

# AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

Report of an Audit of  
University of Western Sydney

January 2007

AUQA Audit Report Number 51

ISBN 978 1 877090 68 4

© Australian Universities Quality Agency 2007

Level 10, 123 Lonsdale Street  
Melbourne, VIC 3000  
Ph 03 9664 1000  
Fax 03 9639 7377

[admin@auqa.edu.au](mailto:admin@auqa.edu.au)

<http://www.auqa.edu.au>

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

## CONTENTS

<b>OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT .....</b>	<b>1</b>
Background .....	1
The Audit Process .....	1
<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>3</b>
Introduction to Findings.....	3
Commendations.....	5
Affirmations .....	6
Recommendations .....	7
<b>1 UWS CONTEXT, STRATEGY AND DIRECTION .....</b>	<b>8</b>
1.1 Structural Reforms and Institution Building.....	8
1.2 Strategic Plans.....	9
1.3 Strategic Directions 2004–2008.....	10
1.4 Tracking Strategic Plans .....	11
1.5 Context for Audit .....	11
<b>2 GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCING .....</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1 Board of Trustees .....	12
2.2 Academic Senate.....	12
2.3 Senior Management .....	13
2.4 Resourcing .....	14
2.4.1 University Funding Model .....	14
2.4.2 Promoting Self-sufficiency.....	14
2.4.3 Strategic Investment .....	15
2.5 Communication.....	15
2.6 Accountability and Performance Management.....	15
<b>3 TEACHING, LEARNING AND STUDENT SUPPORT .....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1 Strategic Plans and Action Plans.....	17
3.2 Quality Assurance .....	18
3.2.1 Course Approval and Review Processes .....	18
3.2.2 Tracking Quality.....	19
3.2.3 UWS Graduate Attributes.....	20
3.2.4 Assessment .....	20
3.2.5 Plagiarism Prevention.....	20
3.2.6 Internationalising the Curriculum.....	21
3.3 Supporting Teaching Staff .....	21
3.3.1 Induction and Professional Development.....	21
3.3.2 Heads of Program Network .....	21
3.3.3 Staff Recognition.....	22
3.4 Learning Support for Students .....	22
3.4.1 Library .....	22
3.4.2 Flexible and Blended Learning.....	23
3.5 Other Student Support Services .....	23
3.5.1 Transition and Retention .....	23
3.5.2 Indigenous Students.....	24
3.5.3 Equity Groups.....	24

3.5.4	Students at Risk .....	24
3.5.5	Student Complaints and Grievances .....	25
<b>4</b>	<b>RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING.....</b>	<b>26</b>
4.1	Research Context .....	26
4.2	Accountability, Management and Resourcing .....	27
4.3	Tracking Research Performance .....	27
4.4	Research Concentrations .....	28
4.5	Engaged Research .....	28
4.6	Commercial Research .....	29
4.7	Internationalisation of Research.....	29
4.8	Support for Researchers .....	29
4.9	Support for Research Students .....	30
4.10	Quality Management .....	31
<b>5</b>	<b>ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE .....</b>	<b>32</b>
5.1	Strategic Priorities .....	32
5.2	The Indigenous Community.....	33
5.3	Strategic Use of Resources and Partnerships .....	34
5.4	Recognition and Reward .....	35
<b>6</b>	<b>INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES .....</b>	<b>36</b>
6.1	Review of International Activities .....	36
6.2	Assuring Quality .....	37
6.3	Transnational Programs .....	37
6.4	Support to International Students Onshore .....	39
<b>7</b>	<b>HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS.....</b>	<b>40</b>
7.1	Human Resources.....	40
7.1.1	Staffing Strategy .....	40
7.1.2	Equity Strategies for Staff .....	41
7.1.3	Workload and Environment.....	41
7.1.4	Performance Review and Staff Recognition.....	42
7.2	Administrative Systems and Processes .....	43
7.2.1	Student Administration.....	44
7.2.2	Information Technology Infrastructure .....	45
7.2.3	Physical Facilities .....	45
	<b>APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY .....</b>	<b>47</b>
	<b>APPENDIX B: AUQA'S MISSION, OBJECTIVES, VALUES AND VISION.....</b>	<b>48</b>
	<b>APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL .....</b>	<b>50</b>
	<b>APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS.....</b>	<b>51</b>

## OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

### *Background*

In 2006 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of the University of Western Sydney.

This Report of the audit provides an overview, and then details the Audit Panel's findings, recommendations, affirmations and commendations. A brief introduction to the University of Western Sydney (hereinafter 'UWS' or 'the University') 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. 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 3 July 2006, UWS presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) to AUQA, along with various supporting materials. The Audit Panel met on 25 July 2006 to consider these materials.

The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to UWS on 22 August 2006. During that visit, the answers to questions and additional information requested by the Panel were discussed with the auditee, as well as the Audit Visit program.

As a part of the audit of UWS, some of the transnational operations of the University were also audited by AUQA. A delegation of the Audit Panel consisting of the Audit Panel Chair and Audit Director visited five partners in three countries and the following programs were considered during 25 to 30 September 2006:

- Hong Kong: Partner: Hong Kong Baptist University, Program: Master of Primary Health Care; Partner: Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Program: Master of Public Health
- China: Partner: Nanjing University of Chinese Medicine, Program: Bachelor of Computing (E-Business)
- Singapore: Partner: Hemsdale, Program: Master of Fire Safety Engineering; Partner: TMC Education Corporation Ltd, Program: Bachelor of Engineering Management.

For each program, the delegation interviewed managerial, administrative and academic staff and students/alumni; inspected the facilities; and reviewed relevant documents. A written report of these activities was circulated to the full Audit Panel prior to the main Audit Visit.

The main Audit Visit took place from 15 to 19 October 2006. The Panel was located at the Parramatta campus on 16 October. On the following days the Panel held interviews at the Penrith and Bankstown campuses and returned to Parramatta campus for the final day of the Audit Visit.

In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 280 people during the Audit Visit, 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. Open sessions were made available for any member of the UWS community to meet the Audit Panel and 14 people took advantage of this opportunity.

The Audit Panel appreciated the openness of all of those with whom it met. There was a readiness to provide whatever documentation the Panel sought both before and during the audit. This cooperation assisted the Panel greatly, and enhanced the evidentiary basis of the audit.

This Report relates to the situation at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 19 October 2006 and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. It records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by UWS as well as information gained through interviews, discussion and observation. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of UWS's activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance nor comment on 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 the 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 UWS to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

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. It should be noted that other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

### *Introduction to Findings*

#### *UWS Context, Strategy and Direction*

This quality audit was conducted at a time when UWS was emerging from a period of fundamental structural and academic reforms and was in the early stages of implementing many new systems, structures and procedures. AUQA acknowledges the long and difficult gestation period UWS has had as a university and that the University is now well positioned for the future.

Since its inception in 1989 the University has striven to achieve its teaching and research objectives especially in terms of meeting the needs and aspirations of the residents of Greater Western Sydney (GWS). This commitment to its immediate communities is a significant distinguishing feature of UWS, which may well be termed a “University of the people”.

In pursuit of its objectives, UWS put in place a multitude of new plans and policy frameworks. To ensure the effectiveness of the plans, UWS has developed an integrated strategic planning framework. Successful outcomes for many of the UWS strategies will depend on how effective the University is in implementing this framework.

#### *Governance, Management and Resourcing*

The strategic involvement of the Board of Trustees in effectively guiding the University through major reviews and reforms is evident. The Academic Senate is functioning effectively and exercising commendable oversight and leadership of UWS’s academic activities. The senior management, with the strong leadership shown by the Vice-Chancellor, has played a major role in taking forward the restructuring agenda. Many key initiatives such as course consolidation, the development of a workload policy and a revised and more transparent funding model are now firmly in place, although some of them need further work.

UWS has faced considerable challenges in fiscal matters over the last decade. At the time of the audit, a report outlining the principles and methodology of a revised funding allocation model had been developed. The various measures UWS proposes to explore in this model indicate that UWS is now gaining mastery over its financial challenges.

#### *Teaching, Learning and Student Support*

UWS offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses through 17 academic schools across six campuses. It has a large student enrolment in national priority programs in the schools of education and nursing. Overall, UWS has been successful in offering flexible programs to a diverse student profile and in increasing higher education participation rates of people from GWS. There are also areas that need immediate attention such as monitoring the quality of the transnational programs, measuring achievement of graduate attributes, ensuring consistency in assessment practices, and addressing student grievances arising out of course consolidation. UWS is addressing these issues.

The University has developed some excellent online tools such as the Online Course Approval System, Tracking and Improvement in Learning and Teaching and 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 this Report are the Heads of Program Network that enhances communication between senior management and program leaders; and the UWS Library that has improved its services by optimal integration of technology. Areas that need attention include use of WebCT by staff across the University, and the recruitment and induction of sessional staff.

Strategies for supporting various equity groups are well aligned with the UWS mission. However, in the multi-campus environment, it would be useful to more clearly define an aspirational profile of 'UWS students' and monitor student experience against that profile.

#### *Research and Research Training*

UWS has a sound research plan and, in general, the University is performing well in areas that are particularly relevant to its mission. To monitor its research performance, UWS tracks the standard indicators of research income and research publications. Performance in research publications has greatly improved over the past five years. Although UWS is earning significantly more in research grants than the NGU group average, there has been a slow growth rate over the period 2002 to 2005. Major investments beginning in 2006 should improve this.

AUQA notes the commitment of UWS to high quality research concentrations as indicated by the investment in research and affirms UWS's development of strategies to ensure research activity is supported by appropriate workload allocations and clearly defined research foci. Given the goal to be more financially self-sufficient, the income that is generated by commercial research, commercialisation of research findings and consultancy activity is particularly important; but in all of these areas, performance has been modest.

The Register of Research Activity tracks individual performance in generating external research income, research publications, and higher degree research completions. It also provides multiple evidence-based levels of recognition and AUQA commends UWS for the effective use of the Register of Research Activity to encourage further research activity.

UWS has a suite of programs and schemes to support HDR students and the supervisors. An area that needs attention is the candidature support funded through Research Training Scheme and a working party of the UWS Research Studies Committee is addressing this issue.

#### *Engagement and Service*

Strategic engagement with GWS regional communities is a distinguishing feature of UWS through regional participation, engaged research, and engaged learning.

The 2006 First Year Retention Survey indicates that just over 52% of UWS students are the first in their family to attend university. A high proportion of UWS students enter university after completing TAFE studies. While entry scores to many UWS courses are among the lowest in the NSW metropolitan area, graduate employment rates are strong, suggesting that the University is fulfilling its mission of providing for enhanced participation rates in university education by local residents, and ensuring that the quality of the education provided is high.

In Engaged research, UWS has an appropriate set of KPIs and notable successes. It is consistently among the top five national performers in terms of the success rate of ARC Linkage grants, and has secured 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.

This report commends several excellent examples of engaged learning at UWS, including the 'Classmates' program and the Cooperative Education Program.

In Indigenous education, UWS is entering a new phase of development with a renewed commitment to embed Indigenous education across the whole university. UWS would do well to strengthen resourcing in this area even further.

*International Activities*

International enrolments currently account for approximately 15% (5448) of the total student enrolment, with 32.9% of international student enrolment being in transnational (TNE) i.e. offshore programs. Commencing in 2004, a more rigorous policy base for quality assurance of TNE programs and international students studying at the Sydney campuses was established. TNE programs which were found to have quality or viability concerns were moved into teach-out mode. At the time of the audit, UWS had only three TNE programs in ongoing mode and 18 in teach-out mode.

Generally, the Panel found that partnership contracts, student admission processes, approaches to the development and production of marketing materials, provision of teaching materials, attention to plagiarism, student assessment and quality of local staff are sound. Teaching facilities provided by partner institutions have been variable. Access to library facilities and reading materials, timeliness in providing feedback to students and involvement of UWS staff in the teaching of TNE programs needs attention.

Some UWS transnational programs are still affected by legacy issues dating from the University's history as separate institutions. Programs also reflect very different models of delivery. UWS would do well to review TNE delivery to determine a core approach to be used for all transnational programs.

*Human Resources and Administrative Systems*

The average age of the University's academic staff is at the higher end of the sector average. The Sustainability Agenda of 2004 and Aligning Human Resources and Strategic Directions projects reflect the University's intention to better manage and enhance the staff profile to match strategic priorities for the future.

Although UWS has had a longstanding commitment to increase Indigenous staff numbers, the University is performing short of its stated aspirations, particularly given the demographic profile of GWS. AUQA encourages the University to give greater prominence at governance and management levels to the achievement of sustainable levels of growth in Indigenous academic and professional staff appointments.

Workload principles have caused some apprehension amongst staff concerned that this approach may limit support and time for research. The workload system will need careful monitoring across the University and, very likely, some fine tuning in the next few years. The monitoring and tracking of completion of performance reviews and planning is less than optimal. UWS recognises that there is a need to review this process and implement improved monitoring systems.

The performance of the University's core administrative systems is sound. However, there are two areas that need further attention, namely student administrative services and information technology governance. The capital planning and facilities management are satisfactory, with priorities in backlog maintenance and upgrades still to be addressed.

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 this disparate collection of campus communities into a unified university that is now well positioned to thrive in the next phase of its existence.

