasing the rate at which e-learning opportunities are being made available to higher education students.

4.9 *Teaching and Learning Support for Staff*

The University has various incentives to improve teaching and student learning including the Vice-Chancellor's awards for teaching excellence and promotion criteria that recognise good teaching. And, for over 10 years, VU has run an annual Learning Matters Symposium, where staff in teaching and support roles can share experiences and effective teaching practices.

The Panel notes as an area of good practice that VU has developed a Statement of Teacher Capabilities and implemented an Induction for Teaching Policy. The Policy requires all new staff who teach 10 hours or more per year, including sessional staff, to complete an initial Induction for Teaching program. Teaching staff with ongoing or contract employment are required to also complete an Extended Induction program. Staff can also enrol in a Graduate Certificate of Education (Tertiary) offered through the University's School of Education.

The Teaching and Learning Support (TLS) area at VU comprises the four units of:

- Staff College
- Student Career Services
- Post-Compulsory Education Centre
- Student Learning Services.

The Staff College and the LiW unit in Student Career Services provide support to staff to improve their teaching and courses, while the Post-Compulsory Education Centre undertakes educational research of relevance to VU, with a particular emphasis on cross-sectoral and post-compulsory education. The Staff College took a lead role in producing the Blue Guide and provides a wide range of professional development programs in addition to learning support. The University comments that good practice in areas of particular concern, such as retention and progress, is shared by close liaison between faculties and TLS.

However, it is not clear whether the Staff College is regarded internally as an important and effective partner in implementing institutional change. The Audit Panel heard mixed views from academic staff of the services provided by the Staff College. Some higher education staff appear to view the College as too 'TAFE oriented' while others find the support provided by the College to be of value. In the light of these comments and a need for additional leadership training, AUQA suggests a review of the Staff College, to clarify its future role in meeting the University's academic and leadership training needs.

5 RESEARCH

The VU Strategic Plan 2004–2008 includes the following objective of relevance to the development of research and research training:

Industry and the professions: Through strategic collaborations create new knowledge and applications for the benefit of students, staff, industry and the professions, and enhance the economic and social development of the western region of Melbourne and beyond.

The University has expressed a strong commitment to research as an integral component of its objectives and to increasing its research performance.

5.1 Research Plans

The Research and Research Training Functional Plan contains a range of strategies in support of each of the objectives in the Strategic Plan including:

- Increasing external research income by 15% per annum. Increase in number of successful applications by 50% each year progressively to attain national average success rates for the major national competitive grant schemes
- Developing a scheme that recruits outstanding early-career and mid-career researchers in Victoria University's strategic fields, and recognise and reward achievement
- Improving opportunities for research engagement by staff and higher degree by research (HDR) students with community partners by developing schemes that encourage research collaboration with community organisations.

The Plan also includes a large number of outcome indicators for research students, including:

- Maintaining the rate of timely completions at over 80%
- PREQ rating for research culture improved from below 60% to over 70%
- Aiming for over 50% of research theses to be rated by examiners as in the top third of research degrees
- 100% of registered supervisors undertaking six hours of training per year.

The University aims to increase the number of HDR students by 8% per annum and to improve HDR completion rates, especially for students who enrolled prior to 2001.

5.2 Research Outcomes

KPIs for research take the form of a Combined or Consolidated Research Index (CRI) which uses the four indicators of: research income (weighted at 40%); higher degree completions (40%); higher degree research load (10%); and publications (10%).

Although the University's research performance is improving, in recent years the University has performed less well than comparator institutions in relation to research income. While research income relative to academic staff numbers remains very close to the NGU average, between 2000 and 2004 the University's external research income increased by 11%, which is less than the NGU overall increase of 25% and the sector increase of 52%. VU's performance on research publications is better: publication outputs have increased in line with other NGU institutions and publications per academic staff member are slightly above the NGU average.

Among senior staff, research output per academic staff member at level D and above, as measured by the CRI, is substantially below that of each of the other seven Victorian universities and the Panel heard that the output of more junior staff is also an area of concern.

A rapid increase in HDR load has not been matched by an equally rapid increase in HDR completions: VU's ratio of completions to load is below the national average and quite significantly lower for international research students, who form the majority of VU's HDR students.

5.3 *Research Management*

Executive responsibility for research and research training rests with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region), assisted by Directors of the Office for Research, Office for Postgraduate Research (OPR) and the Office for Industry and Community Engagement. With three separate offices being responsible for elements of research management, the University needs to ensure not only that the roles and responsibilities are clear but also that these offices maintain close working relationships. Each of the three faculties has an associate dean (research and region) established in the 2005 restructuring of faculties, and in 2006 the University is further defining the relationship between the three offices, associate deans and research institute directors.

Two ERB standing committees are responsible for research and research training respectively. Although research outcomes against University-wide KPIs are monitored, it was not evident to the Audit Panel that all the outcomes contained in the Research and Research Training Functional Plan are regularly monitored by associate deans (research and region), faculty boards or the Research Committee. As part of its review of functional plans, the University should ensure relevant committees are required to consider implementation of strategies and their outcomes.

Higher degree by research programs are monitored by faculties using the standard course report format. Although these reports provide a general overview, their questions are not designed to match the functional plan indicators. The OPR has prepared a 2006 report on selected outcomes for HDR students but this does not address all the indicators in the Research and Research Training Functional Plan. To ensure adequate monitoring of performance, the OPR should prepare an annual report against each of the strategies and indicators in the Functional Plan, including outcomes by faculty. Outcomes for international students should be monitored closely and additional support provided to these students if required.

The University has a standard set of policies for research management, including policies on consultancy and intellectual property, although the Panel notes that a review of the Code of Conduct for Research appears overdue.

