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Report of an Audit of
La Trobe University

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OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

In January 2004 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of La Trobe University, based in Victoria, Australia.

This Report of the audit provides an overview, and then details the Audit Panel's findings, recommendations (including affirmations) and commendations. A brief introduction to La Trobe University (hereinafter called 'the University' or 'LTU') is given in Appendix A; the mission, values and objectives of AUQA are shown in Appendix B; membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix C; and a glossary of terms and abbreviations used in this Report is provided in Appendix D.

The Audit Process

AUQA bases its audits on each organisation's own objectives, together with the MCEETYA National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (hereinafter the National Protocols, which can be found at http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/mceetya_cop.htm). The major aim of the audit is to consider and review the procedures an organisation has in place to achieve and monitor its objectives. Full details of the AUQA audit process are available in the AUQA Audit Manual (which can be found at <http://www.auqa.edu.au>).

On 10 June 2004 LTU presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) to AUQA, along with 14 Appendices and 28 Supporting Documents. The Audit Panel met on 19 July 2004 to consider these materials and subsequently requested the auditee to supply additional items of information and to answer a number of questions in advance of the audit. The University responded fully and helpfully to these requests.

The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to LTU on 30 July 2004. During that visit, they discussed the additional documentation and answers to questions requested of the University in advance, and reviewed the suitability of arrangements for the various onshore and offshore Audit Visits.

The main Audit Visit took place at the Bundoora campus over 30 August to 2 September. Prior to that, the Audit Panel decided, given the regional and, increasingly, international nature of the University, to also send delegations to the Bendigo campus (on 19 August 2004), the City campus (on 27 August 2004) and a sample of the University's partners in Hong Kong and Vietnam (10-13 August 2004). The full scope of University activities were subject to audit. In order to obtain a broad view of the University's academic activities, and yet also ensure issues were considered in sufficient depth, the Audit Panel selected a representative sample of schools for particular consideration in terms of materials and interviewees.

In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 315 people during the Audit Visit, including senior management, academic and general staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students and external stakeholders, including LTU Council members, offshore partners, representatives of business, industry, and professional organisations and the community, including from secondary schools and alumni. During the main Audit Visit at the Bundoora campus, one panel member also undertook 12 *impromptu* interviews with staff in situ. Sessions were also available for any member of the LTU community to meet the Audit Panel and one person took advantage of this opportunity.

This Audit Report relates to the situation current at the time of the main (and last) Audit Visit, which ended on 2 September 2004, 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 LTU, as well as information gained through interviews, discussions and observations. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the University's activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

The Audit Report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations 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 unsuitable approach, a faulty deployment, or a lack of success in relation to a stated goal, and which in AUQA's view is particularly significant. They indicate matters in need of attention, possibly with suggestions for action. Where such matters have already been identified by LTU, with adequate evidence, they are termed 'affirmations'. It is acknowledged that recommendations and affirmations in AUQA Audit Reports may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for institutions. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise these recommendations and affirmations, and recognises that it is the responsibility of LTU to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

As usual, AUQA has based the structure of this Audit Report on the Performance Portfolio submitted by the University. Sections in the Performance Portfolio on Academic Support and Services and Infrastructure Support have been merged in this report for convenience, and the section on Internationalisation has been relocated in order to better cluster the sections. Other minor variances from the structure of the Performance Portfolio reflect the topics selected by the Audit Panel for audit.

Note on terminology: the University is transitioning from the term 'subject' to the term 'unit', as a result of a change in its Student Information System. AUQA has, in most cases, used the term 'subject' in this Report only because it appeared to have the widest application at the time of the audit.

The Audit Panel would like to extend its thanks to LTU for the highly professional and constructive manner with which it engaged in this important process.

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. It should be noted that, in addition, other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Introduction to Findings

La Trobe University undertook a thorough self-review in preparing for its audit by AUQA. This review was underpinned by the commitment of Council, senior management and staff. It comprised a broad range of evaluative activities within the University. This self-review was both illuminating and useful. It is an encouraging sign of the University's commitment to quality enhancement that by the time of the AUQA Audit Visit, the University was already acting upon its own findings.

LTU is a complex institution comprising five faculties, eight campuses – many of which were the consequence of institutional integrations – and a number of domestic and offshore partnerships. As a comprehensive, multi-campus University, with strong expectations placed upon it by the regional and metropolitan communities it serves, it is essential that the University has a strong sense of self. The audit occurred at a time of significant change for the University, especially concerning its Bendigo campus which has traditionally not been well integrated with the University's main campus at Bundoora in terms of systems or academic culture. A review of the University's regional presence noted that LTU is the largest provider of higher education places in regional Victoria. It is apparent that the University, as a whole, has yet to embrace a clear and strongly held idea of the implications of this position. This lack of shared identity constrains the University in terms of regional engagement and institution-wide acceptance of policies.

That said, there is clearly a renewed effort to address this issue and a shared sense of optimism throughout the University's internal and external communities. Moreover, there is a new and improved approach to University planning. The University's current Strategic Plan, which identifies regional and community engagement as areas for attention, provides it with a clear and tangible sense of direction, and is well accepted by the staff. At intra-University levels, however, there is considerable scope for improvement in establishing and implementing a coordinated and useful system of planning and review (incorporating risk management). Similarly, there is scope for a University-wide framework for policy management and greater use of benchmarking in most areas of activity. These three quality improvements will be particularly important for LTU as a devolved, multi-campus organisation.

The policies and processes in place for assuring the quality of LTU's courses are basically sound. The degree of flexibility in their implementation is currently broad in order to encompass the University's activities across campuses, faculties and countries. This is most notable in the extent of tolerance of variances within a subject, by way of 'subject instances' (ie iterations of a subject taught in different modes, locations and semesters). It will now be important for the University, having encompassed all aspects of its academic activities, to tighten these policies in order to ensure greater consistency of course and subject quality. Expanding the University's 'subject packs' initiative, involving comprehensive teaching and assessment materials for a subject, could greatly assist in this regard.

The issue of consolidating and integrating course and teaching activity across the campuses is particularly challenging. The University has started to respond well to this issue. Staff within the field of nursing, for example, have engaged in a systematic process of discussing and integrating subjects and teaching practices across the campuses, and this may provide a blueprint for further such efforts.

Measurements of teaching quality suggest that LTU is performing comparably to other Australian universities. As an area of professional activity, teaching is supported by the Academic Development Unit (ADU) and monitored through a Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) scheme. There are

opportunities for improvement in this area. For example, the SET is under-utilised; time and assistance for teaching preparation is sometimes inadequate and many staff believe that teaching is undervalued in the promotion process.

The University has been operating teaching programs overseas for more than a decade and has had a number of successful experiences in this area. It is apparent that these were largely due to the commitment and efforts of dedicated staff and well-chosen partners. The University cannot yet claim to have a total framework in place that effectively assures the quality of its offshore activities. For example, the Library and Information Technology Services need to be incorporated into planning and service delivery for offshore programs to ensure that students offshore are able to have adequate access to LTU resources and services. However, there are steps being taken to improve these activities, such as introducing (or, in some cases, reinforcing) the Quality Assurance of Subjects scheme, consolidating offshore admissions processes to ensure consistent application of standards, and implementing updated external programs manuals.