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

*Commendations*

1. AUQA commends UWS for its strong corporate and academic governance under the leadership of the Board of Trustees and Academic Senate. .... 13

2.	AUQA commends UWS for the strong leadership and effective management shown by the Vice-Chancellor and the University executive team, in challenging transitional times, in developing and implementing innovative and coherent structures and procedures that will provide a sound foundation for future development. ....	14
3.	AUQA commends UWS for the development of computer-supported quality systems for consolidating data and tracking processes including the Online Course Approval System, and the Tracking and Improvement in Learning and Teaching system. ....	19
4.	AUQA commends UWS for the Heads of Program Network which has increased the visibility of the important contributions of heads of program, and facilitates peer support and leadership development. ....	22
5.	AUQA commends UWS for the significant improvements demonstrated in the Library over a short period of time and exemplary use of benchmarking for monitoring the quality of its services. ....	23
6.	AUQA commends UWS for the development of the computer-supported Complaints Handling System and for using it effectively for continuous quality improvement. ....	25
7.	AUQA commends UWS for the effective use of the Register of Research Activity to encourage further research activity, and for providing professional development opportunities for researchers and higher degree research supervisors. ....	30
8.	AUQA commends 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 programs such as the Cooperative Education Program. ....	33

***Affirmations***

1.	AUQA affirms UWS’s efforts to develop an integrated framework for coordinating and streamlining all levels of university planning, and facilitating the monitoring of performance against plans. ....	10
2.	AUQA affirms the various measures UWS is exploring to support its self-sufficiency agenda. ....	15
3.	AUQA affirms the Academic Senate’s decision to review the assessment practices as a priority for 2007. ....	20
4.	AUQA affirms that UWS continue to develop the use of WebCT in all programs and work to ensure its use by all academic staff. ....	23
5.	AUQA notes the commitment of UWS to high quality research concentrations as indicated by the investment in research and affirms UWS’s development of strategies to ensure research activity is supported by appropriate workload allocations and clearly defined research foci. ....	28
6.	AUQA affirms that in keeping with the 2005 internal review, UWS redevelop a whole-of-university community engagement strategy and align associated University systems to ensure it is implemented across the University. ....	35
7.	AUQA affirms the attention UWS is giving to aligning human resources with strategic priorities for its future through projects such as Our People 2015. ....	41

8. AUQA affirms the establishment of a university workload system to ensure consistent application and alignment with University strategic priorities. ....42
9. AUQA affirms that UWS continue to monitor its indicators of student satisfaction with student administration services, and consider ways to increase access to core enrolment-related services and make further improvements to client service.....44

### ***Recommendations***

1. AUQA recommends that UWS extend its benchmarking to a national and international peer group chosen in the light of its proposed learning and teaching profile. ....20
2. AUQA recommends that UWS define the desired distinguishing characteristics of the UWS student experience and develop a whole-of-institution strategy to implement and track the progress of this strategy. ....25
3. AUQA recommends that UWS further develop the business development office and associated University systems to promote income generation from consultancies, commercial research and other external sources.....29
4. AUQA recommends that UWS develop an effective strategy to increase higher degree research (HDR) enrolments and completions without jeopardising quality, and ensure that all HDR students have appropriate facilities and support regardless of campus location.....31
5. AUQA recommends that UWS develop appropriate systems to implement the Indigenous education commitment including redeveloping the resource plan and giving consideration to adding a graduate attribute. ....34
6. AUQA recommends that UWS reconsider the approach to offering transnational UWS award programs to ensure that the UWS reputation is strong and that quality is assured in practice. ....38
7. AUQA recommends that UWS develop and implement for all staff a more rigorous system of performance review and evaluation. ....43
8. AUQA recommends that UWS develop a more robust strategic approach to the governance of information technology (IT) services across the University and build a stronger client service ethos among those responsible for IT service planning and delivery. ....45

## 1 UWS CONTEXT, STRATEGY AND DIRECTION

The *University of Western Sydney Act 1997* (the 'UWS Act') mandates that "the object of the University is the promotion, within the limits of the University's resources, of scholarship, research, free inquiry, the interaction of research and teaching, and academic excellence." It also identifies the following principal functions for the promotion of that object:

- the provision of facilities for education and research of university standard, having particular regard to the needs and aspirations of residents of Greater Western Sydney
- the encouragement of the dissemination, advancement, development and application of knowledge informed by free inquiry
- the provision of courses of study or instruction across a range of fields, and the carrying out of research, to meet the needs of the community, beginning in Greater Western Sydney...(UWS Act p2)

Since its inception in 1989 the University has striven to achieve this object especially in terms of meeting the needs and aspirations of the residents of Greater Western Sydney (GWS). There is a genuine desire to engage and collaborate with GWS communities that is embedded within the culture of the University and is evident across all areas of its activity. This commitment to its immediate communities is a significant distinguishing feature of UWS, which may well be termed a "University of the people".

This is a complex university, serving a heterogeneous community. Not surprisingly, given its history, within the University there remain subcultures with strong allegiances to local constituencies. UWS has undergone several stages of major structural reform which have been vital for both short-term survival and longer-term viability but which have created significant challenges for the University, its leadership and its external communities. It would appear that the major phase of structural reform is now close to completion.

### 1.1 *Structural Reforms and Institution Building*

The Dawkins reforms of 1989–1990 led to the establishment of UWS as a federation of three former colleges of advanced education. In this model, the 'headquarters' of the University had specific overarching responsibilities for governance, resource allocation and high-level planning while its core activities were managed and carried out by the three former college entities. This federated model of governance and management proved to be unworkable and in 1995 the model was revised to strengthen the central core of the University while still maintaining day-to-day autonomy for its member institutions.

The next major change was triggered in 1999 when UWS was identified by the Australian Government as a university at financial risk. After a year's consultation, the Board of Trustees approved the unification of UWS as a multi-campus university with a single administration and academic structure. This change, enacted through amendments to the UWS Act, took effect from 1 January 2001. It required a complete reshaping of academic structure and governance arrangements.

Over the past five years the University has put in place the major organisational and operational changes necessary to unify its structures and systems. The unified academic structure has progressively reduced the 56 faculties and schools in existence in 2000 to three colleges and 17 schools in 2006. The unification process also significantly reduced duplication by consolidating courses across campuses.

This extensive and locally contentious change process has challenged all areas of the University, as structures, policies, processes, programs and practices were subject to review. 'Change fatigue' was evident in many groups who met the Audit Panel. However, as a result of these changes, the University has built a robust policy framework, and structures and systems are now capable of sustaining the integrated University well into the future. UWS is now in a position to move forward with confidence.

## 1.2 *Strategic Plans*

The University's stated mission is:

*To be a university of international standing and outlook, achieving excellence through scholarship, teaching, learning, research and service to its regional, national and international communities, beginning with the people of Greater Western Sydney.*

While the University generally is tracking well towards achievement of its mission, there are some aspects of the mission statement such as being "a university of international standing and outlook" which are still in an early stage of development. But given the recency of the UWS unification, members of the Audit Panel were confident that UWS is well placed to show balanced development across all components of its mission over the next decade.

In pursuit of its mission, UWS has put in place a multitude of new plans and policy frameworks. The Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan provides overarching direction. Separate strategic plans for teaching, research and community engagement build on this overarching direction based on a five-year cycle. College and school plans are formulated, implemented and reviewed on a rolling, three-year basis. These plans identify strategic directions and key priorities specific to the organisational units and consistent with the overall UWS strategy. There are also shorter term operational plans and action plans for schools and units. Three-year rolling plans are produced for organisational areas such as the Library, information technology infrastructure and services, capital works and facilities, campus development, equity and equal employment opportunity, student administration and human resources. The University Funding Model provides targeted support for these plans. University priorities are intended to cascade to the level of the individual staff member via work plans, which set out personal goals within the context of university directions and used for performance management.

The Institutional Assessment Framework (IAF) Portfolio 2005 acknowledges that UWS has a strong strategic focus and that key goals are reflected in core, operational and enabling plans. To implement these plans, UWS has developed an extensive series of strategic initiatives, projects and action plans. For example, the project 'Our People 2015' initiated in 2006, aims to develop a strategic framework for developing workforce capacities that will be needed if UWS is to achieve its goals by 2015.

It will be a challenge for UWS to ensure that the planning infrastructure does not become overly burdensome and remains relevant to those for whom it is intended. It is also necessary to ensure that effective processes are maintained for monitoring performance against plans and that fixed planning periods do not mitigate the need regularly to update planning priorities to take account of rapidly changing environmental factors. The variety of approaches currently being applied to planning documents (for example the format of college plans) make meeting these challenges more difficult.

UWS has, however, realised that this multiplicity of plans and strategies needs to be simplified if they are to be effective. There is a need to integrate the plans into a coherent and concise strategy which would then frame the actions to be taken in the short, medium and long terms. Over recent

months, an independent consulting company has been assisting the University in this process of integration.

Consequently, UWS has now identified the following four areas of focus:

- create a superior student learning experience
- develop focused, relevant and world class engaged research
- build financial capacity to achieve the vision, and
- nurture a mutually beneficial relationship with GWS communities.

At the time of the audit, UWS had recently developed an integrated representation of its strategies (the 'strategy pyramid') and an indicative road map for action. These were endorsed by the Board of Trustees in August 2006. Within the integrated strategy, the Board and the senior management group have identified more than 100 action projects and plans requiring alignment. The next step will be to develop a concise set of priorities and an achievable implementation plan against which progress can be measured.

#### **Affirmation 1**

**AUQA affirms UWS's efforts to develop an integrated framework for coordinating and streamlining all levels of university planning, and facilitating the monitoring of performance against plans.**

As many of the university systems, strategies and procedures are only recently developed, they are still largely untested. Some may need fine tuning as insights emerge from implementation. Some new systems and procedures are still seen as the property of the few individuals who have been responsible for their development. The executive team will need to find ways to get staff from all areas of the University to be committed to these policies and procedures if the positive initiatives are to be successfully implemented.

### **1.3 Strategic Directions 2004–2008**

UWS aspires to be an institution that brings positive change to the life opportunities of its students as individuals and to the GWS community as a whole. The Vice-Chancellor and the executive team demonstrate a strong commitment to upholding the priority accorded by UWS to community engagement. The strategic directions of the University for both the short term and long term reflect this commitment.

UWS is aware of the changes in its operating context and wishes to capitalise on them to serve the GWS community. The Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan of the University of Western Sydney (pp16-19) presents the following as key strategic directions for 2004–2008 to place UWS in the right growth trajectory for 2025:

- UWS will pursue a managed growth strategy
- UWS will have a broad academic profile with a strong professional orientation
- UWS will acquire a diversified revenue base and actively pursue financial self-reliance
- UWS will actively pursue an international focus in its teaching and learning, research and community engagement
- UWS will promote the distinctiveness of its campuses to maximise the visibility and standing of the University across its Region
- UWS will be accessible to its student and staff communities in ways that meet their needs

As will become evident from the later sections of this Report, successful outcomes for many of these strategies will depend on how effective the University is in building on the 'unified UWS' and in implementing its integrated strategic planning framework.

#### **1.4 Tracking Strategic Plans**

UWS has adopted the 'Plan, Implement, Review, Improve' cycle for its quality assurance processes. UWS recognises the need for quality management processes to be focused, integrated and synchronised. Other principles stress the need to be evidence-based, regularly monitored, consultative, action-oriented, consistently supported, and accountable. The Audit Panel endorses this approach, but notes that implementing these principles will not be easy for UWS, given the complexity of the University and the multiple layers of plans in place. The proposed integrated strategy will be essential in implementing these principles successfully across the University.

The University conducts five-yearly reviews of schools and administrative units and periodic thematic reviews in key areas of risk or relevance. UWS reporting and review processes are supported effectively by the Office of Planning and Quality which manages collection, analysis and reporting of data at various levels (section 3.2.2).

To track progress against strategic plans, the University has identified a set of key performance indicators (KPIs) which are tracked in the 'Vital Signs' report (introduced in 2004) and reported regularly to the Executive, Strategy and Resources Committee, and Board of Trustees. The current set of key directions for UWS, developed in 2003 for the period 2004–2008, are reported to the Board of Trustees twice-yearly as time series, benchmarked data. A revised set of governance-level KPIs was endorsed by the Board of Trustees in August 2006. While the approach being taken is appropriate, the Audit Panel found that University-level KPIs focus on sector-wide data rather than data directly relevant to the achievement of UWS's strategic objectives. The University should strive to develop a more salient set of institutional KPIs. More specific information about KPIs, and how well UWS is achieving against them, is given in the relevant sections of this Report.

#### **1.5 Context for Audit**

As stated above, this quality audit was conducted at a time when UWS was emerging from a period of fundamental structural and academic reform and was in the early stages of implementing many new systems, structures and procedures. Given this context, UWS has made excellent use of the self-assessment conducted as part of the AUQA audit to deepen its understanding of progress made to date and what remains to be done, and to integrate a more coherent set of policies and practices into everyday operations across the University.

AUQA acknowledges the long and difficult gestation period UWS has had as a university. Although the leadership of UWS has demonstrated strong vision, courage and persistence in grappling with the difficult issues of unification, it seems some staff continue to struggle with the implications of unification.

There is a growing sense of hope that the end of restructuring might be in sight and that the University's focus can properly shift away from structural reform towards shaping and realising a future agenda. One of the most consistent comments the Audit Panel heard was: "It is better than it was". Another oft-repeated comment was "it is time to move on". Both comments convey a level of optimism—the sense that UWS has been through some difficult times, but is now well positioned for the future.

## 2 GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCING

The governance of UWS derives from the provisions of the UWS Act, as amended in 2001. Key responsibilities rest with the Chancellor, Board of Trustees, Academic Senate, and the senior management.

### 2.1 *Board of Trustees*

The Board of Trustees, the governing authority of UWS, consists of 18 members: the Chancellor, 10 external members, the Vice-Chancellor, the Chair of Academic Senate and five elected members. The elected members represent the constituencies of staff (2), students (2) and graduates (1). The Act describes the following key functions for the Board:

- the development of broad policies and strategic plans with respect to the University
- generally defining the University's educational profile
- the management of the University's resources and the monitoring of the University's performance
- representation of the University as occasion requires

The Board also has responsibility for risk management and financial compliance. In carrying out its various governance responsibilities the Board is supported by a number of standing committees and advisory councils including the Audit & Risk Management Committee, Campus Development Committee, Remuneration & Nominations Committee, Strategy & Resources Committee, Indigenous Advisory Council and UWS Regional Council. Board Standing Committees and University Advisory Councils are chaired by the Chancellor, Vice-Chancellor or a Board member.