5.4 *Research Strategies and Areas of Strength*

The University has used a variety of approaches to the identification of areas of research strength in recent times and now recognises, as an area for improvement, the need for greater clarity and transparency in the process. Four University institutes reporting to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Region) were established in 2004, as follows:

- Institute for Community Engagement and Policy Alternatives
- Institute of Sustainability and Innovation
- Institute for Logistics and Supply Chain Management
- Institute for Health and Diversity

There are also six University research centres, which report to faculties, while some former centres continue to operate as research units within faculties. Each institute and centre prepares an annual report with a formal review every three years.

As well as institutes and centres, there are also priority research areas (PRAs), which are being supported by a commitment of University funds of \$15 million over five years. Funding has so far been allocated competitively to several projects relating to three institutes and other areas, with an emphasis on projects that support the University's commitment to the west of Melbourne and wider agendas. The PRAs funded to date include: cultural competence in diabetes; sustainable water use; and the global knowledge economy. As well, selected areas of research strength relevant to future goals have been asked to develop submissions for PRA funding.

PRAs are expected to earn matching external funding and their establishment is being guided by bimonthly reviews by an internal University panel and six monthly major reviews by panels with external members.

AUQA affirms the University's intention to clarify the relationship between PRAs, institutes and centres and their alignment with market leading courses, noting that this will help the communities and industry to engage more effectively with the University. As part of this process, VU should confirm that planned expenditure on PRAs supports its 'New School of Thought' commitments while also resourcing the development of further areas of distinctive expertise for the University.

Affirmation 9

AUQA affirms the Victoria University's plans to clarify the relationship between priority research areas, institutes and centres and their alignment with market leading courses.

5.5 Support and Development of Researchers

5.5.1 Allocation of Internal Research Funding

Internal funding for research is provided from grants to VU by DEST, based on previous research performance, together with strategic initiatives and other funding committed by the University. In addition to the \$15 million committed for PRAs, additional funding for VU's commitment to the Access and Success in the West project, capital investment for sports sciences, and Cooperative Research Centre support, the University provides internal funding as follows:

- Research Support Fund (a revised approach to the allocation of Institutional Grants Scheme funding, which aims to encourage concentration of research while rewarding individual highly-productive researchers)
- Funding for the full cost of institute directors and half the cost of centre directors
- Faculty Research Performance Fund (a 2.5% 'off the top' allocation based on research performance)
- Internal grants schemes (such as a new internal Researcher Development Grants Scheme to support early career researchers).

The Audit Panel notes that Research Infrastructure Block Grant funding is allocated competitively on the basis of submissions made by research groups and asks VU to consider whether this process is a worthwhile use of staff time.

Research funding support is a complex picture, with a plethora of schemes at various stages of development, implementation or disestablishment. It is therefore difficult to ascertain the

University's overall approach to the allocation of research funding and there is a degree of opacity over the amount of funding available for particular strategies. Although some information is available in separate policies and guidelines, VU is urged to consolidate its advice so a full picture is available to all researchers within the University and to staff more generally. This advice should include details of contestable and formula-based funding.

Recommendation 7

AUQA recommends that Victoria University clearly document its financial support for research and ensure this information is readily available to staff within the University.

5.5.2 Research Active Index

Higher education academic staff at VU have previously been able to declare themselves 'research active' and receive a reduction in teaching workload as a result. Given the comparatively low research output of senior staff mentioned in section 5.2, the University has developed a Research Active Index (RAI) to provide a meaningful benchmark by which to assess research productivity and to inform the University's new workload model and future Enterprise Bargain Agreement negotiations. The RAI has been developed after advice from other NGUs and aims to reflect a level of activity commensurate with the University's capabilities and future needs. It uses a weighted aggregate of research output measures to assign points to various academic staff levels: staff who reach the required points total are recognised as 'research active'. The RAI provides a transparent measure of activity that will assist the University in assessing the effectiveness of its strategies for research development.

Commendation 8

AUQA commends Victoria University for its development and introduction of the Research Active Index, a metrics-based approach to assessing the research activity of staff.

5.5.3 Recruitment and Retention of Researchers

Research staff are aware of the University's aim to increase overall research performance by 15% a year and new staff recruited to positions associated with the institutes are clear about the expectations in relation to research. Among academic staff more generally, there is a view that all staff should be able to undertake research if they wish to although the RAI may influence staff choices in future. The Panel encourages the University to use the new Staff Performance and Development Plan (SPDP) to clarify expectations of research for current staff.

AUQA urges the University to encourage further mentoring and more active career planning for new staff with an interest in and demonstrated capacity for research. If VU is to meet its targets for improved research performance, the University will need to ensure that heads of school and other supervisors are able to offer informed career advice and support. It may be helpful to ensure that early career researchers have opportunities to discuss their career development options with associate deans (research and region) or other research leaders prior to developing their SPDP (section 7.1.3).

As a new university, VU is vulnerable to the 'poaching' of leading research groups by other institutions and although the PRA process and funding for institute and centre directors will go some way towards addressing this risk, additional strategies could be considered. Moreover, if the University is to reach its target for improved research performance, the Panel judges that the University will need to accelerate the pace at which it recruits and retains established and newer researchers. In this regard, it is inappropriate for decisions on the recruitment of new academic staff to be made expediently, without sufficient consideration of the consequences of appointing

staff who are unlikely to be research active. New staff position descriptions should specify the contribution to research output that is expected and applicants should be rigorously assessed against this criterion.

Recommendation 8

AUQA recommends that, in order to achieve its aims for research performance, Victoria University consider additional measures to recruit and retain outstanding research scholars and those of proven research potential.