LTU has a strong tradition of research and a sound approach to intellectual property management. There are clear past and present examples of research excellence of which the University can be proud. What is less clear is the extent to which the strategic planning processes for research are driving research resourcing activities. Currently, the research activities of the University, and support for those activities, are very uneven across the campuses, the faculties and those areas of research that operate independently of the faculties. A comprehensive strategic approach would be beneficial.

The systems in place for research training are basically sound. One area where there is obvious potential for improvement is resourcing for higher degree research students, which varies considerably across the University beyond the levels of variance which might be expected for different disciplines.

The University demonstrates a strong commitment to supporting its students. This is manifest through the positive relationship with representative student organisations, proactive and targeted support for onshore international students, and through the provision of a range of student services. One area sampled by the Audit Panel, Student Counselling Services, demonstrated well developed quality assurance and enhancement practices.

LTU has been transitioning from a traditional 'personnel' orientation to staff management to a more strategic human resource management focus. It has a number of University-wide systems for monitoring and aiding staff performance and development, some of which are not yet fully embedded but are proving useful where implemented. In particular, the University has well developed systems in respect of progression for general staff, workload management and equity. The University may need to consider its application rates for academic staff promotion, which appear to be low.

The organisational climate at LTU is extremely well served by an Ombudsman's Office. Available to both staff and students, this office has proven very effective in helping to resolve a range of problems without unnecessary escalation. It may be an exemplar for the Australian higher education sector.

LTU is a University well connected to a wide range of communities through a number of means such as Regional Advisory Boards, Course Advisory Committees and collaborative research projects. In some cases, these means may constitute excellent role models for other areas in the University where they are less effectively deployed. There is an opportunity to better coordinate these efforts, promote good practices in this area and to ensure that risks are appropriately managed through community engagement policies and promotion of good practices.

The University's Library has, largely through its national networks, a well-established practice of benchmarking, surveying clients and developing quality improvement strategies. Its quality of customer service is impressive. An area for improvement relates to the extent to which the Library is involved, at a suitably early stage and in sufficient detail, in proposals for new subjects and courses both onshore and offshore.

Coordinating design, delivery and usage of information technology across the University is a challenge for LTU. In particular, its efforts at achieving high quality teaching through new technologies would benefit from a considered, coordinated strategic and operational approach. Support for teaching staff is available, but it is not reaching all who require it. The University is in the early stages of using teaching technologies, and so there is an opportunity to address this issue before it becomes a major concern. The establishment by the University of a new Chief Information Officer position is designed to address such issues.

In broad summary, the University has in place systems appropriate to the fulfilment of its mission “to be internationally recognised as a major contributor in the scholarly discovery, preservation, transmission and application of knowledge”. There are substantial areas requiring attention, but the University is demonstrating a renewed and constructive concern for continuous quality improvement. AUQA trusts that this Report will provide further impetus for those improvement efforts.

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

Areas where AUQA commends the practices of La Trobe University are as follows:

1. AUQA commends La Trobe University for developing a new strategic planning process that enjoys the support and involvement of the University’s internal community. 14
2. AUQA commends La Trobe University for supporting its budget model with appropriate training programs and support for budget centre managers. 16
3. AUQA commends La Trobe University for undertaking a thorough and constructive self-review and for demonstrating a commitment to following-up on the findings. 18
4. AUQA commends La Trobe University for the manner in which those involved with nursing education are collaborating across campuses to achieve full integration and consistency in their academic offerings, providing an exemplar for other disciplines to follow. 22
5. AUQA commends La Trobe University for its ‘subject packs’, which provide a comprehensive set of subject and teaching resources to promote good practice and help ensure consistency across subject instances. 22
6. AUQA commends La Trobe University for examples of course advisory committees being used very effectively in enhancing the appropriateness of courses to the needs of relevant external communities while maintaining academic standards. 25
7. AUQA commends La Trobe University for identifying the need for improvements in research outcomes in the Graduate School of Management and responding with strategies which have proved to be very successful. 29
8. AUQA commends La Trobe University for an effective system of postgraduate coordinators, which is appreciated by postgraduate students and demonstrates genuine commitment by the University to student learning. 34
9. AUQA commends La Trobe University for a well-developed system for managing intellectual property and licensing. 35
10. AUQA commends La Trobe University for maintaining strong linkages with its campuses’ local communities through Regional Advisory Boards. 38

11. AUQA commends La Trobe University for being proactive in identifying and responding to the support needs of onshore international students, for example via the ESOS Advisory Group.....	41
12. AUQA commends La Trobe University for some good examples of positive and well-managed relationships with offshore partners which help enable the University to provide quality education to students overseas.	42
13. AUQA commends La Trobe University for its proactive and quality-conscious Counselling Services, which exemplify good practice in student services.	48
14. AUQA commends La Trobe University for success in its efforts to create an equitable working environment.	52
15. AUQA commends La Trobe University for its successful Ombudsman’s office, which has proven to be effective in supporting the entire University community.....	53

Affirmations

Areas where AUQA affirms the need identified by La Trobe University for improvements to its practices are as follows:

1. AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to concentrate on developing an inclusive organisational culture across all its campuses, and especially between the Bundoora and Bendigo campuses, in order to successfully pursue its strategic goals.	12
2. AUQA affirms La Trobe University’s efforts to develop an integrated system of planning and reviews that permeates all significant budget centres of the institution, and to provide improved support for managers with planning responsibilities.	15
3. AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to develop a more systematic approach to identifying and assessing strategic and operational risks and incorporating the findings into the planned management of the University.	16
4. AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to improve the management information available to managers at various levels to assist with the execution of their planning, decision-making and performance monitoring responsibilities.	17
5. AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to ensure that uptake of its Graduate Attributes scheme is systematic throughout the University.	20
6. AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to ensure that the Quality Assurance of Subjects system is implemented consistently throughout the University, including for its online and offshore courses.	24
7. AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to provide systematic support for professional development in learning and teaching for sessional and full-time academic staff.	26
8. AUQA affirms La Trobe University’s plans to promote greater use of its Student Evaluation of Teaching survey, but particularly so that more staff will seek and act upon student feedback on their teaching through a system that may provide for benchmarking and professional support.	27
9. AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to develop a clear position on what it means to be a regional university and incorporate this position into its strategic and operational planning processes.	37

10. AUQA affirms La Trobe University's decision to centralise coordination of offshore international student enrolment for now, in order to ensure that standards are implemented consistently.41
11. AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to increase its attention to Indigenous students as an issue of relevance to the whole University community.49

Recommendations

Areas where AUQA recommends improvements to the practices of La Trobe University are as follows:

1. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University establish formal mechanisms for regularly reviewing the performance of the Vice-Chancellor and the Council.10
2. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University develop a comprehensive framework for the development, approval, dissemination, monitoring and review of policies that takes into account appropriate delegations to faculties and campuses.19
3. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University review the level of delegation to the coordinators of different 'subject instances', with a view to establishing systems that will ensure greater consistency across subject instances.21
4. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University review its credit point policy with a view to establishing a standard annual full-time credit point load applicable to all programs, including combined degree programs.23
5. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University adopt an alternative acronym to DBA for the Diploma in Business Administration in order to avoid confusion with the Doctor of Business Administration.23
6. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University enhance its assessment policy in light of best practice within the Australian higher education sector.25
7. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University ensure that all major research activities, centres and initiatives are brought within a single, comprehensive research strategy.31
8. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University develop a comprehensive framework for explicitly linking research with teaching and curricula, and establish means for monitoring the effectiveness of this framework.31
9. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University establish monitoring systems to ensure that its policies and processes for postgraduate supervisors and supervision are implemented consistently.33
10. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University review the adequacy of its resourcing of higher degree research students.34
11. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University connect its Research and Development Parks more closely to the research capabilities of the University in order to maximise commercialisation opportunities and the potential of this resource to contribute to the overall research effort of the University.36
12. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University establishes a mechanism for ensuring that moderation is appropriately and consistently implemented for all applicable offshore courses, and that results for comparable onshore and offshore courses are considered as one means for determining equivalence.45

- 13. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University fully integrate Library and Information Technology Services considerations into the overall management of offshore activities in order to ensure that offshore students receive an equivalent level of service in support of their education.....45
- 14. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University reconsider the application of its English language entrance standards in light of the overall demands of the teaching, reading materials and assessment methods.46
- 15. AUQA recommends that La Trobe University develop and implement a university-wide strategic approach to the design, implementation, growth and evaluation of online learning management systems and video-conferencing.....57

1 THE INSTITUTIONAL SETTING

1.1 *The University*

The primary mission of La Trobe University (LTU) is:

The University seeks to be internationally recognised as a major contributor in the scholarly discovery, preservation, transmission and application of knowledge.

The three objectives that stem from this mission are set out in the Strategic Plan 2004-2008 as follows:

1. *to produce from a diversified intake graduates capable of meeting the various needs of society*
2. *to be an internationally recognised centre for quality teaching, scholarship, training and research*
3. *to maintain a successful outreach program*

The University has recently embarked upon a strategic repositioning in which it recognises its role and responsibilities as the University with the largest regional operations in Victoria. This is a major issue which is not obviously reflected in the mission of the University. This matter is discussed later (section 5).

1.2 *Governance*

The governing authority of the University is the Council, chaired by the Chancellor. The Audit Panel met a number of Council members and considered a range of documentation pertaining to their role and the execution of their responsibilities. In many cases these responsibilities are exercised through committees of Council, notably the Academic Board (which makes recommendations to Council); Finance and Resources Committee (section 2.3); and the Equity, Access and Personal Welfare Committee (EAPWC – section 8.7).

On balance, the Audit Panel believes that the Council demonstrates due regard for its responsibilities, is committed to maintaining a distinction between governance and management responsibilities, and is proactive in enhancing the University's capacity to achieve its mission.

The Vice-Chancellor and deans regularly present to Council. This helps to ensure that Council is aware of issues throughout the University and has the opportunity to question deans directly on matters of interest.

Council has attended to quality assurance and quality enhancement in the governance activities of the University. A Review Committee was established in March 2002 to ensure that the governance structures – committees and key officers – were effectively discharging their governance responsibilities and were suitably supported in this effort. A number of enhancements arose from this review (and consequential developments), most notably a new Corporate Governance and Audit Committee which ensures that the University places an increased emphasis on corporate governance, risk management (section 2.2) and a range of external accountabilities.

Council has yet to embrace contemporary practices of accountability and quality enhancement for its own governance practices. The Council does not have a formal process for setting objectives and reviewing the performance of the Vice-Chancellor. This responsibility is currently exercised

through a constructive relationship between the Chancellor and the Vice-Chancellor and through regular reporting to Council meetings by the Vice-Chancellor. The Audit Panel suggests that while these are positive and useful methods, good practice in contemporary governance would also require a more specific and formal approach to guiding the work of the chief executive officer.

Similarly, the Council has no formal mechanism for self-review. Some members indicated their awareness of self-reviews as an increasingly-used practice among governing bodies and suggested that the Council may consider such a tool. The Audit Panel supports this view.

Recommendation 1

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University establish formal mechanisms for regularly reviewing the performance of the Vice-Chancellor and the Council.

1.3 Management

LTU has a matrix-type management structure. In addition to policy and service portfolios led by executives, and faculties led by deans, each campus has a leader responsible for local operations. A Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee (VCAC) meets and includes campus leaders and deans. The VCAC meets five times per year, and it was suggested that there is, therefore, limited potential for this group to do more than act as an occasional information exchange forum. There is a perception amongst deans that VCAC concentrates primarily on regional and campus issues (some campuses being very small operational units), and that an additional forum is required that is principally for deans and concentrates on faculty issues. This may be appropriate, although the Audit Panel notes that the University has not yet fully developed its role as a significant regional operator (section 5), and that any focus on faculty issues will still need to take this into consideration.

The Audit Panel was advised that there is no particular induction or support for persons in senior roles (although they can access the AVCC Leadership Program and various internal courses in areas such as equity training). Given the significant realignment of the Bendigo campus in which the University is currently engaged (section 1.4.1), and the pervasive nature required of this realignment if it is to be successful, the Audit Panel suggests that it is timely for leadership training programs in change management and organisational development to be introduced. The University, through its Human Resources Division (section 8.1), has recently been canvassing views on this issue.

1.3.1 Quality Management

An Academic Quality Assurance Committee, chaired by the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic Board) and including the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Quality Enhancement) (PVC(QE)), has been established to consider quality assurance reports from Faculties. It reports to the Vice-Chancellor but maintains communication with the Academic Board through the Chair.

The University has also established two other groups, convened by the PVC(QE) to help develop, implement and monitor improved quality assurance processes throughout the University. The first of these is the Academic Quality Reference Group (AQRG), which comprises nominees from each faculty who have been delegated responsibility for the oversight of their faculty's quality assurance initiatives. The Management Information Unit (section 2.4), Library and Academic Development Unit (ADU) are also represented. The second group, the Administrative Quality Advisory Committee, comprises the faculty registrars and the heads of the key administrative units. It performs a corresponding role to that of the AQRG.

These groups have been predominantly focused on preparation for the AUQA Audit and are now shifting to a longer-term focus designed to ensure that the momentum generated through the audit process is maintained and that the improvement opportunities identified will be acted upon (section 2.6).

1.4 Organisational Scope and Structure

LTU has a unique profile and culture. The organisation of LTU may be characterised by two key factors: a history of institutional mergers resulting in a multi-campus institution with various traditions across its campuses; and a high level of autonomy at the faculty level.

At the time of the Audit Visit, the University comprised five faculties: Health Sciences; Humanities and Social Sciences; Science, Technology and Engineering; Law and Management; and Regional Development (but note section 1.4.1). These faculties collectively accommodate 23 schools. Many of the academic quality assurance responsibilities are devolved to faculties and schools, and these are discussed throughout the Report (eg sections 3.2.4 and 4.5.4).

LTU now comprises eight campuses throughout the state of Victoria (see Appendix A for a full listing), which is the greatest number of regional campuses of any Victorian university. For this reason, the Audit Panel took particular interest in the multi-campus management issues. These arise throughout this Report (eg sections 5 and 9) and a number of campus-specific comments are made below in this section. The Audit Panel selected the main campus at Bundoora and the Bendigo campus (section 1.4.1) as its audit sample. A fact-finding visit was also made to the City campus (section 1.4.2).