It is the responsibility of the Board to ensure that the controlled entities are monitored and do not exercise any function or engage in any activity for which the University is not authorised under the Act. Oversight of controlled entities is achieved through regular reporting to and review by the Board's Strategy and Resources Committee and, as required, the Audit and Risk Management Committee. In addition, there are members of the Board of Trustees or UWS senior staff on all controlled entity Boards. This has helped UWS to ensure adequate oversight and streamline operations of the controlled entities.

The strategic involvement of the Board and the contribution made by the Chancellor and the Board members are very evident. The Board has effectively guided the University through a series of major reviews and reforms, and worked productively with the Vice-Chancellor to make the far-reaching and often difficult decisions that were necessary to bring about a unified UWS (section commendation in 2.2).

### 2.2 *Academic Senate*

The Academic Senate is a standing committee of the Board of Trustees and exercises delegated responsibility from the Board for academic policy formulation and decision-making in the University. The elected Chair of the Academic Senate is a member of the Board of Trustees.

The UWS Act provides for the Academic Senate to be the primary custodian of academic values and standards for the University and so the Senate provides advice to the Board of Trustees on a range of academic issues. It is responsible for accrediting and approving courses, programs and units, and promoting the quality and development of research.

In order to carry out its responsibilities, the Senate is supported by a number of subcommittees and College Boards of Studies.

The Academic Senate operates under a well-defined and transparent policy framework, with the University Academic Governance Policy covering the role, functions, scope and membership of both the Academic Senate and its committees. The authority to approve and amend the provisions in the University Academic Governance Policy rests with the Board of Trustees.

The Academic Senate has made a significant contribution to the understanding of academic policies across the University. The Academic Senate also appears to be well aware of areas that still need attention such as monitoring the quality of the transnational programs, measuring the achievement of graduate attributes, providing alternate pathways to course completion for students affected by course consolidation, ensuring consistency in assessment practices, preparing for the research quality framework, and supporting actions that address Indigenous issues.

To continually improve the quality of Senate operations and the contributions it makes to the University, the Academic Senate submits an annual work plan to the Board, setting out the strategies and lines of responsibility it proposes to continue to improve the Senate's academic quality assurance accountabilities. The Audit Panel found that the Academic Senate is functioning effectively and exercising commendable oversight and leadership of UWS's academic activities.

### **Commendation 1**

**AUQA commends UWS for its strong corporate and academic governance under the leadership of the Board of Trustees and Academic Senate.**

### **2.3 Senior Management**

Academic and administrative leadership of UWS rests with the Vice-Chancellor who is responsible to the Board of Trustees. The Vice-Chancellor is supported by a senior executive team consisting of three deputy vice-chancellors (DVCs) and the Chief Financial Officer (CFO). The DVCs and the CFO report directly to the Vice-Chancellor. Each of the DVC portfolios addresses one of the core academic and administrative functions of the University, namely Academic and Services; Corporate Services; and Development and International.

At the next level, a group of pro vice-chancellors hold more specific University-wide portfolios in Research, Academic, Engagement, Campus Development, and Planning and Quality. Three executive deans have college-wide portfolios. The realignment of colleges and schools has resulted in new role descriptions for executive deans, associate deans, heads of school and associate heads of school. Under the more streamlined senior management structure the heads of school now hold pivotal senior positions providing both academic leadership and delegated management of schools.

The senior management, with the strong leadership shown by the Vice-Chancellor, has played a major role in taking forward the restructuring agenda. While many of the strategy decisions are yet to be fully embraced, it was evident from the data gathered by the Audit Panel that the senior management team has been handling the significant challenges of transition effectively. Many key initiatives such as course consolidation, the development of a workload policy and a revised and more transparent funding model are now firmly in place. Although more remains to be done in each of these areas, the trends are encouraging. What has already been done should provide a sound foundation for further consolidation and quality improvement in the future. AUQA commends the senior management team for its success in leading and managing the transition to a unified university.

## Commendation 2

**AUQA commends UWS for the strong leadership and effective management shown by the Vice-Chancellor and the University executive team, in challenging transitional times, in developing and implementing innovative and coherent structures and procedures that will provide a sound foundation for future development.**

### 2.4 Resourcing

UWS has faced considerable challenges in fiscal matters over the last decade. UWS was identified to be at financial risk in 1999, and incurred a significant deficit in 2004. Yet at the time of this audit, UWS was projecting an operating surplus for 2006. This turnaround in financial wellbeing has been achieved as a result of rigorous review of existing activity and structures, efficiency measures, significant initiatives and an overall reduction in programs and staffing. It appeared to the Audit Panel that this painful period of adjustment had been well-handled.

While the careful budget controls will need to continue, the current surplus is an encouraging indicator that UWS's strategies to improve self-reliance are sound. The IAF Portfolio 2005 recorded some concerns about the financial position of the University, but it also noted that a good net asset base, deferred maintenance and 'no borrowings' as strengths of the University's financial position.

#### 2.4.1 University Funding Model

A University Funding Model (UFM)—a budget and resource allocation framework—was developed in 2001 and implemented in 2002. Despite subsequent incremental improvements, a number of shortcomings with the UFM became apparent, particularly during the period of revenue shortfall. Consequently, upon the creation of a CFO position and appointment of an experienced financial administrator to that role, UWS has undertaken a major review of its internal resource allocation processes with the aim of introducing a more strategic, transparent and responsible approach to internal resource allocation. At the time of the audit, a report outlining the principles and methodology of a revised funding allocation model had been endorsed by the VC, the University Executive, and the Strategy and Resources Committee of the Board. The new UFM forms the basis for the 2007 budget development.

UWS is confident that the revision will embed appropriate incentives (and disincentives) and encourage improved internal client service, the efficient and appropriate use of space and better allocation and control of costs. A consultative and communication strategy has been developed to support the new UFM and an ongoing monitoring system has been put in place to help ensure continuous improvement in the revised UFM. The budget model provides explicit and welcome rewards to cost centres for good performance in research and research training, and learning.

#### 2.4.2 Promoting Self-sufficiency

UWS is rightly concerned that it is heavily reliant on Commonwealth Grant Scheme funding. At a time when the potential for growth in other fee revenue is becoming more difficult to achieve, UWS recognises that it needs to identify alternate sources of income and generate increased revenue from those sources in the interests of long term self-sufficiency and reduced exposure to limited growth in Commonwealth funding. Self-generated income recently has become one of UWS's corporate KPIs to help ensure proper focus is given to activities that will broaden its revenue base.

While the proportion of revenue earned as self-generated income has increased in 2005, this is off a low base compared to the broader university sector. The University is exploring a range of

innovative ways to strengthen its long term revenue streams including a whole-of-university asset development strategy.

Overall, the Audit Panel concluded that UWS is addressing its strategic financial challenges with realism and prudence. The new UFM and the various measures UWS is exploring to support its self-sufficiency agenda demonstrate a professional and informed approach and indicates that UWS is now gaining mastery over its financial challenges. The Panel acknowledges that, with ongoing review and refinement, the University Funding Model provides an effective internal resource allocation mechanism that will support the implementation and achievement of University priorities.

### **Affirmation 2**

**AUQA affirms the various measures UWS is exploring to support its self-sufficiency agenda.**

#### **2.4.3 Strategic Investment**

Expansions in research activity and flexible learning are emerging as high priorities for UWS and are being funded accordingly, providing solid evidence of UWS's commitment to supporting strategic priorities by realigning budget allocations. These are substantial strategic investments for UWS, especially in times of financial stringency. The University anticipates that these investments will result in strong University performance in the future and create new funding growth opportunities. To ensure intended outcomes are realised, UWS will need to systematically monitor the progress of these strategic investments, both in the short and longer term.

#### **2.5 Communication**

Given its long history of extensive structural and programmatic reforms, good communication is critical to the success of UWS and the preservation of morale. The multi-campus nature of the University makes electronic communication particularly important. Despite considerable attention being given to this issue, communication problems remain, particularly for students affected by course consolidation. The revised academic governance structure approved for implementation in 2006 specifically mentions communication as an area for reform. The development of successful communication strategies and the maintenance of mechanisms for monitoring their effectiveness will need to remain an important priority for the University into the future.

The introduction of expanded college boards of studies, as well as the new layer of school boards of which all academic staff are members, is one strategy to improve staff communication about academic matters and it provides increased opportunities for participation. However, the Audit Panel found little clarity among staff about the objectives of this changed model or the role such structures are expected to play as part of a broader communication strategy.

#### **2.6 Accountability and Performance Management**

One feature of the structural reforms has been the significant changes that have taken place with the accountability and performance management processes at UWS. In general these appear to be working well, especially at the higher levels of governance.

The annual reviews by the Board of Trustees have resulted in refined terms of reference for the Board standing committees. The Board conducts biennial self-assessments to consider improvements required in its own performance and to inform its work priorities.

The Academic Senate undertakes biennial self-assessment, and submits an annual work plan to the Board. The Senate also reviews results from the 'Tracking and Improvement in Learning and Teaching' system to identify areas relevant to the Senate that need attention.

All senior management positions have been reviewed during the last 12 months and some significant changes made. There appears to be clarity in the key operational and strategic responsibilities and accountabilities among the senior management.

At each level of senior management there are specific annual performance review processes. The performance management of the Vice-Chancellor is carried out by the Chancellor, and performance is reviewed against previously agreed KPIs for that period. The outcomes are considered by the Remuneration and Nominations Committee of the Board, and are reported to the Board by the Chancellor. For the other members of the senior management, performance review requires establishment and annual review of portfolio goals related to the key responsibilities.

### 3 TEACHING, LEARNING AND STUDENT SUPPORT

The Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan of the University of Western Sydney states that the mission of the University revolves around three core functions: (1) teaching and learning; (2) research; and (3) regional and community engagement. The strategic goals and plans for each of these core functions build on the directions highlighted in this overarching plan.

With reference to teaching and learning, UWS aspires that “Teaching and learning within UWS will build the University’s reputation for excellence and scholarship in teaching based on the professionalism of its staff and their commitment to students.” This aspiration is elaborated into strategic goals in the Teaching and Learning Plan (T&L Plan) 2004–2008. They are to:

- provide distinctive, professionally oriented and flexible academic programs
- enhance the University’s reputation for educational excellence...
- ensure a diverse student profile, and increase higher education participation rates of people from Greater Western Sydney
- provide a high quality, student-centred experience at UWS to improve student success and graduation rates
- ensure that UWS students ‘learn to learn’ and graduate with the ability to participate actively and responsibly in a changing world (T&L Plan p3)

Towards the realisation of these goals, UWS offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses through 17 academic schools across six campuses (Appendix A). It has a large student enrolment in national priority programs in the schools of education and nursing.

In keeping with the goal of enhancing access to university study for the people of GWS, 19.8% of current domestic student enrolment has been admitted on the basis of a TAFE award. Domestic students reflect the diversity of the region with the 2005 cohort being made up of students born in more than 170 countries and with international students from more than 100 countries. UWS acknowledges its cultural diversity as a strength. However, the University’s complexity presents considerable challenges to ensuring equivalence and consistency across the institution in the teaching and learning experience provided to students. A range of educational strategies and support mechanisms have been developed to address these challenges.

Overall, UWS has been successful in offering flexible programs to a diverse student profile and in increasing higher education participation rates of people from GWS. There are also areas that need immediate attention such as monitoring the quality of the transnational programs, measuring achievement of graduate attributes, ensuring consistency in assessment practices, and addressing student grievances arising out of course consolidation. UWS is addressing these issues. These observations and audit conclusions are discussed in the following sections.

#### 3.1 *Strategic Plans and Action Plans*

Planning processes specific to teaching and learning operate at both university and college levels. University-level development priorities are given effect in the Learning and Teaching Action Plan (L&T Action Plan) 2006–2008 which reaffirms institution-wide priorities with targets and responsibilities. The three colleges develop strategic plans, consistent with the University’s Strategic Plan and sensitive to discipline, campus and resourcing profiles.

The L&T Action Plan 2006–2008 focuses on agreed University-wide initiatives and complements the specific initiatives identified in the colleges’ strategic plans for 2006–2008. This plan captures the high stakes areas of learning and teaching, including those sector-wide indicators that are used

by DEST to distribute resources via the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund. Key indicators in the plan include specific percentage improvements in:

- Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) Overall Satisfaction, Appropriate Assessment and Good Teaching Scales (by the end of 2007)
- retention at the University level (by the end of 2007)
- undergraduate demand for each year during 2006–2008 (i.e. a 15% increase after three years), and
- fee-paying equivalent full-time student load (both postgraduate and international) during 2006–2008.

Given the recency of the L&T Action Plan, it is too soon for UWS to be able to confidently demonstrate results. However, the plan appears to be providing a solid foundation for teaching and learning priorities over the next three years and there are positive short term improvements. Benchmarking done with the New Generation Universities (NGU) has been useful in identifying some areas where UWS could improve its outcomes. Recent data suggest that UWS has been able to effect improvements in areas such as CEQ scores and course quality. However, these still leave room for further improvement (Recommendation 1 in section 3.2.2).

Overall retention rates were an area of particular strength for UWS in the early 2000s. However, they have declined somewhat to be closer to the sector average in recent years, though still above the average for the NGU cohort. UWS attributes this shift to a strong employment market and has noted that this indicator needs close monitoring. Actions to improve retention in the last year appear to be effective, with a 3% improvement in undergraduate retention rates in 2005–2006.