5.6 Research Training

5.6.1 Supervision and Resources

The University appropriately places considerable emphasis on timely completion of research degrees. To this end, HDR student progress is monitored every six months, while students are also encouraged to take responsibility for managing their own candidature with the support of their supervisors. All supervisors must be registered and should undertake some professional development training each year, although it was not clear to the Panel that this latter requirement is always met and the register of supervisors was only compiled in 2006.

Students whose thesis is passed without major amendment are classified as high achievers but VU aims to raise the bar on this measure and is seeking additional feedback from examiners on the quality of theses and whether they provide evidence of the possession of graduate attributes, based on practices used at the Universities of Melbourne and Western Australia.

Feedback from HDR students is sought through an annual survey and students have the opportunity to raise issues about supervision through progress reports that are seen by supervisors. Although students are advised to discuss with a third party any issues they do not wish to raise with their supervisor, students cannot use the progress report process to provide confidential feedback on problems with supervision at an individual level. Students should have an opportunity to identify issues in confidence and the University should amend its processes to allow this to happen. VU does not require research students have more than one supervisor, although many have an associate supervisor. In the absence of a policy requiring a supervisor and associate supervisor, arrangements should be put in place at enrolment to ensure continuity of supervision should a single supervisor cease to be available.

Results from PREQ and VU's internal surveys of research students highlight some of the difficulties that may be experienced by research students entering fields where there is not a strong research culture and where physical infrastructure for HDR students has not previously been a priority. These difficulties are likely to be exacerbated by a rapid increase in research student load. To further encourage a vibrant intellectual community for research students, the University is considering a policy that would limit supervision of research students to staff associated with areas of research strength.

There are no minimum requirements for physical facilities and resources such as conference support for HDR students, each student being asked to clarify expectations with the relevant facility before enrolment. Access to a desk and computer has not been available to all research students, although the University is increasing both space and facilities, recognising that infrastructure is an area of considerable concern to research students.

Recommendation 9

AUQA recommends that Victoria University amend its policies for research students to allow students a systematic opportunity to provide confidential feedback on the quality of their supervision and that the University provide a statement of minimum resources that addresses physical space, among other requirements for study.

5.6.2 Other Support for Research Students

VU states that it ‘values research students and supervisors and aims to support them to a level equivalent to, or better than, that of other Australian universities of comparable size’ (PF p55). Notwithstanding the comments above in regard to infrastructure and resources for HDR students, the Panel found evidence to support this claim in the personal and professional development training programs for HDR students offered by the Office of Postgraduate Research.

OPR provides over 120 training programs each year for students and supervisors, to consistently positive feedback. First year HDR students, and from 2006 second year students as well, are offered a week-long course to equip them with skills and also build a research community, and OPR also offers faculty and school-based workshops, plus symposia, forums and other special events. Students to whom the Panel spoke rate highly these opportunities and the overall support provided by OPR.

Content, attendance and outcomes of VU training programs are routinely compared to those at Swinburne, Ballarat and Sunshine Coast Universities, while components of the VU program have been offered at other universities within Australia and internationally. A program for staff and students to develop skills in research management, jointly developed by OPR and the Office of Research, is now available as an accredited award of the University offered through the School of Management.

Commendation 9

AUQA commends Victoria University for the support provided to research higher degree students by the Office of Postgraduate Research.

5.7 Ethics

The University operates a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Animal Ethics Committee and Institutional Biosafety Committee. Each faculty also has a human research ethics committee to assist on evaluating lower-risk projects. The latter two committees are operating effectively but some improvements could be made to better support the University’s human research ethics committees.

VU has recognised this, in part, by establishing a position to develop a system to report on the University’s compliance with NHMRC ethics guidelines. First among other issues that need addressing is thorough monitoring of annual progress reports for projects with ethics clearance. The Audit Panel was advised that HREC has repeatedly asked for follow-up of progress reports that have not been provided but has so far not succeeded in obtaining all progress reports.

Researchers indicated some degree of frustration with current processes, as submissions may be returned before reaching the committee when only a minor wording change is required. The Panel suggests that the process of initial review of submissions by administrative staff could be streamlined. However the Panel also formed the view that some staff may regard ethics clearance as more of a nuisance than a significant part of the research process. The University should address the issue of effectively following up progress reports and consider other improvements that could be made, including additional education for staff and students.

Recommendation 10

AUQA recommends that Victoria University improve its processes for annual progress reports on projects with ethics clearance, to allow proper monitoring by the Human Research Ethics Committee, and that the University undertake further education of staff and students about ethics approval processes.

6 INTERNATIONAL

VU's approach to internationalisation, as stated in the International Functional Plan, is intended to situate international activities within VU's strategic planning framework and embrace the University's engagement agenda while in practical terms focusing on:

- ensuring the economic viability and sustainability of VU's international activities and that these activities adhere to principles of quality and compliance
- recruitment of onshore fee-paying international students
- expanding study abroad and academic exchange for both incoming and outgoing students, and
- promoting internationalisation of the University's core activities.

There are no KPIs specifically for internationalisation in the University's Strategic Plan although a number of strategies and KPIs will be affected by performance in regard to internationalisation.

6.1 *Responsibilities for Internationalisation and Partnerships*

6.1.1 Victoria University International

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) has overall responsibility for international activities at VU and this position reflects the University's increasing coordination of its international relations, marketing and quality assurance arrangements. Recently-established positions of associate dean (international) in each of the faculties assist with academic quality assurance for faculty international programs.