From a quality assurance and quality enhancement perspective, a key issue for a multi-campus university is the adequacy of communication systems for disseminating, *inter alia*, policy and best practices, and for ensuring consistent implementation of policies and processes. Regarding the particular LTU issue of regionalisation (discussed further in section 5), the ability of the University to integrate with regional communities and identify and respond to the associated opportunities and responsibilities requires involvement from the whole University, not only from those aspects of the University already operating at the regional campuses.

The VCAC, which comprises executives, deans and campus heads, is designed to assist with this challenge. However, the Audit Panel found that the strategic and operational opportunities and responsibilities of being a multi-campus university do not feature strongly in the consciousness of many parts of the University. The cross-campus focus of Schools is generally light, especially if they are not already operating on more than one campus. There are exceptions to this which could be used as exemplars for the rest of the University (one of these, nursing, is explored further in section 3.2.1).

The Audit Panel found that there is no discernable culture of communication that integrates these devolved structures and decentralised campuses into a single, coherent university. Indeed, it is apparent that LTU has yet to fully detail its special identity (most notably, the University has yet to fully embrace its regional role – section 5). There is an opportunity for the University to specifically design a broad system of communication, incorporating structure, decision making processes and communication technologies, that integrates the University at all levels into a common culture (still allowing, of course, for appropriate subcultures at local and disciplinary levels). The University has identified this major challenge as one of importance. LTU's risk management exercise suggested that the extent of devolution within the organisation generates risks of inconsistent interpretation and implementation of policy. The University is attempting to address it through a number of strategies, most notably a realignment of the Bendigo campus (discussed further in the following section).

Affirmation 1

AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to concentrate on developing an inclusive organisational culture across all its campuses, and especially between the Bundoora and Bendigo campuses, in order to successfully pursue its strategic goals.

1.4.1 Bendigo Campus

The Bendigo campus became a part of LTU in 1989 as a result of a government-directed merger. This campus, via various incarnations, has a 150-year history resulting in a strong local heritage. The part of its history which encompasses the relationship between the Bendigo and Bundoora campuses has not been smooth. This has been partly because of a strong desire by some in the Bendigo community to have an independent university presence and partly because the University did not always effectively engage with the Bendigo campus and the Bendigo community. However, early in 2004, a new concerted effort was made to bridge the divide, culminating in an agreement, approved by LTU Council in March, to move ahead with a strategy for closer relationships. The outlook is now considerably more promising.

At the time of the audit, the academic activities at this campus were incorporated into a single multidisciplinary Faculty for Regional Development (FRD). Central to the March agreement is the disbanding of the multidisciplinary FRD and the repositioning of its constituent disciplines into their University-wide disciplinary faculties. This also has the effect of separating out the two roles of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Bendigo) and dean of the main faculty at that campus. A second key decision in the agreement is to headquarter the Faculty of Education at Bendigo. In this way, the campus does not lose the status and significance of hosting a faculty.

The net effect of the realignment is that all faculties and schools must take greater cognisance of the regionalisation of the University (section 5.1.1).

The March agreement is also designed to address a perceived imbalance in the manner in which campuses are treated from a planning and resourcing perspective. Many staff and students at Bendigo perceive that their campus has received a lower priority in resourcing than the Bundoora campus. Numerous examples were given in support of this perception. The Audit Panel was able to verify some of these (such as local decisions to cancel tutoring in certain subjects as a result of resource constraints, and others which will be commented on later in this report) indicating that there are real issues to address. Other claims were not able to be verified, suggesting that the perception itself is an issue requiring attention in order to maximise the prospect of a successful realignment.

Selected figures from the University indicate that per student spending is higher at the Bendigo campus than at the Bundoora Campus. This is not a complete response to the perceived concerns, given that there are many contextual factors to consider (such as the different relative starting positions of each campus and variances in economy of scale given their different sizes). It does, however, indicate that the University has been attempting to address resourcing issues for the Bendigo campus. There is an opportunity for the University to now translate this effort into a perception of equitable treatment.

Overall, the current momentum towards closer integration through realignment is a positive development and is proceeding well. The Bendigo Delegation of the Audit Panel met staff and students who appeared fully aware of, and comfortable with, the process. It was apparent from the Audit Panel's interviews and observations that the Bendigo campus community retains a sense of vulnerability as a result of the history of the relationship between Bendigo and Bundoora campuses. Consequently, there is still work to do in terms of shifting the staff cultures at Bundoora and Bendigo towards a more inclusive orientation. In particular, staff at Bundoora

have yet to fully appreciate and embrace the opportunities that may be generated through the realignment. Deans are aware of this challenge and their leadership will be essential in fulfilling the new vision.

1.4.2 City Campus

The University previously had physical premises in Abbotsford and Carlton. Six years ago these premises were released and a new city presence established in Franklin Street, Melbourne. A member of the Audit Panel visited this City campus and met campus leaders.

The purpose of the City campus is, firstly, to ensure that the University is responsive to the demands of a full fee paying student market seeking short courses in the city. In addition, it provides programs to nearly 350 students in Public Health and 40 in Law and Management. The teaching staff are drawn from other campuses.

Secondly, the City campus provides a venue for location-sensitive research activities. It currently accommodates the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society – a large, award-winning research centre of about 50 staff in the Faculty of Health Sciences (section 4.3) – and three smaller research centres: the Palliative Care Unit, the Centre for the Study of Professions and the Conflict Resolution Research Centre.

The Library operates an inter-campus, next-day loans service to the City campus. This appears to adequately meet current levels of demand, although the Audit Panel notes that it did not meet students of the City campus with whom it could cross-check this issue.

Thirdly, the campus operates as a commercial space venture to help fund its educational service role. The University benchmarked similar enterprises at other satellite campuses and has developed a useful website in response, emphasising the quality of facilities and service.

The campus, which is centrally-funded as well as generating external revenue, has a strategic plan and an annual operational plan including key performance indicators (KPIs). The plans and annual reports are primarily facility-oriented, which reflects the role of the campus in servicing the needs of LTU's faculties. To that end, City campus leaders meet with faculty registrars at least annually to discuss issues of mutual interest. Also, students are surveyed as to their satisfaction with the campus (and the campus staff are often available for direct communication) and the results also feed into the City campus planning process.

Campuses are, as well as venues for teaching, locations where students can meet both socially and to discuss their learning. To that end, the University provides a small, but adequate, computer laboratory and has entered into a relationship with the La Trobe University Postgraduate Association (LUPA) by which lounge facilities are made available and appropriately maintained.

In summary, the University's City campus appears to be an appropriate strategic response to a set of identified needs, and is fulfilling its purpose satisfactorily.

2 PLANNING AND REVIEW

The University's strategic direction for management in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008 includes:

To further embed a quality framework to underpin all operations of the University.

This section attends to the quality framework, and specifically the University's planning (including determining its academic profile), management information, budgeting and review systems and the policy framework.

2.1 Planning

The University launched its new Strategic Plan 2004-2008 a couple of months before the Audit Visit. As such, the Audit Panel looked to that document for the statements of intention from the University, but looked to the previous Strategic Plan 2002-2006 in terms of assessing the extent to which the University had demonstrated a capability of achieving its targeted outcomes. The new plan was introduced earlier than anticipated because of changes in federal policy (the 'Nelson Reforms' of 2003-4). This also provided the University with an opportunity to improve its strategic planning process.