UWS tracks ‘eligible first preferences’ as an indicator of perceived attractiveness and quality of courses. The recent downward trend may in part reflect the impact of course consolidation at UWS since many courses have been discontinued at specific campuses. UWS intends to give this indicator immediate attention.

UWS is mindful of the importance of the Learning and Teaching Performance Fund as an external driver of quality in teaching and learning, and is seeking to replicate it with a set of internal drivers that will better align resource incentives and strategic goals. The revised UFM will include a significant component of performance based funding to reward excellence in teaching outcomes.

The lines of responsibility in developing, implementing and monitoring teaching and learning plans are clear and the Teaching and Learning team is effectively leading this agenda across the University.

## 3.2 *Quality Assurance*

The UWS quality assurance system for learning and teaching is driven by a suite of academic policies at course, school and college levels. Academic Senate, in conjunction with the associate deans (academic), is responsible for monitoring the implementation of these policies.

### 3.2.1 Course Approval and Review Processes

In general, UWS has well-developed systems for course development, approval and ongoing quality monitoring. Academic Senate and its committees play an important role in approving, reviewing and discontinuing courses, and implementing continuous improvement processes. A new course must demonstrate alignment with the strategic directions of the University, and justify its sustainability informed by market analysis, and the availability of resources including staff to offer the course.

Systematic review of courses played an important part in the UWS unification process, as courses were consolidated on a limited number of campuses. Course review also has been a significant factor in cost control, with Academic Program Review of undergraduate programs resulting in a significant reduction from 265 courses and 3808 units in 2001 to 74 courses and 1453 units on offer in 2005. The consolidation has helped UWS to reduce duplication, casual staff teaching, and units with non-viable enrolments. While the processes of course review and consolidation have been contentious within the University and in its communities in GWS, these changes have been essential for the long term viability of UWS.

UWS acknowledges that a key area for improvement is the speed with which new courses are approved. To address this challenge, UWS is introducing an Online Course Accreditation System, which has received widespread support across the University. The system will be fully operational by the end of 2006. This is a noteworthy initiative (Commendation 3 in section 3.2.2).

### 3.2.2 Tracking Quality

UWS has an effective system of collecting, analysing and reporting data about quality. It surveys students, employers, graduates and staff, and conducts periodic reviews of schools and colleges (including their programs) every five years. There also are clearly specified accountabilities surrounding these reviews, with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) being responsible for monitoring and confirming that agreed recommendations from each school review have been addressed.

Annual Course Reports are submitted and combined with the results of the UWS Student Satisfaction Survey and other data sources are consolidated to produce the University-level Vital Signs reports to the Board of Trustees. Data from the Complaints Handling System (CHS) also helps inform the Academic Senate discussions on quality and standards (section 3.5.5).

The Tracking and Improvement in Learning and Teaching (TILT) system consists of a net of interrelated data gathering and reporting systems. It allows UWS to drill down and link data from many sources. TILT combines student feedback obtained from core University surveys such as CEQ, Graduate Destination Survey, the UWS Student Satisfaction (and Research Student Satisfaction) Surveys; UWS Feedback on Units; UWS Student Feedback on Teaching Questionnaire; UWS Exit Survey; UWS Retention Survey; UWS Image Survey; and the UWS Employer Survey.

The OPQ coordinates management information reports for the University drawing on all administrative systems. The Panel noted that OPQ has been nominated for the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for 2006. The nomination is in recognition of the professional service rendered by OPQ which has strengthened the University's capacity and confidence to use a substantial array of data to inform its decision-making.

Overall, the University has developed some excellent online tools such as the Online Course Approval System and TILT. These are powerful systems that consolidate rich data sources and keep track of complex quality assurance processes in important areas of University activity. AUQA commends UWS for the manner in which it has effectively developed these in-house online systems.

#### **Commendation 3**

**AUQA commends UWS for the development of computer-supported quality systems for consolidating data and tracking processes including the Online Course Approval System, and the Tracking and Improvement in Learning and Teaching system.**

While taking pride in these excellent new tools, UWS should note that they will not in themselves, win the hearts and minds of staff or students. It is only when concrete benefits are seen to flow from their application, that others will appreciate their worth.

The potential of this quality tracking system may be useful to UWS in strengthening its benchmarking efforts. As indicated in section 3.1, benchmarking with the NGU group has been useful in many respects. Given the distinctive learning and teaching profile to which UWS now aspires, it would also benefit from benchmarking its program quality and services against a peer group with similar aspirations. This peer group would help UWS set itself stretch targets for the future.

### **Recommendation 1**

**AUQA recommends that UWS extend its benchmarking to a national and international peer group chosen in the light of its proposed learning and teaching profile.**

#### 3.2.3 UWS Graduate Attributes

UWS has a clearly articulated set of graduate attributes which are well integrated into course design and approvals processes. Results from the Outcomes Scale in the 2005 UWS Student Satisfaction Survey indicate that students are satisfied that their work does develop the capabilities identified in the graduate attributes. But it is not clear how the achievement of these capabilities is monitored, other than by student self assessment. Further work on the assessment of those attributes in graduates is desirable.

#### 3.2.4 Assessment

UWS has in place a range of safeguards to monitor consistency, equivalence, and standards of assessment across the six campuses. School and college assessment committees evaluate the grade distributions on each campus. Unit coordinators have to justify outcomes that differ from the norms. UWS ensures that assessment tasks are identical for units taught in more than one campus.

Despite the existence of sound assessment principles, assessment practices across the University need improvement. There are complaints about the extent and timeliness of feedback on assignments, the accuracy of recording grades within some units, and some outdated practices in determining pass levels. The Complaints Resolution Unit has dealt with a number of these complaints. Timely feedback is a particular problem where individual staff are not making good use of e-learning support systems. The UWS Student Satisfaction Survey results for 2005 identified the provision of timely and constructive feedback as a major area for improvement. These issues are being addressed as a component of the L&T Action Plan 2006–2008 and the Academic Senate has taken up the review of assessment practices as a priority for 2007.

### **Affirmation 3**

**AUQA affirms the Academic Senate's decision to review the assessment practices as a priority for 2007.**

#### 3.2.5 Plagiarism Prevention

The prevention of plagiarism is being given due attention at UWS. Unit outlines provide links to UWS policies and procedures relating to assessment and academic misconduct. Training and electronic resources are available to students and staff through the Professional Development Unit, the Library and the Office of the Academic Registrar. Under the 'Academic Honesty'

project, UWS is developing a web portal that will provide a range of strategies to help students learn the conventions of scholarship. In addition, a trial of plagiarism detection software in selected high enrolment cohort units is underway.

### 3.2.6 Internationalising the Curriculum

UWS recognises that the linguistic and ethnic diversity of staff, students and the broader community is a major asset in the internationalisation of the curriculum. The University has identified 132 units that focus on international aspects of professional or disciplinary practice, 120 focused on cultural issues and 99 on language. More remains to be done to ensure all UWS students are engaged in an international curriculum and learning environment.

Opportunities for students and staff to undertake exchange programs are limited. While student exchange agreements have been developed with 188 institutions in 32 countries, not many are operating effectively and the University is working to increase participation. UWS also has recognised the need to develop a more consistent and systematic approach to embedding international perspectives and content in the University's courses.

## 3.3 *Supporting Teaching Staff*

### 3.3.1 Induction and Professional Development

In general, induction for new staff at school level is informal though supplemented by orientation sessions offered centrally. Some schools offer formal orientation sessions for sessional teaching staff.

The Educational Development Centre (EDC) offers professional development programs for teaching staff on various aspects of teaching and learning. 'Introduction to Teaching and Learning at UWS' has been designed for new staff. Other support and resources currently available for new teaching staff include an information booklet, CDROM, workshops for new tutors, and occupational health and safety online training. Only the occupational health and safety training is mandatory. At the time of the audit, the executive team was considering a proposal for a revised induction framework for new sessional teaching staff and new academic full-time equivalent (FTE) staff which would include mandatory participation in certain orientation programs.

EDC has a key role in supporting staff for the e-learning environment. It manages the University's centralised e-learning infrastructure and supports flexible and blended learning. The staff who responded to the UWS Staff Satisfaction with Services Survey 2005 rated EDC as consistently performing well and in 2005, the e-learning staff received the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence in the category of Professional Services. Despite these EDC successes, staff use of WebCT remains variable across the University and more remains to be done in ensuring that all staff make use of the teaching and learning support WebCT provides.

The level of professional development extended to sessional staff is variable. Some schools support their sessional staff in attending EDC's professional development programs while in other schools sessional staff depend largely on peer support. Time constraints and campus location are also limiting factors to the optimal use of the support services of EDC. Overall, this area needs strengthening and the University has noted this need in its strategic investment plan.

### 3.3.2 Heads of Program Network

Heads of Program Network is a network linking all heads of program. This network aims to maximise the expertise of academic middle managers and gives them enhanced opportunities to steer academic developments. It enhances communication between senior management and

program leaders, and serves as a valuable discussion forum on teaching and learning issues across the disciplines. Heads of program use the network as a platform for peer support and sharing of experience. The Panel noted that this network enhances the visibility of the heads of program and the important work they do and it also supports their leadership development. A similar network exists in the Head of School Forum. UWS's use of these mechanisms for linking local course leaders and heads of schools with the University-wide teaching and learning agenda is commendable.

#### **Commendation 4**

**AUQA commends UWS for the Heads of Program Network which has increased the visibility of the important contributions of heads of program, and facilitates peer support and leadership development.**

#### 3.3.3 Staff Recognition

From students and alumni across the University, the Panel heard that most UWS academic staff are hard-working, knowledgeable and approachable. Most care deeply about their students' learning and wellbeing, and understand and appreciate the dynamic cultural mix that is part of GWS and therefore, part of the UWS community. Student surveys generally have been positive about the quality of the academic staff. It is surprising then that the CEQ data is not stronger in terms of graduate's opinions on the quality of teaching received, and UWS could investigate the discrepancy.

The annual Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Awards have been instituted to acknowledge the achievements of individual staff members and teams and one of the areas it covers is learning and teaching.

### **3.4 Learning Support for Students**

#### 3.4.1 Library

UWS has seven libraries located across six campuses, with an expanding collection and an increasing array of electronic materials and services.

The Library has responded to the challenge of a geographically dispersed multi-campus environment by optimal integration of technology and online services. Students from any campus can access the Library collection via an inter-campus loan delivery service. High demand materials are made available online through a digital e-reserve collection. Past examination papers have been digitised and made available online, as have current unit outlines. UWS is a major contributor to the Australian Digital Thesis program, with all research higher degree theses accessible internationally.

The UWS Library enjoys high uptake and high levels of satisfaction from library users. Students are appreciative of the 'Online Librarian', a real time web-based online reference and enquiry service. Students can use this service regardless of physical location, to 'chat' with one of the UWS librarians and get assistance with their information needs across the full span of library opening hours. A network of professional liaison librarians ensures strong connections with academic programs and provides information literacy programs at undergraduate and postgraduate levels.

The Library is an exemplar of the effective use of external benchmarking as a tool to support and improve quality. The Library benchmarks extensively using CAUL (Council of University Librarians) data and has taken the initiative to identify a suitable group of peer institutions and

track quality improvements against them. Trends over the past five years indicate continued and consistent improvement across all significant measures which is commendable.

UWS participates biennially in the externally administered Rodski Client Satisfaction Survey, along with other Australian university libraries. The Library's position has moved from the bottom quartile in 2001 to the top quartile of Australian university libraries in 2005. This is a remarkable improvement against national benchmarks.

#### **Commendation 5**

**AUQA commends UWS for the significant improvements demonstrated in the Library over a short period of time and exemplary use of benchmarking for monitoring the quality of its services.**

#### 3.4.2 Flexible and Blended Learning

Improving flexible and blended learning opportunities was identified in the L&T Action Plan 2006–2008 as a key priority theme. The projects within this theme aim to create “a more flexible and responsive learning environment with the optimum blend of learning pathways, appropriate learning methods, times, locations and support to optimise retention and productive learning” (p3). One of the major strategies for achieving this priority is WebCT—the set of online learning and teaching tools for both staff and students.

Given the logistical challenges of multi-campus operations, online learning supports are of critical importance. At UWS, universal use of WebCT could help resolve the problems that arise when programs are consolidated on fewer campuses. This view is reinforced by the high levels of documented student support for its usage. For example, in the Student Satisfaction Survey students ranked WebCT and online learning 4<sup>th</sup> in importance from 85 items.

The UWS retention survey data also suggests that students are generally satisfied with WebCT. However, the Audit Panel found that use of WebCT by staff across the University is rather uneven. While some staff and some schools are making excellent use of this tool to create dynamic interactive learning environments, other staff are not using it at all. Student complaints about inadequate and slow feedback on assignments seemed primarily associated with staff who do not use WebCT. The University will need to find ways to encourage and support the slow adopters of this new technology.

#### **Affirmation 4**

**AUQA affirms that UWS continue to develop the use of WebCT in all programs and work to ensure its use by all academic staff.**

### 3.5 *Other Student Support Services*

#### 3.5.1 Transition and Retention

The University's Student Support Services provide a wide range of academic skills development programs, career support and social and personal support to students. The recent improvements in attrition rates may in part be associated with the value of these learning support programs. Through a range of UWS tracking systems, such as the UWS Exit Survey and the powerful data from the First Year Retention Survey, UWS monitors student experience areas that are critical to retention. The 2006 UWS First Year Retention Survey shows improvement in areas known to affect retention. Given the UWS mission to enhance university access for the GWS population, providing this type of support to help ensure student success is important. The Panel noted that while UWS student entry levels are relatively low, indicators of graduate success are quite strong.

This combination of indicators attests to UWS's success in addressing the access dimension of its mission.