A review in 2005 of the then International Services Division resulted in the creation of Victoria University International (VUI) which manages international partnerships, exchanges and policy in addition to recruitment and admission of international students. A Marketing and Recruitment Plan is under development and agent relationships are currently being reviewed. VU participates in the well-established benchmarking process for international offices run by the Australian Universities International Directors' Forum. The University's performance is comparable to that of other institutions, one exception being VU's comparatively low ratio of international office staff to international students.

6.1.2 Partnerships and exchanges

VU has academic and research partnerships with over 100 different overseas institutions. Some of these partnerships are longstanding while others are more recent. In common with other Australian universities, VU is now emphasising fewer and more strategic partnerships, although it is well-served by its active academic exchange programs with 60 institutions. VU reviewed all existing agreements with offshore partner institutions in 2005 and had discontinued some.

The University's initial entrepreneurial approach has led to the establishment of relationships, for offshore programs in particular, with various well-regarded international institutions that can afford to be selective in their choice of partner. It is to the University's credit that VU has maintained and enhanced these relationships over a significant period of time. The Audit Panel also notes VU's support for certain developing countries, such as Timor Leste, with aid projects and research.

Commendation 10

AUQA commends Victoria University for establishing and maintaining strong relationships in the delivery of offshore programs with several well-regarded international partner institutions.

VU's current processes for negotiating agreements with offshore partners reflect the growing maturity of its approach to international relations. A position of Manager of Transnational Projects has been established within VUI and there is now a manual and set of protocols for initiating and concluding international agreements.

International exchanges are managed through a Victoria Abroad team within VUI. In 2005, 108 students undertook study offshore. VU plans to extend opportunities for exchanges through more flexible degree structures and study tours, having already allocated \$500,000 for travel grants in 2006.

6.2 *Internationalisation of the Curriculum*

The University aims to develop a shared view across both higher education and TAFE of ways in which the concept of internationalising the curriculum can be defined. The Blue Guide provides some advice to staff, and information on resources in regard to meeting the needs of international students, internationalising the curriculum and equivalence in onshore and offshore programs. Other initiatives being taken by the University include diversity workshops and a new Bachelor of International Studies. To advance discussion within the University, the Education and Research Board has requested that faculties and TAFE schools map their current strategies and approaches to internationalisation of the curriculum. AUQA encourages ERB to move ahead with this project, which relates directly to the University's Strategic Plan and core graduate attributes.

6.3 *Support for Onshore International Students*

Academic support for higher education students is available through the Student Learning Unit which runs both special workshops and weekly support sessions on various subjects in addition to providing discipline-specific online assistance and support. VU has a good record of success with AusAID scholarships for international students and an established early intervention strategy to ensure that 'at risk' students are identified and supported. One of the strategies in the Learning and Teaching Functional Plan is to develop an International Student Learning Support Plan. This is likely to be a useful initiative that should generate closer links between the delivery of services and the monitoring of international student outcomes.

Services specifically for international students are provided by VUI but student advisors in the Student Services Department also play a role in offering support and information. The Panel heard from students and student representatives that there is some confusion among international students over which areas of the University are responsible for which services and also concerns over a perceived loss of quality in advice to international students. VUI is encouraged to work closely with the International Students Association to resolve any issues, ensure a consistently high level of service and ensure that students know which areas to see for advice. A new survey of international students should assist in identifying and meeting the needs of this particular student population.

6.4 *Offshore Programs*

The University provides offshore courses in Bangladesh, Hong Kong and mainland China, Singapore and Malaysia, with around 2300 higher education students studying through these programs. Some partnerships also involve TAFE and English language courses. The University has decided to work with partners in expanding its international programs, with pathways to courses in Melbourne, rather than to establish its own campuses offshore. In July 2006, VU

hosted a three day 'Enriching Partnerships' conference to bring together onshore and offshore partners to discuss ways to best meet the learning and teaching needs of offshore students. This active engagement allowed VU to hold productive dialogue on subjects such as the ways in which customisation of material and teaching for local contexts does and should occur.

Many of the programs were developed in an ad hoc fashion, through personal networks and contacts although, as noted above, a number of them have resulted in successful sustained partnerships. Also, many of these programs continue to rely heavily on the dedication of individual academic leaders. The University needs to appreciate the risks this creates in terms of succession and give additional consideration to ensuring that the efforts of staff who take on responsibilities for offshore programs are adequately recognised.

Recognising the inherent risks in offshore operations, VU commissioned audits of each VU offshore program by an external reviewer between 2004 and 2006. These audits were comprehensive and brought to light various inadequacies and risks in the management of partnerships and delivery of courses. The University has now addressed many of these issues through the negotiation of new agreements with partners, in which academic quality assurance has been guided by the rollout of new academic policies.

VU has not systematically considered comparative pass rates and grade distributions for offshore students as against onshore fee-paying and onshore 'domestic' students, although the Panel notes that this is now being addressed (see also section 4.3.2).

Commendation 11

AUQA commends Victoria University for identifying the risks associated with international partnerships and offshore teaching, initiating external audits to refine the risk analysis and systematically working to implement the audit recommendations.

Offshore courses offered with four partner institutions were sampled during the audit, as follows:

- Sunway University College
- Chinese University of Hong Kong – School of Continuing Studies
- Liaoning University
- Hong Kong Institute of Technology (HKIT).

The first three of these partnerships are robust and well-established, while the fourth is ending and courses are being taught out.

The external audit of the two courses offered with HKIT identified some serious quality assurance issues and risks for VU. When the parties could not agree over the content of new agreements, VU advised HKIT that it would discontinue its relationship. Ongoing disagreement between HKIT and VU in regard to the University's commitments to current students, generated to a considerable extent by the inadequacy and vague wording of the existing agreements, has led to a difficult situation and created considerable uncertainty for students. A number of these matters have been resolved and VU is committed to a full teach-out of the courses. However, VU should implement, as thoroughly as possible, a more active strategy to directly communicate with students and implement the academic quality assurance improvements the University originally sought to incorporate in revised agreements with HKIT.