Over the past two years the University embarked upon a new approach to strategic planning, recognising the scope for improvement. It has created a new position of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Strategic Development) and has developed a method of strategic planning that involves widespread consultation within the University. The new approach has brought benefits. The new Strategic Plan 2004-2008 is positively regarded within the University community. It is well-structured, comprising, for each major topic, a strategic direction, strategies, outcomes and some definable targets. For the most part these focus on growth, although there are some targets oriented to quality improvement. A number of these are referred to throughout this Audit Report.

Commendation 1

AUQA commends La Trobe University for developing a new strategic planning process that enjoys the support and involvement of the University's internal community.

The Audit Panel notes that the new strategic planning process, while a significant improvement on previous approaches, still does not involve adequate consultation with external stakeholders. For a university with a significant regional presence, this is an area requiring further attention. It may be that the University's Regional Advisory Boards (section 5.2) could play a significant role in this regard.

At lower levels (campuses, faculties, central administrative areas), the planning processes are less well developed. While plans of various forms exist in many areas, they are of highly variable form and utility. In some areas the planning process is clearly not highly valued by staff as a useful exercise. For example, although most schools do have both strategic and operational plans, some contend that as the majority of resources allocated to schools are regarded as fixed, there is limited scope and incentive for schools to engage in meaningful planning.

Faculties are assigned targets and, within that, campus sub-targets. Schools have a common set of KPIs. However, this is a very limited approach to planning.

The Bendigo campus is about to face a particular challenge. As mentioned earlier (section 1.4.1), the University proposes to close the Faculty of Regional Development and to allocate the

academic activities at the Bendigo campus to their disciplinary faculties. As such, the faculties will need to be very aware of their multi-campus nature in order to ensure that campuses such as Bendigo receive adequate planning and resourcing attention. Also, Bendigo campus itself, in the absence of a single, dedicated faculty structure, will need a new approach to campus planning in order to ensure that it is able to operate effectively as a coherent campus of the University.

The University is aware that it needs to align its lower level plans with the Strategic Plan in order to ensure cohesive and coordinated efforts throughout the University. The University's Risk Ownership Report exercise (section 2.2) shows that operational planning is an area of risk, with inadequate alignment of faculty plans with the Strategic Plan, inadequate resource plans and poor planning communication. As a result of the institutional self-review (trial audit), the University Secretary has sought to strengthen the alignment of plans in the central administrative areas to the University's Strategic Plan 2004-2008. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Strategic Development) has also been working with the faculties and schools to ensure alignment of their plans to the Strategic Plan. This work has included use of such tools as basic templates, briefing sessions and a requirement for annual reports by Deans to Council.

The Audit Panel endorses these findings and responses. The challenge is extensive. A comprehensive framework for planning and aligned reviews (section 2.6) is clearly being developed, but there is still more to do. Heads of schools and managers of administrative units need not only to know precisely what is expected of them and why, but also to have assistance with undertaking planning in a manner which will add value to their areas. It is encouraging that providing guidance on planning is a priority for the University. These efforts could be further enhanced with, for example, assistance for managers in environmental assessment techniques, planning methods and exemplar plans for (in particular) faculties and schools

Affirmation 2

AUQA affirms La Trobe University's efforts to develop an integrated system of planning and reviews that permeates all significant budget centres of the institution, and to provide improved support for managers with planning responsibilities.

2.2 Risk Management

The University maintains that it has been risk-conscious for many years, but that its risk management strategy is in the early stages (with the exception of occupational health and safety: section 8.8). Numerous examples of inadequate risk management practices were identified during the audit. Some examples related to reputational risk, such as the lack of guidance or checking for media releases which can be (and are) generated from any part of the University. Other examples related to the inherent potential for research to generate political risks, such as the lack of involvement from the Public Affairs Office in the launch of the Refugee Health Research Centre (section 4.3). Another example related to the lack of business continuity planning for teaching students in campuses that lack a critical mass of academic staff for particular subjects.

In 2004 the University engaged external consultants to undertake an independent assessment of operational risks. The resulting Risk Ownership Report (June 2004) provides a comprehensive assessment indicating 28 areas where the residual risk (ie after taking into consideration the University's extant risk control arrangements) is 'high' or 'extreme'. This is a very helpful start in developing and maintaining a risk register.

The Audit Panel referred to this document frequently in the course of its deliberations. At times it reinforces the University's conclusions in its own Performance Portfolio, and at other times

these two documents are inconsistent. Where appropriate, both documents are referred to in this Audit Report.

It is not yet apparent that the results of risk assessment exercises, which raise important issues requiring (at times urgent) attention, are incorporated into the University's overall planning framework.

Affirmation 3

AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to develop a more systematic approach to identifying and assessing strategic and operational risks and incorporating the findings into the planned management of the University.

The establishment by Council of a Corporate Governance and Audit Committee (section 1.2) is likely to ensure that the University now gives greater attention to risk management.

2.3 Budgeting

The University's budget is overseen by the Finance and Resources Committee of Council. LTU has developed a budgeting process that is aligned with the strategic and operational plans. The budget is based on a three-year horizon. For the most part, the process involves consideration of submissions from budget centres and allocations based largely on a standard allocation formula.

The University uses an 80:20 ratio for staffing to other expenditure. This ratio was approved as policy by the University Council. Performance against this objective is reported quarterly to the Finance Committee. In 2004, the majority of academic budget centres are within 2% of this ratio – for the first time since it was introduced five years ago. However, there appears to be minimal consideration of disciplinary differences in applying this formula, despite a view held by senior persons that faculty variances could be justified. This is one example which suggests that the role of deans in debating faculty resourcing policies is light, and lends strength to the view that a forum for deans to meet with senior executives (section 1.3) could be useful.

The University provides, centrally and locally, a strong level of training and ongoing support to budget centre managers and administrators in managing and monitoring their budgets. This level of support is appreciated and helps to ensure effective management of budget centres.

Commendation 2

AUQA commends La Trobe University for supporting its budget model with appropriate training programs and support for budget centre managers.

The University recognises that alignment of resource allocations with plans (at both strategic and operational levels) is a complex and ongoing challenge. It is responding to this challenge, in the first instance, at the strategic level by committing a sum of nearly \$6.5m specifically dedicated to initiatives in support of the Strategic Plan.

Capital aspects of budgeting are dealt with through the Capital Plan (a subset of the University's Operational Plan) and overseen by the Capital Management Advisory Committee. Some comments on capital issues are made later in this report (section 9.4).

2.4 Management Information

LTU recognises that the development of effective plans and the ability to monitor progress against agreed plans requires appropriate management information being regularly provided to various levels of management. To date, and with the exception of financial reporting as mentioned in the preceding section, the University does not appear to be meeting this need in a

satisfactory manner. The Management Information Unit (MIU) has undertaken a project to produce more comprehensive and accessible planning and performance data. This is particularly important given that the University uses KPIs to set targets and track progress for faculties and schools. At the time of the Audit Visit, the benefits of this project were not yet evident.

Affirmation 4

AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to improve the management information available to managers at various levels to assist with the execution of their planning, decision-making and performance monitoring responsibilities.