The University has identified 'Transitions' as one of the priority themes for action in teaching and learning. Projects under this theme aim to support "the transitions in learning for students as they enter the University via multiple pathways (e.g. TAFE, international articulation), and progress through stages in their learning through to employment or further study" (L&T Action Plan 2006–2008 p3). The first year students find the transition website very helpful.

### 3.5.2 Indigenous Students

Consistent with UWS's mission and location, Indigenous education is a high priority. Access for Indigenous students at UWS increased from 0.3% in 2002 to 0.9% in 2005. However, national benchmarking data suggests that UWS has been performing below the NSW and sector averages in terms of access and participation, but in terms of Indigenous success and retention, UWS performs better than the NSW and sector averages. This pattern indicates that there is a need to strengthen recruitment programs for Indigenous students, while support services once Indigenous students are enrolled are performing satisfactorily.

UWS is addressing the Indigenous recruitment issue. An active campaign in Sydney schools is raising Indigenous student awareness of tertiary education. A UWS–NSW Department of Education and Training Aboriginal mentors project is supporting secondary students, and the project 'Caring for Country' is reaching out to Indigenous students in years 8 and 9 in Western Sydney schools. Scholarships for Indigenous students include the UWS Reconciliation Scholarship, the U Step Merit Equity Scholarships, and the College of Business Merit Equity Scholarships. UWS also offers two Aboriginal Rural Education Programs, one in education and the other in community welfare, at the Bachelors level with an early exit point—the Diploma of Indigenous Education Studies.

Support for Indigenous students at UWS is coordinated by the Aboriginal Education Centre. It is recognised that while support services for Indigenous students have been maintained through some difficult times, there is a need to give a higher priority to, and better coordinate, the whole suite of services and programs designed to maximise positive outcomes for Indigenous students. The recent appointment of a Dean of Indigenous Education will strengthen UWS's attention to Indigenous issues (section 5.3.1). The resource incentive for Indigenous enrolments also is a noteworthy strategy to try to increase the number of Indigenous students at UWS.

### 3.5.3 Equity Groups

UWS provides a range of mentoring and support programs for TAFE students, students with disabilities, women in certain disciplines, students from low socio-economic status and those from non-English speaking background. The 'Widening University Participation' program also helps to encourage university participation from under-represented groups by reaching out to students in years 9–12. Such programs are well aligned with the UWS mission.

### 3.5.4 Students at Risk

UWS has put in place, effective strategies for identifying students who could be considered 'at risk'. Twice-yearly, University-wide progression audits are conducted to identify students with grade point averages within 'at-risk' bands. A number of progression checks such as failing more than 50% of units attempted in the previous six months and failing the same unit twice are applied. Students identified through these progression audits are advised to contact their Head of Program before the next teaching session commences to discuss future study plans.

The First Year Support Program piloted in 2005, was a response to these data. The program provides counselling and support for first year students to help them avoid being 'at risk'. This program has significant potential, but at present it is still under development, with some academic units having more involvement than others.

### 3.5.5 Student Complaints and Grievances

A comprehensive suite of policies and procedures are in place to deal with students' enquiries, complaints and grievances on academic, financial and administrative matters. Policies on sexual harassment, racism, and bullying provide guidance on how to address specific issues.

The Complaints Handling System (CHS) of UWS implemented online by the Complaints Resolution Unit within the Office of Planning and Quality (OPQ), provides a single repository for the registration and tracking of all matters that reach the defined complaints threshold. The data recorded and tracked by CHS has been used effectively not only for complaints resolution but also for continuous quality improvement. Through analysing the root causes of the complaint, UWS has been able to identify areas that need attention and take action to resolve them.

Despite only being fully implemented in mid-2006, the online CHS already has attracted interest both from within the sector and outside it and is clearly a leading practice in higher education. It also may present a commercial opportunity for UWS, given its utility across all types of university context.

#### **Commendation 6**

**AUQA commends UWS for the development of the computer-supported Complaints Handling System and for using it effectively for continuous quality improvement.**

UWS has taken a range of initiatives to address issues identified through student feedback. One of these has been a communication campaign to encourage students to take up opportunities to provide feedback to the University and to demonstrate to them that they are heard. 'Your Voice Counts' posters are on display across the University and improvements as a result of feedback from research students have been described in a postcard campaign. These are good initiatives and may well encourage students to continue to take up opportunities to participate effectively in the University community.

Perhaps because of the challenges of commuter multi-campus operations, the UWS student experience as a whole is somewhat undefined and the student body seems largely to have escaped the 'unification' process. To enhance the quality and cohesion of the UWS student experience, the Audit Panel suggests it would be useful to more clearly define an aspirational profile of 'UWS students' and state clearly what the University intends offering them. If this can be captured in concrete terms, it should help UWS develop and track progress towards making this vision of the UWS student experience a reality.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**AUQA recommends that UWS define the desired distinguishing characteristics of the UWS student experience and develop a whole-of-institution strategy to implement and track the progress of this strategy.**

## 4 RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING

The Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan of the University of Western Sydney recognises the advancement of the 'quality, relevance and sustainability of the UWS research program' as one of its seven planning priorities. The Research Plan 2004–2008 identifies five strategic goals for research and research training for the 2004–2008 timeframe, namely to:

- achieve outstanding performance in research and scholarship that is distinguished by its interdisciplinary focus and relevance to industry, government and the community
- substantially increase UWS's profile in research output, income and commercialisation of findings
- build productive research groups and University-wide research programs in areas that reflect UWS's distinctive strengths and orientation to practical knowledge
- develop effective research partnerships with industries, organisations and communities in the GWS region, as well as nationally and internationally
- establish distinctive research higher degree programs marked by their relevance to industry, government and community futures

The Audit Panel concluded that UWS has a sound research plan and that, in general, the University is performing well in areas that are particularly relevant to its mission. UWS has made concerted efforts towards the realisation of its strategic goals for research and research training. However, to meet the targets specific to the five research goals, the University has to ensure that research policies and processes are implemented consistently across the University. The following sections present detailed observations and audit conclusions.

### 4.1 *Research Context*

UWS's overarching goal of ensuring 'quality, relevance and sustainability' in research is an ambitious one, especially given the highly competitive research context in which all Australian universities currently operate. UWS has made a strategic decision in aiming for high quality research outcomes in a limited number of specialist fields.

UWS is pursuing a research plan which is well considered and coherent. In setting its research goals and consequent actions, the University is informed by the key recommendations generated in two external reviews of UWS research conducted in 2001 and 2004. The purpose of the 2001 review was to assess the research and research training capacity and performance of UWS, and to frame research strategies and priorities for the next five years. The review findings emphasised the core concepts of selectivity and concentration. The 2004 review of the performance and prospects of research centres and support arrangements identified areas that needed attention such as research student recruitment, commercialisation and benchmarking.

Given its history and current areas of focus, UWS is on a sound trajectory for high quality research in areas that are particularly relevant to its mission. For example, UWS is performing well in terms of external research grants per equivalent full-time staff numbers, research publications, increased success rates in Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage grant applications, and local government funding for research. The percentage of industry and other funding grants from GWS also has increased. The other areas of research performance are also generally showing growth.

One of the challenges UWS is likely to face with the forthcoming implementation of the Research Quality Framework is whether these relatively small nodes of high quality research will be able to

bring sufficient performance funding to sustain the overall research and research training agenda the University has set in place.

Implementation of research policies and principles across the University appears to be somewhat uneven. To achieve its research goals, the University needs to take action to ensure that the implementation of these policies and related processes, including the workload formula, are being applied consistently and to good effect across schools.

#### **4.2 *Accountability, Management and Resourcing***

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Research) reports to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) (Development and International). Given the University's ambitions and the magnitude of the planned investment in research, the Panel was of the view that research needs to have very high level coordination and leadership. The University may wish to consider upgrading the leadership position to DVC status.

Research leadership at the next level is well represented with a Dean of Research Studies providing University-wide leadership for research training and associate deans (research), holding college-wide responsibility for research and research training.

Research governance structures also are appropriate, with two Academic Senate Subcommittees – the Research Committee and the Research Studies Committee – providing oversight, and administrative and management support for researchers being provided by the Office of Research Services.

UWS has been supporting research development through substantial targeted investments and in 2006 the Board approved a ten-year research investment strategy, allocating significant resources for further development of UWS as a research university. Urban and medical research have been identified as two priority areas for the first phase of this new investment. Other strategies in place include funding Postdoctoral Research Fellowships in identified areas, providing an internal research grant scheme to support specific research themes, and returning the bulk of Institutional Grants Scheme funding to colleges to encourage local research initiatives.

#### **4.3 *Tracking Research Performance***

To monitor its research performance, UWS tracks the standard indicators of research income and research publications. Performance in research publications has greatly improved over the past five years. DEST weighted research publications output increased by 104% between 2000 and 2004. Research publications relative to academic staff numbers increased by 144% between 2000 and 2004 and overtook the benchmarking cohort average in 2003.

The key performance indicator (KPI) on research income shows that although UWS is earning significantly more in research grants than the NGU group average, there has been a slow growth rate over the period 2002 to 2005. UWS hopes that the major investments beginning in 2006 will produce more rapid growth in research activity as measured by grant income over future years.

Despite financial stringency and intense competition across the sector, UWS has been able to attract some excellent researchers. However, if it is to succeed in its research strategy it will have to take action to retain all of its highly productive researchers in strategic areas and provide them with conditions that encourage maximum productivity. Attention will need to be paid to the ageing profile of highly productive researchers, ensuring appropriate workload allocations are supporting researchers, and ensuring that clear research foci are maintained.

### **Affirmation 5**

**AUQA notes the commitment of UWS to high quality research concentrations as indicated by the investment in research and affirms UWS's development of strategies to ensure research activity is supported by appropriate workload allocations and clearly defined research foci.**

#### **4.4 Research Concentrations**

The strategy adopted by the University to achieve its research goals hinges on concentrating resources in selected areas of research strength. To promote research concentrations in 2001 UWS designated a small number of flagship University Research Centres (URCs) which although hosted by a particular college, are interdisciplinary in nature.

By 2005 the success of this strategy was evident with URCs earning 40% of the University's externally generated research income and 77% of ARC Discovery and Linkage projects. The intensity of this concentration and the success of these research teams are significant given that only 13% of UWS staff are affiliated with them. Currently there are seven URCs.

UWS appreciates that growing research productivity is not only about creating narrowly focused, high achieving concentrations but is also about developing research productivity across a wider base. In 2006 UWS developed a second tier of research nodes known as University Research Groups (URGs). URGs can be upgraded to URCs when their performance reaches specified levels. Currently there are five URGs.

The Panel found the two-tier model of URCs and URGs to be basically sound. All URCs and URGs provide an annual report to the UWS Research Committee. The University, through the Office for Research Services (ORS), regularly reviews URCs performance. It is appropriate that the University has identified strict criteria, including both focus and performance, to govern the transition from URG to URC. UWS will need to rigorously adhere to its criteria in evaluating the performance of both URCs and URGs if this approach is to achieve the desired outcomes. The University has to maintain its emphasis on demonstrated performance both to achieve and retain URC status rather than being swayed by a group's potential to perform.

UWS also has identified a series of research themes that capitalise on the particular expertise of UWS researchers. These themes address the particular needs of GWS communities. Current research themes are: Children's Futures; Culture and Community; Urban and Community Development; and Water Research. It is not entirely clear, however, how these themes relate to URGs and URCs. Through the 2002–2006 period, a modest amount of central funding has been allocated to support the development of these research themes, but it would be advisable to incorporate them more securely in the overall set of organisational elements related to growing strategic research activity.

#### **4.5 Engaged Research**

One of the strategic goals of UWS is to achieve outstanding research performance through an "interdisciplinary focus and relevance to industry, government and the community". Accordingly, UWS gives particular importance to research partnerships with industry, the corporate sector, and communities. KPIs measure research engagement within the region – the percentage of Industry and Other Funding (IOF) grants that arise from the GWS region and the success rate of ARC Linkage grant applications. On these indicators UWS has been successful. Of the total IOF grants, the percentage that comes from the GWS region has increased from 23% in 2003 to 39% in 2005. ARC Linkage grants success rates have increased from 52% in 2003 to 63% in 2005. The University is meeting its targets.

#### 4.6 *Commercial Research*

Another strategic goal of UWS is to “substantially increase UWS’s profile in research output, income and commercialisation of findings”. Towards the realisation of this goal, UWS wishes to promote targeted development of contract research and improve commercialisation opportunities arising from collaborative industry research, locally, nationally and internationally.

Research contracts and research intellectual property are managed collaboratively through the ORS, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer and the Office of the University Legal Counsel. Consultancies and all commercialisation activity are handled through the Office of the Chief Financial Officer.

Given the goal to be more financially self-sufficient, the income that is generated by commercial research, commercialisation of research findings and consultancy activity is particularly important; but in all of these areas, performance has been modest. Consultancy (fee-for-service) activity seems particularly under-developed. Benchmarking with an aspirational cohort might be helpful in setting more ambitious goals in all of these areas. Development also will be needed across the University to provide appropriate incentives to support these activities.

#### **Recommendation 3**

**AUQA recommends that UWS further develop the business development office and associated University systems to promote income generation from consultancies, commercial research and other external sources.**

#### 4.7 *Internationalisation of Research*

One of the research goals of UWS is to “develop effective partnerships...nationally and internationally”. Some progress towards this goal has been achieved through the International Research Initiatives Scheme and a new program to support Eminent Research Visitors. In 2005 and 2006 increased funding was provided to support high quality international higher degree research (HDR) students. UWS also has undertaken a targeted international staff recruitment drive in research areas of strategic importance. There is still a long way to go in achieving the level of international research collaboration that UWS desires.