The continuing partnerships all exhibit many features of good practice. Agreements are current, with up-to-date schedules and adequate detail; there are excellent local administrators and appropriate facilities for students; regular meetings are held to review and further develop the programs; and the students who met the Panel delegation were articulate and engaged. Course

content is equivalent to that offered onshore, examinations are set and marked by VU staff, examination security is preserved, and local teaching staff largely have a good understanding with VU staff.

There remain some questions over whether students in the offshore location are supported to learn as well as onshore students and whether the program structure and delivery ensures learning and an experience equivalent to those of students in Melbourne. A number of these issues relate to student assessment. In general, students in the offshore programs receive little or no feedback on their assignments, an issue that VU needs to address. The University also needs to ensure that post-assessment moderation of student assignments is undertaken for an adequate sample of all assignments, in accordance with its Student Assessment Policy. In the past, approaches to assessment have been inconsistent in regard to the use of supplementary examinations. The provisions of the new Student Assessment Policy have not yet been fully applied to all offshore programs, although students have been advised of changes in regard to supplementary examinations.

The external audit report questioned the effects on student learning of intensive teaching. The Audit Panel observes that in one program each subject is completed in seven to eight weeks and suggests the University investigate changes to program structures that might allow students more time to assimilate material without necessarily extending the duration of the course.

Many of these issues are being addressed progressively by VU but the University should now undertake a closer analysis of the equivalence of the student experience offshore and onshore, including compliance with the Student Assessment Policy. To avoid placing staff in a potential conflict of interest situation, this review should not involve staff members who are compensated above salary for teaching on these programs.

Recommendation 11

AUQA recommends that, as further follow-up to its external audit of offshore programs, Victoria University analyse the degree of equivalence between onshore and offshore programs in relation to academic requirements, including assessment and feedback to students, and the student experience.

As noted in section 4.3.2, the Panel considers the Education and Research Board should play a major ongoing role in quality assurance for offshore programs, including the active monitoring of student outcomes and equivalence in course content, delivery and assessment. Course coordinators, who are managing their programs well, may benefit from additional assistance from associate deans (international) in the academic review of offshore programs.

7 STAFF AND STUDENT SERVICES

7.1 *Human Resources Management*

The VU Strategic Plan 2004–2008 includes the following objectives with respect to staff:

To engage staff in a creative and rewarding learning community for the benefits of students, staff and other stakeholders.

Key strategies in the Strategic Plan and the Staff Functional Plan are:

- Improving VU's workforce planning capacity
- Developing stronger mechanisms to attract, recruit, retain and reward staff
- Implementation of performance management systems that recognise achievements and active participation by staff in agreed University activities
- Revising workload models
- Providing professional development opportunities for all staff
- Ensuring that leaders and managers are properly skilled through the use of targeted professional development
- Continuing the development of Equal Employment Opportunity and similar programs for under-represented groups and strengthening workplace culture.

7.1.1 Organisation and Planning

A new organisational structure for the Human Resources area is being implemented to give effect to recommendations of reviews conducted in 2004 and 2005. The new model will place human resources contact officers on several campuses so they can work directly with faculties. VU has also joined a human resource benchmarking program being managed by Queensland University of Technology. The University states in the Portfolio that it is currently exploring options to gain external recognition as an employer of choice, including the Investors in People program.

The Audit Panel finds that VU is making considerable progress in the implementation of new arrangements and affirms many of the actions that have been taken. However, there are some groups of staff in danger of being overlooked, most notably sessional and casual staff. And, in the context of workforce renewal, a major challenge for the University is to ensure that those responsible for new academic appointments are adequately equipped to recruit appropriately. The Panel reiterates a view expressed earlier that the University cannot afford to underinvest in leadership and change management if it is to achieve its 'New School of Thought' commitments.

The University's KPIs for staff are:

- Staff retention/renewal (percentage of separations / percentage of new appointments or turnover for continuing and contract staff)
- Staff satisfaction (as measured by staff climate survey of continuing and contract staff)
- Lost time due to Workcover (compensation) claims
- Quality of teaching, as measured by Student Evaluation of Teaching.

These KPIs use readily available measures, some of which are known to be ambiguous or inadequate. VU's staff turnover, for example, was considerably lower than the average for the

sector (2004 data) but whether this is regarded as a good outcome is unclear, as there is no target for this measure. While staff satisfaction is a valuable measure, the quality of teaching measure will be a reliable indicator only when all staff are required to be assessed. The Panel suggests that VU review its KPIs for staff to achieve better alignment with strategic goals.

7.1.2 Workforce Planning

The University's higher education staff profile differs in several respects from sector averages. Expenditure on staff costs (higher education) was above the sector average on 2003 data and has increased since 2000, despite the University's high proportion of sessional and casual academic staff. In this regard, it is noticeable that the University has a higher level of academic staff at levels D and E than national averages. The proportion of VU academic staff aged 45 years or older is 73% compared with the sector average of 56% (2004 data).

Purposeful workforce management is a priority for the University amid widespread recognition of impending generational change for academic staff. VU has since 2004 been undertaking a Workforce Renewal Project, aimed at ensuring the right mix of academic staff to deliver courses and research outcomes for longer-term financial viability and sustainability and, in particular, to 'achieve a better balance between research output and academic staff levels' (PF p79). The Project addresses staff development as well as changes to the academic staff profile but there is an understandable concern among some staff over the implications of the Project. In this somewhat fragile internal climate and given the impending reworking of courses, the University will need to ensure an adequate investment in change management.