Methods for supporting the development and linking of plans throughout the University may need to be based on more than common KPIs. As part of the planning process there is scope for further benchmarking activities throughout the University. Such benchmarking could be facilitated, in many instances, through the MIU. A number of specific suggestions for benchmarking (some of which affirm the University's own intentions) are included throughout this Audit Report (eg sections 3.2.6, 4.1, 6.6, 8.5 and 9.3.2).

2.5 Academic Profile

The University states in the Portfolio that its defining features "include the maintenance of a balance between vocational/professional and traditional/basic of approximately 55/45". This ratio is now included in the University's Strategic Plan.

There is confusion amongst staff at all levels as to how the mix is intended to be interpreted. This is particularly apparent amongst senior academic managers and at the Bendigo campus, which is orienting its academic profile towards a more vocational emphasis.

The mix within each faculty will be naturally skewed one way more than the other as a consequence of the faculty's constituent disciplines. As such, the mix is intended to apply across the University as a whole, rather than within each faculty. The Audit Panel explored whether the University has central systems in place to ensure that this balance can be 'maintained'. Other than a level of awareness of the ratio requirement, it found no such systems in place. For example, there was no apparent method for projecting professional/vocational education and traditional/basic education student enrolment figures as a consequence of new program proposals. Also, it does not apply to onshore (or offshore) international students, who are targeted to comprise 20% of the total student population. Moreover, the ratio is rendered vague because of the difficulty in classifying certain subjects as either professional/vocational or traditional/basic.

The University needs to either develop a means for giving effect to this strategic guideline or consider abandoning or revising it.

2.6 Reviews

The University undertook a comprehensive self-review in preparation for its audit by AUQA. This review process, which involved the University Council's oversight, was supported by staff and has been leveraged to positive effect, with a number of consequential improvements already evident. One of the outcomes of the review was the creation of a set of Quality Improvement Priorities (QIPs), which were made known to the University community in the Performance Portfolio and which have each been assigned to a senior manager for action.

If the University maintains a commitment to addressing the QIPs then it is clear that there will be significant benefits for staff and students. The Audit Panel noted that the QIPs have no specific milestones even when they lend themselves to specific outcomes. In order to ensure that the

quality management momentum is not lost, it would be useful to further develop the QIPs in the context of university planning, with the assignment of resources and time frames to each one.

The University established Quality Management Checklists for schools and administrative units to use when undertaking self-reviews. Each checklist comprises a number of self-evaluative questions based upon notions of good practice developed by the Office of the PVC(QE) in consultation with the AQRG and other senior staff. The questions are grounded in a quality cycle, focusing on planning, stakeholders, core activities, results and improvement processes.

Commendation 3

AUQA commends La Trobe University for undertaking a thorough and constructive self-review and for demonstrating a commitment to following-up on the findings.

The Audit Panel queried staff as to the utility of these checklists. It found that the checklists are considered to be thought-provoking and constructive, although it was clear that they were more valued by the administrative units than schools. Although designed initially to assist the University in preparation for the AUQA audit, the checklists are now expected to play an ongoing role in the University's continuous improvement efforts. The University intends to refine the checklists in light of experience in implementing them, with a view to enhancing their utility.

The University does not have an overall system of regular school and administrative unit reviews (although they are practiced in some faculties and areas, and courses are reviewed regularly: section 3.2.1). Also, it acknowledges that more systematic use of benchmarking will be beneficial both in contextualising current levels of performance, and in identifying improvement opportunities. The Audit Panel, therefore, supports the continued use of the checklists in some appropriate form, and suggests that the next iteration of these checklists incorporate more externally-benchmarked measures and practices. Also, it would be appropriate to align use of the checklists with a systemic planning cycle (see Affirmation 2) and content relevant to each administrative unit and school.

2.7 Policy Management

The University uses policies as a key mechanism for conveying requirements and expectations to staff and students about a range of issues including quality assurance. The Audit Panel considered the means by which policies are developed, approved, disseminated, implemented, monitored and reviewed.

The University's statutes and regulations are available on its legal services website, which is readily accessible and easy to use. In addition, policies and procedures relating to human resource management are disseminated through a consolidated, online manual (section 8.2). Beyond these two well-controlled policy repositories the policy situation is less effectively coordinated. This is, in part, because of lack of clarity about precisely what policies may be set at University-wide, campus, faculty, school or administrative unit levels, and what variances in implementation may be tolerated. Also, there are no clear policy management guidelines that comprehensively cover the issues mentioned above, such as policy needs analysis, best practice templates for policy documentation, systematic monitoring for consistent implementation and periodic review of policy effectiveness.

Examples of inconsistencies are presented throughout this Report. The Audit Panel concludes that, bearing in mind the challenges of LTU's organisational structure (section 1.4), such guidelines could be a particularly useful component of the University's quality management system.

Recommendation 2

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University develop a comprehensive framework for the development, approval, dissemination, monitoring and review of policies that takes into account appropriate delegations to faculties and campuses.

The University is aware of the potential for improvement in this area and has taken some steps in this direction. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) has recently undertaken a review of a range of academic policies with a view to ensuring greater consistency in their application between faculties. This valuable project could provide the momentum for the above recommendation to be given effect.

In terms of procedures, the University has a suite of procedures manuals covering a number of business processes such as finance, emergency management and the secretariat services. These are available online (some secured as appropriate) at a common site and, while they vary considerably in form and substance, provide helpful information to all staff.

3 LEARNING AND TEACHING

The University's strategic direction for learning and teaching in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008 is:

To maintain the commitment of the University to facilitating quality learning outcomes while ensuring that the discipline profile reflects a commitment to both traditional and emerging areas, taking account of changing student demand and labour force needs.

3.1 *Teaching and Learning Management and Planning*

The academic activities of the University fall within the policy governance of the Academic Board, which undertakes much of its responsibilities through its Academic Committee. Management responsibility for courses, teaching and learning rests with the DVC.

At the time of the Audit Visit, the University was working with a draft Teaching and Learning Plan. The University recognised the need to update its previous plan, and the Audit Panel encourages the University to complete the revision process so that faculties and schools may proceed in their own planning with certainty and direction.

3.1.1 Graduate Attributes

Graduate Attributes are a University-wide issue in the new Strategic Plan. There has been differential progress across the University on embedding them in curriculum and teaching practice, and it was too early for the Audit Panel to identify much progress on a university-wide basis. Indeed, some academic staff, from across campuses, were unable to articulate a University policy on graduate standards other than to note the need to comply, where appropriate, with professional accreditation requirements.

Affirmation 5

AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to ensure that uptake of its Graduate Attributes scheme is systematic throughout the University.

3.1.2 Inclusive Curriculum Project

The University is seeking to identify and remove any impediments for students that may be inherent in its courses and teaching methods. To that end, it has established an inclusive curriculum project with the purpose of ensuring that no group of the student population is disenfranchised in the learning process. An early priority has been trying to incorporate the concept into the course approval process.

As yet, the inclusive curriculum project has not provided demonstrable value to the University. This would appear to be largely because most staff are unaware of it. The University may wish to increase the profile of this positive initiative. It will also need to establish means for measuring its effectiveness (such as tracing benchmarked access, participation, retention and success figures) at an organisational level that will be sufficiently relevant to the academic staff concerned in order to encourage their attention.