#### 4.8 *Support for Researchers*

The Office of Research Services (ORS) provides a wide range of support services to assist UWS researchers, both at an early career level and as mature researchers. The University also provides several competitive internal grant schemes and the 2004 review found that these had been helpful in increasing external funding, publications and community/industry involvement in research.

UWS currently is implementing a process that aims to provide consistent research workload allocations across all colleges. This is being aligned with resource allocations to the colleges. In 2006, the research incentive component of the University Funding Model was increased and directly linked to supporting research productivity-sensitive workloads at the college level. This is a worthy but complex aim that will take a lot of fine-tuning to achieve.

Helping early career researchers by providing seeding grants and protected space in their workload for research activity is very important but care is needed, or these resources provided in advance of actual research performance may be seen as ‘entitlements’ that do not necessarily lead to enhanced performance in research.

The UWS Library, information technology services and other support groups provide specific support for research staff and students, the quality of which is tracked in the UWS Research Student Satisfaction Survey and the UWS Staff Services Survey.

The ethics team ensures that all funded projects requiring ethics clearance are monitored once funding is secured. Release of funds is contingent upon securing the appropriate ethics protocol/s. The ARC has commended UWS on the quality of its record keeping and management of ethics issues in ARC grant programs.

It is noteworthy that UWS uses its Register of Research Activity instigated in 2001 to further encourage research activity. The Register tracks individual performance in generating external research income, research publications, and higher degree research completions. It also provides multiple evidence-based levels of recognition and enables benefits including priority access to internal funding, access to HDR supervisory opportunities and promotion of achievement to external communities and agencies. The Institutional Assessment Framework Portfolio 2005 acknowledges that the Register has more rigorous standards than might be encountered elsewhere in the sector. The integrity and transparency of the Register has provided an incentive for staff to strive to achieve recognition at a higher level.

To enhance the quality of HDR supervision, UWS maintains a Register of Graduate Supervisors and provides ongoing supervisor training programs. The Professional Development Unit runs Research Supervisor Forums and in 2005, held nine sessions with a total of 185 participants. The researchers and the HDR supervisors find these sessions to be effective professional development opportunities.

#### **Commendation 7**

**AUQA commends UWS for the effective use of the Register of Research Activity to encourage further research activity, and for providing professional development opportunities for researchers and higher degree research supervisors.**

#### **4.9 Support for Research Students**

UWS has a well developed suite of programs and schemes to support HDR students and the 2004 review of these programs found them to be generally effective. Scholarships are carefully administered and there has been an increase in the number of HDR students enjoying scholarship support – rising from 28% in 2002 (275) to 34% (317 scholarship holders) in 2004.

UWS noted, however, that HDR students perform best when they are located in areas of research concentration, and therefore in 2005 initiated a number of strategies to encourage this alignment between HDR students and research concentrations. For example, in granting UWS HDR scholarships, priority is given to students undertaking research in university centres and/or in partnership with community organisations and industries. Stipend scholarships also are made available to URCs to allocate to their HDR students. This strategy should assist in further strengthening the HDR student experience across UWS, and help address problems of inconsistent levels of candidature support identified by students.

UWS acknowledges the inconsistencies and ambiguities in research candidature support funded through Research Training Scheme and a new policy framework is being developed by a working party of the UWS Research Studies Committee to address this issue.

The Panel noted that while the alignment of HDR enrolments with areas of research concentration should help ensure high quality supervision and supportive contexts for HDR student learning across UWS, the areas of research concentration are relatively few and this will create a low ceiling on the overall number of HDR students the University can enrol. Given the funding consequences of maintaining a very small doctoral program in a large university, the

UWS leadership team may wish to examine and build on existing strategies to increase the capacity for doctoral supervision without jeopardising quality.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**AUQA recommends that UWS develop an effective strategy to increase higher degree research (HDR) enrolments and completions without jeopardising quality, and ensure that all HDR students have appropriate facilities and support regardless of campus location.**

#### **4.10 Quality Management**

UWS has well developed systems for monitoring the quality of HDR student outcomes. Supervisory panels that often include members from industry and other universities contribute to benchmarking quality and provide students with well-rounded expertise in areas that are increasingly interdisciplinary.

The Research Studies Committee examines and assures the quality of research degrees. Each commencing research higher degree student develops a set of “measures of achievement” against which progress can be evaluated at the end of six months and the end of the first year. Associate deans (research) review achievement as candidatures approach their final stages and this helps ensure on-time completions.

UWS considers review and investment as the key strategies for ensuring the further development of high quality research. The two external peer reviews since 2001 have assisted UWS in the development and application of procedures that enhance the management, performance and strategic alignment of research concentrations.

In addition to the research concentrations in the form of URCs and URGs, schools also have a critical role to play in building research productivity. In 2005, the ORS undertook a major analysis of each school’s contribution to the University’s research goals. This research report card is expected to inform performance management for heads of schools in the future.

As part of its preparatory work for the Australian Research Quality Framework (RQF) which is expected to come into being in 2008, UWS is undertaking a trial quality assessment exercise with other NGUs. Given the likely far-reaching implications of the RQF on university funding, this preparation will be critical if UWS is to maximise its RQF returns.

## 5 ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE

As stated in chapter 1, the *University of Western Sydney Act 1997* gives particular emphasis to engagement and service. It indicates the University should “have particular regard to the needs and aspirations of the residents of Greater Western Sydney”. The University takes this responsibility very seriously and since its inception has worked to maintain close connections with regional communities. It also has taken a leadership role nationally in conceptualising the nature of universities’ engagement with their communities.

The Regional and Community Engagement Plan 2004–2008 lists the following strategic goals for regional and community engagement, namely to:

- achieve national and international renown for leadership and scholarship in community engagement
- excel in the development and application of scholarship and knowledge in regional and community contexts
- make strategic use of resources and partnerships to provide leadership in community engagement and regional development
- promote civil society and sustainable communities by building their social and intellectual capital

The Panel received widespread favourable comment on the contributions that UWS is making to engagement with communities and industry in the GWS region, both in terms of teaching and learning, and research. Many UWS staff members are involved in engagement projects of one kind or another. For example, the Portfolio states that over the period 2000–2005, UWS was involved in more than 1100 engagement projects. However, this does not necessarily indicate that all parts of the University are equally active in engagement. For example, fifty percent of the engagement projects mentioned in the Portfolio were emanating from one college, namely the College of Arts.

### 5.1 Strategic Priorities

Strategic engagement with GWS regional communities is a distinguishing feature of UWS, and this is reflected in three relevant KPIs – regional participation, engaged research, and engaged learning.

UWS serves the people of GWS by providing local access to a university education. This is something that many residents would be otherwise unable to use, given the dispersed geographic area, paid work imperatives, and transport limitations that exist in this very large and growing community in Western and Southwestern Sydney. The 2006 First Year Retention Survey indicates that just over 52% of UWS students are the first in their family to attend university. Clearly, the people of GWS see this as *their* university and the Panel encountered a powerful sense of identification and loyalty from students, staff and community members.

A new engagement project, ‘Fast Forward’, is providing valuable opportunities for Western Sydney high school students, who otherwise would be very unfamiliar with university life, to visit UWS’s campuses and hopefully develop a personal aspiration to attend the University. Still very much in its infancy, this program holds promise for increasing the participation rate of GWS school leavers in tertiary education – not only at UWS.

The importance of providing access is also evident in the high proportion of UWS students who enter university after completing TAFE studies. The Panel noted that while entry scores to many

UWS courses were among the lowest in the NSW metropolitan area, graduate employment rates were strong suggesting that the University is fulfilling its mission of providing for enhanced participation rates in university education by local residents, and ensuring that the quality of the education provided, is high. In this regard, the Panel is convinced that UWS is making an important difference to the life chances and economic futures of large numbers of GWS residents.

From interviews with local employers, school principals and community leaders, the Panel also heard that UWS graduates generally are well suited to employment in GWS. Graduates understand and appreciate the dynamic cultural, linguistic and social mix that is characteristic of GWS, and are very well prepared to enter professional roles serving local communities.

An important component of the engagement agenda at UWS involves the concept of 'engaged research'. As described in section 4.5, this is defined as research with "an interdisciplinary focus and relevance to industry, government and the community". In this area also, UWS has an appropriate set of KPIs and notable successes. It is consistently among the top five national performers in terms of ARC Linkage grants, and has secured significant grants for research in rural industries on plant, food and water sciences. Most of these ARC Linkage projects are with partners located in GWS. It is also noteworthy that UWS tracks the number of IOF research grants that emanate from research partners and clients in the GWS region as an indicator of engaged research performance.

The third component of the concept of engagement is 'engaged learning' (i.e. carrying out mutually beneficial teaching and learning activities involving the community in a context of partnership and reciprocity). The Panel was informed of several excellent examples of engaged learning at UWS, including the 'Classmates' program that locates much of the learning associated with teacher education in partner schools and the Cooperative Education Program. The latter places high achieving UWS students from all disciplines in GWS businesses and community organisations for short attachments during their study. This program has proven very successful in providing applied research and relevant professional development opportunities for students and has received national recognition. In 2006 alone, 180 UWS students participated in this program.

#### **Commendation 7**

**AUQA commends 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 programs such as the Cooperative Education Program.**

The KPIs for engaged learning appear to be less well developed and less clear cut than those in either of the other two categories of engagement. For example, while it is claimed that more than 900 undergraduate units and 360 postgraduate units reflect some engagement with the GWS region, it was not clear to the Panel just how this engaged learning is defined or counted in these units. For this indicator to be of value, the University may need to refine both the definition and measurement of engaged learning.

## **5.2 The Indigenous Community**

In Indigenous education, UWS has enjoyed periods of vigorous development, interspersed with periods of latency. Most recently, this area appears to be entering a new phase of development with the appointment of a Dean of Indigenous Education and a renewed commitment to embed Indigenous education across the whole university. The Panel recognises these as important initiatives and also notes the presence of a supportive Indigenous Advisory Council which helps consolidate links with local Indigenous communities.

One way to give a higher profile to Indigenous education for all students across the University would be to create an additional graduate attribute on Indigenous studies. The Panel also was of the view that UWS would do well to strengthen resourcing in this area even further (section 7.1.2).

### **Recommendation 5**

**AUQA recommends that UWS develop appropriate systems to implement the Indigenous education commitment including redeveloping the resource plan and giving consideration to adding a graduate attribute.**

The Panel recognises that educational disadvantage in earlier phases of schooling makes recruitment of Indigenous students to UWS a challenge however, given the comparatively large Indigenous population in GWS, addressing this problem should be a high priority for university leadership. As stated in section 3.5.2, national benchmarking data suggests that in terms of Indigenous success and retention, UWS performs better than the NSW and sector averages. The Audit Panel noted that the support services for Indigenous students generally are performing satisfactorily.

### **5.3 Strategic Use of Resources and Partnerships**

In 2005 UWS carried out a review of its community engagement activities to identify examples of good practice and indicate where improvements might be made. The main recommendations arising out of the review were to further embed engagement across the curriculum, enhance leadership in the area and ensure adequate resourcing.

Several actions already have been taken to implement these recommendations, including establishing the position of PVC (University Engagement). This senior appointment signals to the UWS community and to external communities, the importance of engagement to the University. Further, positions to support engagement such as associate deans (engagement) and college engagement coordinators are currently in the process of being filled. The Panel acknowledges the importance of these developments, as evidenced by the positive comments received from a wide cross-section of the GWS community. Given the scale and importance of engagement however, the Panel formed the opinion that the PVC (University Engagement) should be a full-time position. The University may wish to consider this issue when resources allow.

As in other areas, UWS is making a good attempt to align resources with this strategic priority. The recent establishment of two new grant schemes to promote community engagement, namely, the Regional and Community Grants Scheme for UWS–GWS partnerships, and the Academic Service Learning Grants Scheme, are adding impetus to the engagement agenda. The additional investment to establish the new Urban Research Centre and establish five research chairs in the Centre for Cultural Research, further demonstrates the strong commitment that UWS is making to regional engagement.

The Panel has little doubt that UWS sees regional engagement as a vital part of its mission and has significant achievements in this domain. However, given UWS's imperative to become financially self-sufficient in the interests of long term survival, there exists a level of tension between philanthropically-motivated service to the community and the need to ensure that all activities, including engagement activities, are sustainable. UWS will need to come to terms with this tension as it further develops its engagement mission. While some valuable steps have already been taken to implement the recommendations from the 2005 review, more remains to be done to embed engagement across all parts of University operations. Such an alignment between rhetoric and routine operations will be vital to the successful implementation of an institution-wide engagement strategy.

**Affirmation 6**

**AUQA affirms that in keeping with the 2005 internal review, UWS redevelop a whole-of-university community engagement strategy and align associated University systems to ensure it is implemented across the University.**

***5.4 Recognition and Reward***

The Audit Panel acknowledges the important role that UWS played in the formation of the Australian Engaged Universities Interest Group in 2002, and more particularly the role of the UWS Office of Regional Development (since renamed the Office of Engagement) in administering that group's activities. UWS also played a leadership role in the subsequent establishment of the Australian Universities Community Engagement Alliance in 2005.

UWS has made a determined effort to reflect its commitment to engagement through reward and recognition systems. These include a promotions policy that recognises individual contributions to the region and the wider community; workload adjustment for non-teaching staff to spend time on community engagement; Regional Partnership Awards; the Vice-Chancellor's Excellence Award for Regional and Community Engagement and Women of the West Award. These policies and systems should assist members of the UWS community in embedding engagement across both the culture and practices of all parts of UWS.

## 6 INTERNATIONAL ACTIVITIES

UWS aspires to become a “university of international standing and outlook” and in keeping with this mission, the University has identified as a key strategic direction, the active pursuit of “an international focus in its teaching and learning, research and community engagement” (The Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan of UWS p18). International enrolments currently account for approximately 15% (5448) of the total student enrolment, with 32.9% of international student enrolment being in transnational programs.