For the Workforce Renewal Project to be successful, all levels of the organisation must be clear about the desired academic staff profile of various units, particularly in regard to expectations of research (see also section 5.5.3). As noted in respect of research, the Panel was not convinced that executive deans and heads of school recognise the central importance of attracting a high quality pool of applicants to ensure only high calibre appointments. This message should be reinforced for all selection panels.

Affirmation 10

AUQA affirms Victoria University's planning and initial implementation of the Workforce Renewal Project but suggests the University give greater attention to staff recruitment processes which reinforce its strategic directions.

There is also a need to ensure that human resources systems allow for the capture and reporting of aggregated personnel information relevant to the University's strategies. In making this comment, the Panel notes there is some uncertainty over the accuracy of the University's records on numbers of staff with research higher degrees.

The University is currently revising its academic workload model, to replace the current model based on teaching hours with one that addresses a broader spectrum of academic activities. The new model is due to be implemented in 2007. The new model is a positive development to support increased quality and productivity of academic staff in both teaching and research. The Panel encourages the University to consider whether the workload model should incorporate offshore teaching commitments within teaching load, as such commitments are currently 'above load' for certain staff, an arrangement that does not properly reflect the importance to VU of its offshore programs.

VU's Academic Promotion Policy was updated in 2004 and may require further review in the light of changes to human resources strategies and the University's strategic commitments.

7.1.3 Performance Management and Career Development

From 2006, VU has commenced the implementation of a single performance management and development system for all ongoing and contract staff, to ensure a comprehensive and consistent approach across the University and effective linkage of strategic, operational and individual plans. In accordance with the Staff Performance and Development (SPDP) Policy, a major training program for supervisors has been undertaken and the Panel suggests this might be further extended.

SPDP is an online system, which will assist the University significantly in monitoring the extent to which plans have been developed for all staff and reviews are occurring as well as in identifying future needs for professional and career development. In implementing the SPDP, the Panel observes that it will be important for the University to demonstrate to staff that the results can have an impact on career opportunities and individual and organisational improvement.

Commendation 12

AUQA commends Victoria University for the development of the online Staff Performance and Development Plan process for performance management.

The University has progressively been improving its induction processes for new staff but a number of comments in this Report point to the need for clarification of expectations in terms of research output and leadership at an early stage, together with sound career planning advice for staff.

General staff are able to benefit from professional development programs run by the Staff College and initiatives such as the Women in Leadership program (section 7.2). However, it may be difficult for such staff to advance their careers without gaining experience across a broad range of administrative and management functions, especially if internal systems do not encourage this. The University should investigate additional career development opportunities for general staff through, for example, greater use of internal and external exchanges and secondments.

7.1.4 Management of Sessional and Casual Staff

VU recognises its noticeably higher reliance on casual higher education academic staff than the average for the Australian university sector. While some sessional and casual staff are engaged to provide focused professional input to courses, the majority of these staff at VU are engaged to undertake mainstream teaching. VU's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement requires the University to use its best endeavours to reduce sessional teaching and the Workforce Renewal Project takes this into account.

As up to 50 per cent of teaching in some courses may be undertaken by sessional and casual staff, these staff are critical to achieving the University's goals. They will need to be actively engaged with the University's 'New School of Thought' commitments and aware of the implications for their teaching of more student learning in the workplace and greater internationalisation of the curriculum. AUQA urges the University to extend the SPDP process to sessional and casual staff and to ensure that casual staff have opportunities to be involved in discussions within their schools on changes to courses.

More generally, the Panel expresses a concern over whether processes for employing, involving, remunerating, inducting, supporting and evaluating sessional and casual staff are consistent across all higher education schools. The University has yet to address a recommendation in the Lister Reports for a code of good practice in the employment of sessional and casual staff. Given the importance of these staff, the University should now act to review and improve as necessary its management and support of sessional and casual staff.

Recommendation 12

AUQA recommends that Victoria University conduct a review of the employment of sessional and casual staff and develop a strategy for the management and support of sessional and casual staff in pursuit of the University's strategic directions.

7.2 *Equity Matters*

VU's Equity and Social Justice Branch advises on anti-discrimination and equal opportunity matters to staff and students, and initiates and coordinates equity projects, including support for students with a disability. It coordinates a new mandatory EO Online training program introduced in March 2006 which by October had been completed by nearly 20 per cent of staff.

The proportion of female academic staff at levels D and E is very similar to the sector average of 20 per cent. VU introduced its Women in Leadership (WiL) program in 2003 and now offers the WiL program for women in mid-level positions, which includes mentoring by senior staff across the University, and a Career Development for Women program for women at lower levels. Both programs are oversubscribed. The Audit Panel received positive reports on both programs, which staff are finding helpful for career development but suggests that the University gather more systematic feedback on the impact of the program.

Commendation 13

AUQA commends Victoria University for its Women in Leadership and Career Development for Women programs.

The Panel observes that the Workforce Renewal Project provides an opportunity to examine areas where staff from equity groups are underrepresented, including gender imbalances, and develop approaches to redress these.

Support services for VU's main student equity group, students from low socio-economic status backgrounds, are largely mainstreamed, while responsibilities to support Indigenous students have been transferred from the Equity and Social Justice Branch to a new Moondani Balluk Indigenous Academic Unit located in the School of Human Movement, Recreation and Performance. Vesting these responsibilities in an academic area is partly a response to low enrolments of Indigenous students in programs but reflects a growing demand for teaching in Indigenous studies and cultural awareness across the University. The Unit aims to foster participation in local Koori community activities and will implement a new Bachelor of Arts (Kynandoo) program in Indigenous Studies in 2007. The University's Acknowledgement Policy contains a statement of reconciliation and acknowledges the original custodians of the land on which the University stands.