3.2 *Subjects and Courses*

3.2.1 Approvals, Review and Equivalence

The course approvals process seems appropriate and typical of a research-intensive, teaching university. However, the guidelines require some discussion, as they are designed to allow a high level of variance in academic offerings. LTU is a multi-modal, multi-campus university that also offers units offshore with the support of partners. As such, it is frequently necessary for courses and their constituent subjects to be offered in multiple locations or via multiple modes in the same or overlapping time frames. This raises the potential for inconsistency in academic standards. The Audit Panel chose to explore the issue of equivalence of standards between courses and subjects, particularly entrance standards, teaching standards and student learning outcomes.

A particular concern is that one subject may be offered simultaneously in numerous 'subject instances' which may have different coordinators. Subject instance coordinators are permitted a level of autonomy that places the assurance of consistency of quality in jeopardy. For example, instance coordinators can choose their own teaching materials, textbooks and assessment schedules. The guidelines require the use of moderation between subject instances, although the form of moderation is at the discretion of the coordinators. It is clear that such moderation is not routinely practiced (one set of interviewees likened any such moderation to a comparison, by the subject instance coordinator, of practice against the subject outline). Indeed, it was evident through discussions with subject instance coordinators and teaching staff at different campuses and countries that there is sometimes little, if any, communication between the subject instance coordinators.

This 'loose' approach was, perhaps, initially necessary in order to bring academic activities at different locations within a single policy framework. The Audit Panel understands this argument, but could not determine that this position remains valid today. A consequence is that the University cannot verify the equivalence of standards across instances. Such verification is required not only by the Australian higher education framework, but was described as extremely important by the community representatives whom the Audit Panel and its Bendigo Delegation met.

Recommendation 3

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University review the level of delegation to the coordinators of different 'subject instances', with a view to establishing systems that will ensure greater consistency across subject instances.

The Audit Panel was repeatedly advised that there are no formal means used to compare entrance standards, teaching standards and student learning outcomes across subject instances, but rather that this is a matter of trusting the professionalism of academic staff. For example, moderation of student examinations across campuses is not necessarily undertaken. Courses are reviewed on cycles that vary from three to seven years, and the method for undertaking the reviews can vary considerably. As such, the course review system may not constitute an adequate quality assurance process for this issue. The University recognises an opportunity to improve this process, and the Academic Quality Assurance Committee (see section 1.3.1) may assist in this regard.

The Audit Panel does not suggest that deans, for example, are unaware of issues concerning consistency of courses and subjects. Examples were provided to the Audit Panel where faculties have identified and sought to address inconsistencies. However, the University would benefit from more systematic application of processes for ensuring consistent quality. The Audit Panel

accepts that much onus for quality of teaching and student learning rests on the professionalism of staff and on the ability and effort of the students, but does not accept that this, in itself, constitutes a sufficiently robust quality assurance system.

The Audit Panel learned of one course, the Bachelor of Nursing, where the entrance standard (ie the student entrance cut-off score) is lower at the Bendigo campus than at the Bundoora campus. This was explained as being a consequence of market demand. The University found, in some nursing subjects, that the average exam result for students at the Bendigo campus was about 5% lower than for students at the Bundoora campus. The Audit Panel was told that this may be attributable to the lower entrance standard at Bendigo. It may be helpful for the University to conduct a comparative analyses across the campuses of the relative degree of student progress in order to determine more accurately the impact of different entrance cut-off scores and the implications for teaching practice.

The students and staff are very aware of the difference in cut-off scores, with some suggesting that it indicated a lack of parity of esteem between the campuses. Some students reported that the University had not responded to student concerns about the considerably more limited range of placement options available to Bendigo campus students – with consequentially limited learning experiences – compared with the options available to students at the Bundoora campus.

In the case of nursing, this issue was being responded to in the context of a broader alignment and integration of courseware and teaching practice, which is being catalysed through the March agreement to realign the Bendigo campus (section 1.4.1). Indeed, nursing provides a particularly positive and constructive example of how to align and integrate offerings from similar disciplinary groups of staff at different campuses. Through joint curriculum review and development efforts they are achieving a consolidated and commonly shared approach to LTU's nursing education. The Audit Panel remains concerned that the evident disparity between nursing education at the Bendigo and Bundoora campuses is not yet fully resolved, but commends the University for the manner in which it is now pursuing this resolution.

Commendation 4

AUQA commends La Trobe University for the manner in which those involved with nursing education are collaborating across campuses to achieve full integration and consistency in their academic offerings, providing an exemplar for other disciplines to follow.

There were other, lesser examples of equivalence being actively attended to by committed staff at junior and senior levels. Nonetheless, there is clearly an opportunity for the University to address this issue at a systemic level. Currently, the policies, processes and guidelines seem to emphasise flexibility and do not ensure equivalence across subject instances and course instances.

One good practice was drawn to the Audit Panel's attention which does address this issue. In addition to the subject outlines, 'subject packs' (known also as 'unit packs' and various other terms) are increasingly being used by subject coordinators. These packs expand upon the subject outlines by including such additional information as teaching materials, assessment schedules and teaching notes. When used by all staff involved in teaching a course – including, where applicable, all subject instance coordinators – these packs have the potential to ensure consistency through embedding good practice.

Commendation 5

AUQA commends La Trobe University for its 'subject packs', which provide a comprehensive set of subject and teaching resources to promote good practice and help ensure consistency across subject instances.

3.2.2 Credit Points

The University introduced a credit point policy in two phases in 1997 and 2000. The Bendigo campus has not yet fully changed from its previous framework to the common credit point policy. This is further evidence that the University still has some way to go in resolving its multi-campus nature. The differences in frameworks come into sharp relief for students seeking mobility between various campuses and programs. The University is aware of this issue. Full implementation of the common credit point policy is a planned outcome of the realignment strategy (section 1.4.1).

One aim of the credit point policy was to ensure the workloads for students in the various courses were equitable. The policy of 120 credit points for a standard full-time annual load is confined to single degree programs. Combined degree programs are permitted to exceed this, in that combined degree students can only complete their programs in the advertised minimum time by taking an 'accelerated program' involving higher annual loads than their single degree peers. As a consequence, combined degree students face a workload and academic performance disadvantage that seems contrary to the equitable workload intent of the policy.

Recommendation 4

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University review its credit point policy with a view to establishing a standard annual full-time credit point load applicable to all programs, including combined degree programs.

3.2.3 Qualification Nomenclature

The Australian higher education system allows each self-accrediting institution to determine its own course nomenclature – and associated acronyms – although it is expected that terms like Bachelor, Master and Doctor will be applied consistently with the Australian Qualifications Framework. The Audit Panel considered the nomenclature used by LTU.

For the most part, the University is acting in accordance with expectations of Australian universities. However, one course was found which tests the limits of these expectations. The University's Diploma of Business Administration, which was approved through the University's normal processes for course approval, goes by the acronym DBA. The Audit Panel observed the use of this acronym on a range of marketing materials and internal documentation.

The acronym DBA is well-known within the Australian and international higher education systems as usually referring to the taught Doctor of Business Administration. LTU is very aware of this, as it has previously considered (but rejected) a proposal to establish such a doctoral program.