The international focus was captured in several strategic goals listed in the Teaching and Learning Plan 2004–2008 and the Research Plan 2004–2008. But like many Australian universities, UWS’s international activities, particularly its transnational programs, were established in advance of a considered strategic and policy base. To remedy this, UWS has recently developed a (draft) International Strategic Plan 2006–2010. This lists the University’s international strategic goals to:

- expand international research cooperation and exchange for UWS and the GWS community
- develop and sustain partnerships with international academic institutions, organisations and corporations that enhance mutual benefits and reinforce the UWS mission
- define and implement international perspectives in teaching and learning
- equip students with the skills and experience to work and live in other countries and cultures
- provide a supportive and high quality educational experience to attract international students to study with UWS

It is too soon to comment on the effectiveness of this promising plan but, over the past five years, UWS has carried out several reviews as a result of which positive changes have occurred in its international activities.

### 6.1 *Review of International Activities*

The 2004 Fell-Wood Review made a major impact on structural consolidation and realignment of UWS in managing international activities. This Review emphasised the need to concentrate on the quality and nature of agreements with overseas partners. Its recommendations have formed the basis for many of the recent changes and improvements.

In 2005 the position of DVC (Development and International) was created to assume responsibility for the development, management and accountability for the University’s international strategy. An International Strategy and Policy Committee was formed in July 2005 to assist in developing the UWS international strategy and associated policies, and from mid-2006 an Associate Dean (Development and International) has been located in each college. A new central office for the coordination of international activities was established in 2005 (UWS International) and a director appointed. It now provides centralised administrative support for international activities.

Training in cultural awareness and sensitivity has been identified as an important professional development need for UWS staff teaching in Australia as well as for staff working offshore. The UWS Professional Development Unit is developing cross-cultural training packages for staff, based on successful packages used in other universities.

Overall, the most important action flowing from the 2004 Review was the increased attention given to quality assurance of transnational programs.

## 6.2 *Assuring Quality*

Commencing in 2004, a more rigorous policy base for quality assurance of transnational programs and international students studying at the Sydney campuses was established. Transnational programs which were found to have quality or viability concerns were moved into teach-out mode as quickly as possible. This has meant a significant reduction in the number of transnational programs. At the time of the Offshore Audit Visit, UWS had only three transnational programs in ongoing mode and 18 in teach-out mode. Programs in teach-out mode are required to submit monthly reports to the DVC (Development and International).

Transnational courses must meet the same requirements and follow the same accreditation and review processes as onshore courses and in addition, must meet the UWS Offshore Quality Assurance requirements and commercial guidelines. Responsibilities for transnational programs are now clearly specified, with associate deans (academic) being responsible for assuring the quality of transnational programs. School and college boards, in conjunction with the Academic Senate, are responsible for course accreditation, monitoring and review. The ORS is accountable for quality assurance and administrative support for international research linkage projects.

Following concerns that emerged through a review of international student recruitment agents in 2005, the number of agents was significantly reduced and now agent performance is reviewed annually. The Policy and Governance Unit of the Division of Corporate Services has the responsibility to ensure compliance with the *Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000* (ESOS Act). The ESOS Compliance Officer of this unit works in collaboration with both the Office of the Academic Registrar and UWS International on matters related to international students and the ESOS Act.

In the last two years, UWS has taken significant steps to improve quality assurance in its international activities. Offshore quality assurance guidelines are now built into the UWS Online Course Accreditation System and will be used to assess each offshore program's annual performance. The Portfolio states that the group of Associate Deans (Academic) and Course Coordinators meet every three months, but this seems to be a very recent initiative. UWS needs to strengthen this forum so that good practices can be shared. Currently, within the same discipline there are offshore programs of varying quality and of different models. This forum can contribute to consistency in dealing with offshore program related issues.

UWS International also participates in the annual Australian Universities International Directors' Forum benchmarking exercise. The University is aware that further work is still needed on international quality assurance processes.

## 6.3 *Transnational Programs*

A delegation of the Audit Panel visited five UWS transnational education (TNE) partnership programs, three in teach-out mode and two ongoing. It should be noted that at the time of the audit, UWS had only three ongoing TNE programs and all were in Hong Kong. The whole Panel considered the Portfolio submission and the delegation's report at the main Audit Visit.

The Panel acknowledges that UWS had identified quality issues in its TNE programs and had already taken action to close those with significant quality issues. This is to the University's credit. However, the Panel noted that some of the closing programs had remaining quality issues that needed close monitoring for the duration of the programs. The Panel was informed that in future, the University will focus on international student enrolment on its Australian campuses and will consider expansion of the TNE programs particularly with partners who are credible in research.

Generally, the Panel found that partnership contracts are sound, though the quality of the partners has been variable. For example, the facilities provided by partner institutions vary from very well equipped teaching spaces and full scale university libraries to a single small classroom with no access to a library. In this latter discontinued postgraduate professional program the students relied largely on technical resource materials held in their workplaces. The Panel acknowledges that the recently developed, more rigorous protocols for considering new transnational partners and programs should help ensure that future partners are of high quality, as are the partners of the existing ongoing programs.

Student admission processes are sound. At most the partner undertakes an initial screening of applications, but UWS makes all decisions on admission and all students are enrolled as UWS students. For the most part, entry standards are equivalent for both on and offshore students.

Approaches to the development and production of marketing materials are generally well handled, with the appropriate consideration being taken of these materials by UWS staff.

Several of the TNE programs rely almost entirely on the provision of UWS curriculum and written teaching materials. These materials are generally well prepared and sent to the partner institutions in a timely fashion. For the most part, the materials also give appropriate attention to conventions regarding plagiarism.

The Panel generally is impressed with the quality of local staff. In the best cases, these are full-time academic staff of reputable university partners, who are operating in a supportive academic context very similar to an Australian university. The local sessional staff also are appropriately qualified, usually with strong professional backgrounds in their field. The Panel is concerned however, at the very limited input by regular UWS academic staff in some delivery models.

In most transnational programs visited by the delegation students receive photocopied reading materials for each unit. Access to the UWS Library was identified as an area for improvement in the Offshore Student Satisfaction Survey 2005. In response, additional services for transnational students have been put in place by the University Library. Transnational students who make use of the UWS online library services are in general very satisfied with the level of support they receive. However, local staff do not have access to UWS online library services and this omission needs attention.

For most transnational programs, assessment practices and moderation appear sound, but there were complaints about the slowness of assignment feedback and final grades on units, especially in those programs that do not make use of e-learning support systems.

It is clear that some UWS transnational programs are still affected by legacy issues dating from the University's history as separate institutions. For example, two similar Masters programs are on offer with different partners in close proximity in Hong Kong. Programs also reflect very different models of delivery. A greater level of engagement by UWS staff in the teaching of transnational degrees is desirable to provide a stronger academic community with local staff, and to develop a more robust approach towards achieving whole-of-program learning outcomes. UWS would do well to evaluate its current models of TNE delivery, then determine a core approach to be used for all transnational programs. A model that uses both the strength of local academic staff and close connections with Sydney-based staff would be desirable.

### **Recommendation 6**

**AUQA recommends that UWS reconsider the approach to offering transnational UWS award programs to ensure that the UWS reputation is strong and that quality is assured in practice.**

Of the programs visited by the Panel, the Master of Public Health offered by the School of Biomedical and Health Sciences in partnership with Hong Kong Polytechnic University deserves special mention. The collegial relationship between the staff of both institutions is characterised by mutual respect. The blend of UWS and local staff provides for rigorous yet locally relevant teaching. There are excellent library and teaching facilities and students strongly affirm their UWS identity. This program would provide a good template for future UWS transnational partnership programs.

#### **6.4 *Support to International Students Onshore***

UWS provides an economical education pathway for international students and a campus experience that is characterised by the rich ethnic diversity that is a hallmark of GWS communities. However the multi-campus operations, limited student residences at some campuses and public transport limitations provide significant challenges for international students. Similarly, delivering services to this diverse group of students poses challenges for the University.

Conversion rates of prospective students from application to acceptance are lower at UWS than the sector average. To improve this, an application management system is currently being trialled and should be fully operational by early 2007.

UWS offers several types of English language support for international students, depending on their enrolment and campus location. These include: provisional offers, which require them to study English for between 10 and 40 weeks before taking up their UWS program; electives such as 'English for Academic Purposes'; and assistance through the Learning Skills Unit, which provides workshops and online resources to assist with academic writing.

A range of services is provided to international students through UWS International including International Student Advisors who are responsible for providing mentor programs, orientation and general advice on all aspects of student life. But UWS has identified coordination of student services for international students as an area needing further attention and has commissioned a working party to address this issue.

UWS acknowledges its obligations to identify and support students at risk – both academically and personally. Six-monthly progress audits identify international students at academic progression risk and work is underway to develop procedures to support these students (section 3.5.4).

## 7 HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS

### 7.1 *Human Resources*

In many respects the current staff profile of UWS reflects the University's origins in three former colleges of advanced education and the impact in recent years of serious cost containment. The average age of the University's academic staff is at the higher end of the sector average. The Strategic Plan of UWS acknowledges this ageing profile and indicates that "[g]iven the current age profile of UWS staff and the anticipated growth in student numbers, there will be a significant need to recruit new staff, particularly academic staff, in line with...strategic priorities".

The need for a more strategic approach to human resources policy and practices was recognised in 2005 when the Board of Trustees approved the development of an overarching 10-year staffing strategy that focuses on:

- aligning the staff profile to the academic program and strategic directions
- enhancing staff quality and attracting high performers
- matching expenditure on staffing to sector norms and releasing resources to invest

The Audit Panel concluded that UWS is aware that attracting, developing and retaining high quality motivated staff is critical to achieving UWS strategic objectives across all domains of University activity. The Panel noted that the Sustainability Agenda of 2004 and Aligning Human Resources and Strategic Directions projects reflect the University's intention to better manage and enhance the staff profile to match strategic priorities for the future.

Some of the human resources aspects regarding academic staff have been dealt with in earlier sections of this Report. Only the additional information and relevant observations are presented here. This section should be read in conjunction with section 3.

#### 7.1.1 Staffing Strategy

An ageing academic staffing profile and heavy reliance on casual staff are two key human resource issues that need the attention of the University. The Panel investigated how the University responds to these issues through its various staffing policies and practices particularly in relation to selection, induction and professional development activities. In each of these areas the Panel found evidence of significant progress in implementing effective human resource practices.

##### *Ageing profile*

UWS recognises that its ageing staff profile requires careful and deliberate succession planning, and it is anticipated that the Our People 2015 project will address these issues. It will be important that outcomes from the project are carefully monitored.

##### *Recruitment and Selection*

To improve selection processes and outcomes for senior appointments, in 2005 the UWS Senior Recruitment Project was established. The Panel understood that the project has been successful in accelerating the filling of senior academic positions with well-qualified individuals.

Recruitment of academic sessional staff is an area that still needs attention. It seems in some cases the hiring of sessional staff occurs just prior to the commencement of teaching; with the consequence that availability of staff can become a higher criterion for selection than qualifications for the role. This in turn can have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and

the overall student experience. High levels of sessional staff in some disciplines also are mitigating the development of a coherent academic culture. The Audit Panel concluded that it would be highly desirable for UWS to develop a more coherent whole-of-university approach to the recruitment of sessional staff and their integration into mainstream academic activities.

#### **Affirmation 7**

**AUQA affirms the attention UWS is giving to aligning human resources with strategic priorities for its future through projects such as Our People 2015.**

##### *Staff administration*

Staff OnLine is introducing many online features to facilitate staff administration. Some of the features include: online timesheets for approval and payment; online hazard notification, injury and incident reporting; 24/7 access to Staff OnLine; a Workforce Demographics Portal which allows UWS management to monitor predefined metrics online; and an online performance management matrix that will provide managers and supervisors across the University with a uniform method of planning and carrying out performance management for all staff.

#### 7.1.2 Equity Strategies for Staff

The UWS Employment Equity and Diversity Plan 2005–2007 sets out a range of strategies which all managers are expected to implement. The Equity and Diversity Unit has the responsibility for monitoring performance against the plan.

The University has developed specific programs to improve employment and educational opportunities for women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people with a disability and those from a non-English speaking background. UWS is above target in the proportion of academic staff whose first language is not English, and the proportion of professional staff who are female. UWS has also exceeded the target set by the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee for the percentage of senior women academics by 2010. UWS has been named as an Employer of Choice for the past five years by the Equal Opportunity for Women Agency and received particular mention for the promotion of women to senior positions.

Although UWS has had a longstanding commitment to increase Indigenous staff numbers and has been a pioneer in articulating that commitment in its enterprise agreements, the University is performing short of its stated aspirations, particularly given the demographic profile of GWS.

UWS states that the University restructure commencing in 2000 and associated issues caused disruption to the support of Indigenous staff and students and resulted in the loss of some staff and a reduction in student numbers. A solution to this situation is being sought through extensive consultation with Indigenous community leaders, staff and unions. The UWS Indigenous Employment Strategy now being developed aims to improve the participation and employment of Indigenous Australians.

Notwithstanding this explanation and actions, AUQA encourages the University to give greater prominence at governance and management levels to the achievement of sustainable levels of growth in Indigenous academic and professional staff appointments.

#### 7.1.3 Workload and Environment

The allocation of academic workload has been a major area of contention during the process of unification and program consolidation. It also has been subject to major policy and procedural developments. The new workload model requires staff to be engaged in the agreed areas of academic activity for at least 1725 hours per annum, in accordance with the enterprise agreement.