7.3 *Student Administration and Student Services*

7.3.1 Student Services: Administration and Service Centres

Student Services at VU were restructured following a 2003 University One Stop Student Services Review and a 2004 Student Union Services Review. The Student Services Department now comprises:

- Student Administration Branch: Admissions and Exams, Enrolments and Fees, Systems and Reporting, and Graduations and Offshore Student Administration
- Student Liaison Branch: Student Service Centres, Student Contact Centre and Student Advisory Service

- Student Support Branch: Sports and Fitness, Health and Recreation, Counselling and Welfare.

The Student Operations Branch is responsible for childcare centres on four campuses and University residences.

A recent development is the establishment of Student Service Centres on 10 campuses, together with a central telephone and email Student Contact Centre, to provide face to face student advice on administrative and other issues. The Student Administration area manages the student administration system (VUSIS, section 3.5) and its front-end online application, MyVU. The University has collected systematic feedback from students on student administrative and other services through an online Student Satisfaction Survey and AUQA suggests that students and their representatives be advised of actions taken in response to findings, especially in regard to areas of low satisfaction such as fee payment processes and offshore student support.

In discussions, the Panel became aware of some communication issues between Student Services and faculty managers. There are concerns within faculties about the restrictions placed by Services Centres on numbers of student referrals, which may be initial implementation problems. However, working relationships among Student Administration, Student Services and the faculties appear to be quite underdeveloped and would benefit from closer dialogue.

7.3.2 Student Services: Learning Support, Amenities and Advisory

Academic support services for students are provided through Student Learning Services within TLS and comprise a Student Learning Unit, which provides support for higher education students, a Concurrent Assistance program for TAFE students and an English Language Institute for ELICOS students.

Other services for students are provided by the Student Liaison, Student Support and Student Operations branches of the Student Services Department, including alumni services, and through Student Career Services within TLS.

Like other universities, VU faces challenges as a result of Australian Government legislation abolishing compulsory upfront student union fees. VU established a reference group in 2005 to work through the issues, in the context of recommendations of a 2005 review of the Student Support Branch. Although services for students have been reduced, an initial concern that independent advocacy functions could be overshadowed by a focus on maintaining recreation and sporting facilities appears to have been addressed. The Student Support Branch has also strengthened its role in student advice and referral, through a new Student Advisory Service, while responsibility for following-up formal complaints has been centralised in Student Services. A new Feedback, Complaints and Grievance Policy has been approved.

VU should continue to liaise closely with the Victoria University Student Union (VUSU) to ensure that issues relating to both study and the student experience are drawn to the attention of senior staff at an early stage. Student representatives stated that their access to senior managers has improved and commented that the Blue Guide is proving a useful resource for students, although it is targeted to staff.

Students and student representatives recognise the difficulties VU faces in offering a high level of service and support across multiple campuses varying greatly in the size of the student body. They are generally of the view that the University is trying hard to meet needs across all campuses but that too often students are not aware of what is available to them. Many students study only at one campus and may identify more closely with that campus than with the University as a whole. As it can be difficult to engage VU students in campus life especially on smaller campuses, student representatives appreciate the support offered by the Vice-Chancellor

and senior management for Student Forums organised by VUSU. To encourage student participation, VU is providing student lounges at 11 locations and campus branch office space and equipment for VUSU. The Panel suggests that VUSU might also consider making contact with representative groups of offshore students where possible, to better understand the needs of offshore students.

The Audit Panel heard that the University is conscious of the need to provide personal and social support to new students, especially those who are the first in their family to attend university and who have a non-English speaking background. However, such students are not identified in a coordinated fashion by the University at present. As one element of its development of personalised learning plans, VU promises needs assessment and learning support for all students. It may be helpful for this process to be coordinated with personal support services as well. The Panel notes that two faculties offer a Parent Information Program as part of their orientation activities.

Student Career Development provides services and website resources to assist students to plan for and manage their futures. These services are available to graduates for up to two years after they finish their studies.

7.4 *Physical Infrastructure and Services*

7.4.1 Library

The University Library, which provides integrated services for higher education and TAFE, has participated in annual Rodski benchmarking surveys of Australian university libraries. Results from the 2005 Rodski survey show the University to be overall in the top 50% of institutions surveyed, with a significant improvement on scores for facilities and equipment in 2005 following the addition of 600 new computers in response to poor scores on this item in previous years. The Library opened a state of the art Learning Commons on its City Flinders campus in August 2006 and plans are under way for a second Learning Commons on the Footscray Park campus.

7.4.2 Capital Development, Facilities Management and Multi-campus Operations

Higher education activities take place on eight of the University's 11 campuses and all faculties are to some extent involved in multi-campus operations. The University aims to minimise the need for travel between campuses by students and staff, although this may result in some lack of awareness of the University as a whole entity. Both the Library and IT services have staff on all campuses to address student needs and Student Service Centres are on 10 campuses. Campus heads play a role in prioritising needs for maintenance and facilities support on each campus in consultation with facilities management.

The University acknowledges that campus and capital planning has previously occurred on a pragmatic basis driven by immediate operational needs. As the Resources and Capital Functional Plan indicates, VU is now able to begin to plan more strategically around disciplinary activities and course profiles, in order to consolidate both higher education and TAFE activities which serve similar disciplines or industries. The University Council has approved a substantial capital program over the next few years for projects that will immediately improve services and facilities for students or that are closely linked to planned course renewal.

