

## **Audit of the University by the Australian Universities Quality Agency**

### **Purpose**

To provide an overview of the outcomes of the AUQA audit of UWS during 2006.

### **Background**

During 2006 UWS was subject to a whole-of-university audit by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). AUQA undertakes major audits of all Australian universities as part of a five-year review cycle. The final report of the AUQA audit of UWS details the Audit Panel's findings, recommendations, affirmations and commendations. Overall the audit delivered an accurate and very positive assessment of the University's progress against its mission and objectives and its overall quality management system.

The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a preparatory visit to UWS in August 2006. A selection of the trans-national (offshore) operations of the University were also audited, with the Audit Panel Chair and Director visiting five partners in three countries during September 2006. The main audit visit took place in October 2006.

The Panel was based at the Parramatta campus and also held interviews at the Penrith and Bankstown campuses. In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 280 people, including the Chancellor, external members of the Board of Trustees, Vice-Chancellor, Academic Senate, senior management, academic and general staff, research students, international students, Indigenous students, undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students, research sponsors, community partners, and other external stakeholders.

### **AUQA Final Report**

In its final report, AUQA acknowledged the long and difficult gestation period for UWS to become an integrated university and that it is now well positioned for the future. The report noted that the University has strived to achieve its objectives especially in terms of meeting the needs and aspirations of the residents of Greater Western Sydney (GWS) and that this commitment to its immediate communities was a significant distinguishing feature of UWS, which the audit panel termed as being "A University of the people".

The report commended the strategic involvement of the Board of Trustees in effectively guiding the University through major reviews and reforms. The Academic Senate was also found to be functioning effectively and exercising commendable oversight and leadership of UWS's academic activities. AUQA noted that the senior management, with the strong leadership shown by the Vice-Chancellor, has played a major role in restructuring and repositioning the University. Many key initiatives were acknowledged by AUQA as now being firmly in place. These include a sound approach to financial management, effective course consolidation, the development of a workload policy and a revised and more transparent funding model.

The audit panel noted that UWS has been successful in offering flexible programs to a diverse student profile and in increasing higher education participation rates of people from GWS including those who are first in their family to attend a university.

The audit commended the University for its development of excellent online quality management tools, such as its Online Course Approval System, its system for Tracking and Improving in Learning and Teaching (TILT) and the UWS Online Complaints Handling System. These are powerful systems that consolidate rich data sources and keep track of complex quality assurance processes in important areas of University activity. Other strengths noted in the AUQA Report are the use of a Heads of Program Network which enhances communication between senior management and program leaders; and the

UWS Library that is now performing at the top of the sector and has improved its services continuously by optimal integration of technology.

AUQA commended UWS for the effective use of its Register of Research Activity, which tracks individual performance in generating external research income, research publications, and higher degree research completions; for encouraging further research activity; and providing professional development opportunities for researchers and higher degree research supervisors.

The University's commitment to engaged research was noted, with the panel observing that UWS is consistently among the top five national performers in terms of the success rate of ARC Linkage grants, and is securing significant grants for research in rural industries on plant, food and water sciences. Most of these ARC Linkage projects are with partners located in Greater Western Sydney.

AUQA commended UWS for fulfilling its mission with a deeply embedded culture of commitment to serve the people of Greater Western Sydney in a mutually beneficial way through initiatives such as the Cooperative Education Program.

Overall, members of the Audit Panel were impressed by UWS's enduring commitment to the people of Greater Western Sydney and by the determination shown by university leaders in pulling together a dispersed collection of campus communities into a unified university, which is now well positioned to thrive in the next phase of its development.

Key areas identified in the audit as requiring improvement attention have all been acknowledged by the University and are being currently addressed. They include ramping up national and international benchmarking; defining the distinguishing characteristics of the UWS student experience and tracking its implementation; further development of the UWS business office; increasing higher degree research (HDR) enrolments and completions; implementation of appropriate systems for indigenous education and adding a graduate attribute for the area; implementation of a more rigorous system of staff performance review and evaluation; measuring achievement of graduate attributes; ensuring consistency in assessment practices and undertaking a full review of the area in 2007; monitoring and assuring the quality of the trans-national (offshore) programs; and improving IT governance and service levels.

An analysis of the commendations, recommendations and affirmations attracted by all other Australian Universities compared with UWS indicates a very positive and constructive outcome for the University.

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