Academics work with an Associate Head of School to ensure these hours are distributed so as to enable the school to meet its teaching commitments and pursue its research objectives, while providing opportunities for staff to develop their academic and research profiles.

Workload principles were formulated in 2005 to address issues identified through an audit of workload agreements. These principles have caused some apprehension amongst staff concerned that this approach may limit support and time for research. UWS considers that the principles support both demonstrated research performance and provide appropriate opportunities and incentives for the development of research activities and research plans of individual staff (including new career academics or those returning to research) consistent with school and college strategic directions.

The new workload system is an essential component of managing workforce capacities in times of financial stringency. However, the new methodology is not yet working evenly across the University. Finding the balance between equitable workloads for all, and catering for the necessarily different emphases of academic work in a large and diverse university population is not easily achieved. The workload system will need careful monitoring across the University and, very likely, some fine tuning in the next few years. It will be important that senior management continue to oversee its implementation at the local level.

### **Affirmation 8**

#### **AUQA affirms the establishment of a university workload system to ensure consistent application and alignment with University strategic priorities.**

UWS has an occupational health and safety strategy that is systematically monitored by the Executive Management Committee that meets bimonthly. It is noteworthy that a decrease in accident and injury statistics (achieved during a period of considerable organisational change) has led to a significant reduction in premium costs for workers' compensation from 2003 to 2006. The Portfolio indicates that this decrease also is linked to the introduction of a new case management process with performance continuing to exceed expectations. The University's performance in this area appears very strong.

#### 7.1.4 Performance Review and Staff Recognition

With the exception of a small number of special cases, all appointments are subject to the completion of a satisfactory probation period, including reviews at the mid-point and at the end of the probation period. If probation is extended, a further review is undertaken. This is consistent with normal sector practice.

Academic staff performance management is the responsibility of the relevant supervisor. For professional staff, the enterprise agreement emphasises the importance of participation in career planning and development processes as a component of annual reviews of achievements, activities, and the setting of objectives and development plans. In 2004, the University initiated its Management Essentials Program which is a mandatory training program for all UWS staff with supervisory responsibilities designed to enhance the competency of supervisors to undertake basic management responsibilities including performance reviews.

Participation in the performance management process is a requirement, forming part of the employment contracts of all staff. Notwithstanding this, the Audit Panel heard of instances where longstanding staff members had not undergone regular annual performance reviews. This occurred particularly in relation to professional staff. The performance management process is currently under review to address identified areas for improvement. In 2006 initial foci have been on strengthening performance management for senior staff and the development of key performance measures which relate to significant staffing priorities. Although these areas are

clearly meritorious, the Audit Panel concluded that the highest priority should be to ensure that the University's policy of annual performance reviews is applied consistently and comprehensively across the whole of the institution.

### **Recommendation 7**

**AUQA recommends that UWS develop and implement for all staff a more rigorous system of performance review and evaluation.**

The monitoring and tracking of completion of performance reviews and planning is also less than optimal. UWS recognises that there is a need to review this process and implement improved monitoring systems.

#### *Review and Improvement*

Executive management regularly reviews areas for improvement and progress against the staffing strategy, and reports findings to the Strategy and Resources Committee. The Committee reviews non-financial key performance indicators related to staffing and reports on specific staffing issues. A report on staffing is a standing item on the Board of Trustees agenda supplemented as required by reports on strategic staffing issues.

Reviews also focus attention on the key strategic priority of aligning the staff profile to the academic profile and research aspirations of the University. Monthly statistics are available through the UWS Workforce Demographics Portal. Managers can access data at the desktop – both within and beyond UWS.

UWS is a member of the Australian Universities' HR Benchmarking Program, initiated in 2004, which aims to establish a relevant, low cost and flexible human resources benchmarking program with a high level of university participation. Forty three universities are involved (35 Australian universities and eight overseas institutions). Participation in the program has potential but the Audit Panel did not identify any substantive ways in which benchmarking data are being actively applied towards the improvement of human resources policies and practices at UWS.

The Audit Panel noted the Staff Services survey, and believes regular and systematic feedback from staff would be valuable in providing the Vice-Chancellor and senior executive team with trend data on staff perceptions and attitudes.

## **7.2 Administrative Systems and Processes**

The University acknowledges that efficient systems and infrastructure are enablers of learning, teaching, research, research training and engagement activities and must therefore be timely, targeted and responsive to feedback.

The unification process of UWS has had significant implications for the planning and delivery of the core administrative systems. During the past five years UWS has moved from a devolved structure with multiple systems and infrastructure at each location to a centralised environment that provides access at multiple locations. The Portfolio states that the same quality assurance strategies and resource model that underpin the operation of the University's core activities are applied to all administrative systems and infrastructure.

The University's core systems are: Student Management System, Financial System, Human Resource Management Information System, Management Information System, Records Management System, Facilities Management System, Space Management System, and the UWS website and intranet.

In summary, the Audit Panel found that the performance of the University's core systems is sound. Initiatives in place to provide a consistent level of service across multiple sites are effective. Nevertheless, there are some weaknesses in the University's approach to information technology governance and the manner in which some student administrative functions support various groups of students. The following sections consider administrative systems within the context of the major functional areas.

### 7.2.1 Student Administration

The Office of the Academic Registrar is responsible for the management of all student and academic administration matters and relevant support systems. When students have queries related to student administration, the student centres located on the various campuses handle initial enquiries and complex issues are referred to appropriate specialist areas within student administration.

Students were outspoken however, about their difficulties accessing student administration services. Delay in getting a response and lack of clarity about who is responsible for what, especially during a period of major change in course arrangements, has resulted in a high level of frustration among certain student cohorts. Of particular concern to the Audit Panel was information that some students are required to travel to another campus in order to get resolution of enrolment-related issues that they might reasonably have expected to have had resolved on their home campus. Both research higher degree and coursework students enumerated a number of instances where travel to another campus was the only way of resolving relatively straightforward enrolment issues.

Limited operating hours of the student centres compounded the problem for working students, some of whom find it almost impossible to visit the student centre during regular business hours due to their own employment restrictions. The opening hours of the student centres need reconsideration, and a stronger sense of client service would enhance this area of operation.

Many postgraduate students also pointed to a lack of accuracy in student administration, including being enrolled in the wrong program and having paperwork lost after submission. Some of these issues may be resolved as more online services are made available. UWS has been tracking student satisfaction with student administration services following identification of concerns about these services. The 2006 Retention Survey indicates improvements in student satisfaction with student administration. As the quality of interaction with student administration is one of the major contributors to the overall student experience, the Audit Panel believes that UWS should continue to assess the level of student satisfaction with these services and monitor progress against appropriate indicators.

#### **Affirmation 9**

**AUQA affirms that UWS continue to monitor its indicators of student satisfaction with student administration services, and consider ways to increase access to core enrolment-related services and make further improvements to client service.**

One action currently in hand to improve student enrolment related services is the implementation of an online enrolment process as part of the roll out of the MySR (MyStudentRecords) functionality of the Callista Student Management System. Once completed, this should allow students to enrol, view and vary units, change personal details, view and print results, and will eventually display fee information. The system is expected to be fully operational from the beginning of 2007.

### 7.2.2 Information Technology Infrastructure

A number of concerns were expressed to the Audit Panel about the quality of information technology (IT) service delivery. While none of these issues are unique to UWS, the University faces particular challenges in being able to deliver seamless and consistent services across its multiple campuses. A strong level of IT governance is essential, given the high reliance on information services in the UWS environment.

UWS states that its IT developments are driven by the objective of ensuring consistent services and a standard IT operating environment for all students and staff regardless of location. In this context the University conducted a comprehensive review of its governance, operations and delivery in mid-2006. The Panel was advised that recently an IT Standing Committee of the Board of Trustees had been established to guide and monitor IT strategy. However, the Panel was unable to ascertain what actions had flowed thus far to improve IT strategy and implementation. Strengthened IT governance should be a priority for UWS, not only in terms of strategic planning and monitoring of service delivery but also in order to exercise strong oversight of major IT projects.

Notwithstanding the concerns about IT governance, the Panel was advised that there is an adequate disaster recovery process in place which ensures that server and network capacity are available to meet identified system needs. A key component of the UWS enterprise architecture has been the creation of a standard operating environment which is designed to alleviate concerns about the robustness of the IT platform currently in place. Future plans for the establishment of a new data centre on the Parramatta campus will further increase disaster recovery capacity.

In 2006 UWS rolled out wireless access to the UWS network for all staff and students which needs further expansion. The Panel noted that a major WebCT upgrade is scheduled to ensure that the targeted development of IT-enabled learning identified in the University's Learning and Teaching Action Plan is able to be delivered.

During 2004–2005, UWS recognised that the potential of the web in delivering strategic, competitive advantage was not being fully realised. To address this, various measures have been taken. A small central Web Management Unit was established in early 2006, a web manager has been appointed to oversee the development and management of the UWS web presence, and the Web Policy has been updated. A new UWS-Web governance and management framework is being developed, and a review of UWS web practices is in progress.

While each of these initiatives is a positive step, priority setting and delivery across IT projects is of concern. It is the view of the Audit Panel that the impact of these projects would be greater if coordinated in a more strategic manner. This is an issue that the IT Standing Committee may wish to consider.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**AUQA recommends that UWS develop a more robust strategic approach to the governance of information technology (IT) services across the University and build a stronger client service ethos among those responsible for IT service planning and delivery.**

### 7.2.3 Physical Facilities

The physical fabric of UWS is both a great strength and a substantial challenge. A large, disparate and often historic and heritage-overlaid capital portfolio creates many challenges and exposures for a university with a limited revenue base. While the Audit Panel did not identify any particular concerns with the way in which capital planning and facilities management are occurring there continues to be a long list of backlog maintenance and upgrade priorities, which is being

addressed, subject to availability of resources. The University is aware of this matter and is endeavouring to identify comprehensive and affordable solutions.

The Campus Development Unit oversees the strategic master planning and development opportunities of the campuses in line with UWS strategic objectives. The Capital Works and Facilities Unit supports the master planning process through analyses of space needs and existing infrastructure, and in operational aspects of the planning process.

A wide range of services is provided by the capital works and facilities team across all UWS campuses including maintenance, environmental management, security, logistics and facilities system support. The University is a participant in the benchmarks compiled annually by the Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association (TEFMA). Benchmarked data from the TEFMA 2005 Benchmark Report indicates that the University performs within industry norms which it considers as a satisfactory outcome given the multi-campus configuration.

To ensure that agreed improvement priorities are implemented the University follows strategies such as appointment of client managers, meetings with key client groups and workshops to discuss service improvement issues.

## APPENDIX A: UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN SYDNEY

### History and Location

The University of Western Sydney (UWS) was established in 1989, forming a federation of three member institutions - UWS Nepean, UWS Macarthur and UWS Hawkesbury. In 2001, these member institutions were merged to form a unified university with a single administration.

Since 2001, the academic program has been reviewed and consolidated to ensure a comprehensive suite of programs, while reducing duplication and ensuring more effective academic administration.

UWS has six teaching campuses spread across Western Sydney, covering 14 local government areas and 28 state and federal electorates. These campuses are:

- Parramatta
- Penrith
- Bankstown
- Campbelltown
- Blacktown
- Hawkesbury

### Academic Profile

The University has three large colleges, which incorporate 17 academic schools:

- College of Health and Science
- College of Arts
- College of Business

These colleges and schools offer a comprehensive range of undergraduate and postgraduate programs, including medicine, which will commence in 2007.

### Key Statistics 2006

<b>Total student enrolments:</b>		35,372
Research student enrolments:		820
Postgraduate student enrolments:		5,299
International student enrolments:		5,448
<b>Student enrolments by campus:</b>		
Parramatta		8,285
Penrith		7,980
Bankstown		5,870
Campbelltown		4,973
Blacktown		3,001
Hawkesbury		2,623
<b>Total staff (FTE)</b>	Academic:	1,230
	General:	1,270
	Senior	84
	Total:	2,584
<b>Total operating revenues:</b>		\$355M
<b>Total operating expenses:</b>		\$346M

## 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**

Mr Rau Kirikiri, Consultant, Christchurch, New Zealand

Ms Jan Lowe, Director of Strategic Policy, Department of Trade and Economic Development, Government of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia

Mr Ian Marshman, Senior Vice-Principal, The University of Melbourne, Australia

Professor Vianne McLean, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (International), Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane, Australia (Chair)

Dr Antony Stella, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Melbourne, Australia

## APPENDIX D: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

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

ARC.....	Australian Research Council
AUQA .....	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CEQ.....	Course Experience Questionnaire
CFO .....	Chief Financial Officer
CHS .....	Complaints Handling System
DEST.....	Australian Government Department of Education, Science and Training
DVC .....	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EDC.....	Educational Development Centre
EFTSL.....	equivalent full-time student load
ESOS .....	<i>Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000</i>
FTE.....	full-time equivalent
GWS .....	Greater Western Sydney
HDR .....	higher degree research
IAF .....	Institutional Assessment Framework
IOF .....	Industry and Other Funding
IT .....	information technology
KPIs.....	key performance indicators
L&T Action Plan.....	Learning and Teaching Action Plan
MCEETYA.....	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
National Protocols/Protocols.....	<i>National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes</i>
NGU .....	New Generation Universities
NSW .....	New South Wales
OPQ.....	Office of Planning and Quality
ORS .....	Office of Research Services
Portfolio.....	Performance Portfolio
PVC .....	Pro Vice-Chancellor
RQF .....	Research Quality Framework
T&L Plan.....	Teaching and Learning Plan
TAFE.....	Technical and Further Education
TEFMA .....	Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association
TILT .....	Tracking and Improvement in Learning and Teaching
UFM .....	University Funding Model
URCs .....	University Research Centres
URGs.....	University Research Groups
UWS Act .....	University of Western Sydney Act 1997