AUQA finds that the University is meeting the challenges posed by multi-campus operations and is using academic and course requirements to drive future campus planning.

APPENDIX A: VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

History and Location

In 1990, the Footscray Institute of Technology (FIT) and the Western Institute merged to become Victoria University of Technology (VUT). The University was created with its mission defined in the Act, to serve the educationally disadvantaged region of western metropolitan Melbourne. In 1998, the Western Melbourne Institute of Technology (WMIT) was amalgamated when the Victorian Government acted to rationalise vocational education across metropolitan Melbourne. Today, VU can be understood as an amalgam of six former bodies and 15 institutional names that date back 90 years. It has three campuses in the centre of Melbourne and eight in the western suburbs. The University was renamed Victoria University (VU) in 2005.

Academic Profile

Victoria University has three higher education faculties:

- the Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development, comprising Schools of Communication, Culture and Languages; Education; Human Movement, Recreation and Performance; Psychology; and Social Sciences;
- the Faculty of Business and Law, comprising Schools of Accounting and Finance; Applied Economics; Hospitality, Tourism and Marketing; Information Systems; Law; Management; and the Victoria Graduate School of Business; and
- the Faculty of Health, Engineering and Science, comprising Schools of Architectural, Civil and Mechanical Engineering; Biomedical Sciences; Computer Science and Mathematics; Electrical Engineering; Health Sciences; Molecular Sciences; and Nursing and Midwifery.

Victoria University has four institutes, which serve in areas of strategic importance to the University and which combine problem-based research, employee training and education, management support and consultancy that encompasses the University's dual-sector capability. These institutes are:

- Institute for Community Engagement and Policy Alternatives
- Institute for Sustainability and Innovation
- Institute for Logistics and Supply Chain Management, and
- Institute for Health and Diversity.

It also has six research centres:

- Ageing, Rehabilitation, Exercise and Sports
- Environmental Safety and Risk Engineering
- Hospitality and Tourism Research
- Strategic Economic Studies
- Telecommunications and Microelectronics, and
- Corporate Governance Research.

Key Statistics (as at 31 December 2005, unless otherwise indicated)

	Higher Education	Vocational Education and Training
Total Student Enrolments Head (at 5 December 2006):	21,014	25,593
Research Student Enrolments (at 5 December 2006):	279 EFTSL	—
International Student Enrolments (at 5 December 2006):	4,560 EFTSL	1,336,765 SCH
Total Student Load (at 5 December 2006):	14,704 EFTSL	8,826,749 SCH
Total Staff FTE (excluding casual staff):	Academic:	557.03
	TAFE Teaching:	512.20
	General (including senior management)	1,046.95
	Total:	2,116.18
Total Operating Revenues (2005):		\$328.72M
Total Operating Expenses (2005):		\$318.00M

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

Mission

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

Objectives

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

Values

AUQA will be:

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

Vision

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

APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL

Dr Jeanette Baird, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency

Professor Beryl Hesketh, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Sciences and Technology), University of Sydney

Mr Geoffrey Hines, Management Consultant

Professor Michael Rowan, Pro Vice Chancellor and Vice President, Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences, University of South Australia (Panel Chair)

Professor Robert Zemsky, Chair and Chief Executive Officer, The Learning Alliance, University of Pennsylvania, USA

Observers:

Ms Elizabeth Burke, Australian Universities Quality Agency (Day 1 of Audit Visit)

Ms Aysen Mustafa, Australian Universities Quality Agency (Day 2 of Audit Visit)

APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

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

AUCEA	Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
Blue Guide.....	Victoria University's guide to policies and resources aimed at promoting and enhancing excellence in teaching and learning
CEQ	Course Experience Questionnaire
CGAs	core graduate attributes
CRI	Combined Research Index
DEST	Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training
EFTSL	equivalent full-time student load
ELICOS	English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students
EEO	Equal Opportunity
ERB	Education and Research Board
GDS	Graduate Destination Survey
HDR.....	higher degree by research
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
ICT.....	Information and Communications Technology
IT	Information Technology
ITS	Information Technology Services
LiW.....	learning in the workplace
MCEETYA.....	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NGP	National Governance Protocols
NGU	New Generation Universities
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
OICE.....	Office for Industry and Community Engagement
OPR	Office of Postgraduate Research
OSI.....	Overall Satisfaction Index, part of the CEQ (q.v.)
OTTE.....	Office of Training and Tertiary Education (Victoria)
PDRI.....	Plan-Do-Review-Improve (continuous quality improvement cycle)
PF p.....	Performance Portfolio page reference
Portfolio.....	Performance Portfolio
PRA	Priority Research Area
PREQ.....	Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire
QIR	Quality Improvement Review
RAI	Research Active Index

RPL.....	Recognition of Prior Learning
RQF.....	Research Quality Framework
SCH.....	Student Contact Hours
SET.....	Student Evaluation of Teaching
SEU.....	Student Evaluation of Unit (subject)
SMG.....	Senior Management Group
SPDP.....	Staff Performance and Development Plan
TAFE.....	Technical and Further Education (TAFE) a national system of organisations delivering primarily VET (q.v.) programs
TLS.....	Teaching and Learning Services
VC.....	Vice-Chancellor
VET.....	Vocational Education and Training
VU.....	Victoria University
VUI.....	Victoria University International
VUSIS.....	Victoria University Student Information System
VUSU.....	Victoria University Student Union
WiL.....	Women in Leadership
WMIT.....	Western Melbourne Institute of Technology

This image shows a full page of white paper with horizontal dotted lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page, providing a guide for handwriting practice. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the page.