This is a matter of particular sensitivity, as a large proportion of the University's enrolments in the Diploma of Business Administration are offshore students. The success of Australian higher education in international markets is particularly susceptible to any suggestions of misleading promotion.

The Audit Panel formed the view that the University's current use of the acronym DBA to refer to an undergraduate diploma is inappropriate vis-à-vis Australian higher education standards. It ought to be replaced with an acronym more appropriate to the status of the course (such as DipBusAdmin or DipBA).

Recommendation 5

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University adopt an alternative acronym to DBA for the Diploma in Business Administration in order to avoid confusion with the Doctor of Business Administration.

3.2.4 Quality Assurance of Courses and Subjects

For subjects, the University operates a student evaluative survey called Quality Assurance of Subjects (QAS), which has been in place since 1995. LTU learned during its self-review that compliance with this has varied, and has resolved to monitor compliance. For that purpose (and others) it has established the Academic Quality Assurance Committee (section 1.3.1). However, the Audit Panel found that, where practiced, the QAS has provided valuable information which has assisted staff with the ongoing improvement of the subject. It would also seem that the rate of QAS implementation is increasing.

A delegation of the Audit Panel visited a number of the University's offshore partnerships (section 6.5). This Offshore Delegation considered a range of issues including the implementation of QAS for offshore teaching activities, which is a University policy. It found that QAS had not always been implemented and, where it had been, it was administered by the teaching staff. In some cases the partner has introduced its own student evaluation of teaching survey instrument. In one particular partnership, correspondence suggests that QAS was introduced in specific anticipation of the Offshore Delegation's visit. The University ought to ensure that its own policies are implemented.

Affirmation 6

AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to ensure that the Quality Assurance of Subjects system is implemented consistently throughout the University, including for its online and offshore courses.

As with other Australian universities, one of the main methods by which LTU obtains feedback about the quality of its courses is through the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ). The University makes the claim in its Performance Portfolio that "graduate satisfaction is high, with consistent performance above the national average on CEQ results". Upon reviewing the CEQ statistics, the Audit Panel could not strictly support this claim. In 67 of 101 applicable fields of study at bachelor level the University's mean for graduates' overall satisfaction was higher (ie. better) than the national mean. However, the Audit Panel considers this is a tenuous basis on which to claim high results in relative terms, because in 97 of the 101 fields the University was within one standard deviation of the national mean (of the remaining fields, the University's mean was below one standard deviation of the national mean for three fields and higher for one). The University's overall results are satisfactory, but a clearer interpretation of the statistics could emerge through more sophisticated analysis of the data.

3.2.5 Course Advisory Committees

Some courses have course advisory committees (variably titled – for example, one school interviewed has an Industry Advisory Committee), but these are not in place in every instance. The Audit Panel met members from a number of these committees, and found that these committees varied significantly in modus operandi and effectiveness. At the least helpful extreme, external members of one committee feel that they merely 'rubber stamp' new course proposals, the progress of which was a *fait accompli*. However, at the other extreme there are examples of excellent practice. The Audit Panel particularly notes the approach to course advisory committees used within the Faculty of Science, Technology and Engineering. A typical modus operandi is that the committees, which comprise staff, external members and student representatives, meet for two-hour sessions about three times per year. Issues addressed include modifying delivery methods to accommodate the needs of part-time students, the relevance of curriculum to contemporary practice, government regulations and professional standards, and the arrangement of practical placements for students in professional courses.

There is an opportunity for the University to gain further leverage from this good practice by promoting it to schools as an exemplar of meaningful community and industry engagement.

Commendation 6

AUQA commends La Trobe University for examples of course advisory committees being used very effectively in enhancing the appropriateness of courses to the needs of relevant external communities while maintaining academic standards.

There are some cases where a course advisory committee could play such an important role that its establishment and modus operandi perhaps ought to be mandated. For example, some professional disciplines risk becoming disassociated from current practice in their professions through lack of interaction and engagement. For instance, the Audit Panel heard in three separate sessions, concerns that one professional school has developed a culture whereby staff engagement with practice is frowned upon in favour of a more traditional academic orientation. A course advisory committee could play a critical role in working with schools on such matters.

The Audit Panel also noted that course advisory committees are another mechanism by which regional and multi-campus interaction could be enhanced. The University may wish to consider ensuring that the constitution of such committees includes regional and multi-campus membership.

3.2.6 Assessment

The University's assessment guidelines state that 'more than one piece of assessment is preferred'. This appears to be a very lightweight and permissive standard which provided little in the way of guidance to academic staff. There is an opportunity for the University to strengthen its approach to assessment through benchmarking good practice assessment policies in the Australian higher education sector.

Recommendation 6

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University enhance its assessment policy in light of best practice within the Australian higher education sector.

The Audit Panel also notes that, in terms of practice, the students interviewed at the Australian campuses (for offshore campuses see section 6.5.4) indicated a high degree of satisfaction with the timing of marking and the level of feedback received from their lecturers.

3.3 Teaching

The Audit Panel spent considerable time discussing teaching with staff and students, and reviewing the associated documentation. In general, it appears that there is scope for the University to improve its systematic commitment to teaching, although many individual teaching staff demonstrated a high level of commitment to student learning. The sections that follow detail a range of the issues considered by the Audit Panel.

3.3.1 Teaching Preparation and Professional Development

The Audit Panel met a number of staff (and postgraduate students) who were new to teaching at the time they commenced their academic employment at LTU. They advised that there was little or no professional orientation to teaching provided. Some new academic staff were assigned subject coordinator responsibilities with no induction or assistance, and some were expected to teach in modes they were unfamiliar with – most notably online teaching – without any training in the technology (section 9.3.3).

The Academic Development Unit (ADU) does provide a range of professional development opportunities for academic staff. However, orientation to teaching is one of the many responsibilities devolved to faculties and schools. The consequence is that efforts in this area are highly variable.

The University recognises the need to attend to the professional development of academic staff. It has incorporated this issue into its Interim Learning and Teaching Plan 2004.

Affirmation 7

AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to provide systematic support for professional development in learning and teaching for sessional and full-time academic staff.

3.3.2 Casual Teaching Staff

In 2003, the University conducted an analysis of its casual teaching staff profile. Most have some previous teaching experience and 20% have formal teaching qualifications. Less than half (41%) work in an industry related to the field in which they teach, and 81% have a qualification higher than a bachelors degree. The report suggests that the profile is consistent with the national profile for casual staff, although the Audit Panel believes it would not be considered satisfactory for permanent academic staff. Casual/sessional staff comprise about 16% of all the University's academic staff.

The report does not critically assess the implications of its casual staffing profile, although it does note that such staff are engaged in one of the core activities of the University and need to be supported with improved training opportunities. The Audit Panel urges the University to give the recommendations in the report serious consideration and take such action as is necessary to ensure the quality of teaching students receive.

3.3.3 Teaching Evaluation

The University operates a Student Evaluation of Teaching (SET) survey as its primary means for determining the quality of teaching. The Audit Panel met a number of staff who have used SET and found it to be helpful. It is clear that the efficacy of SET is largely dependent upon the commitment of individual staff.

The University has targeted a 5% improvement in student satisfaction with teaching by 2008 in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008. In this way, it demonstrates a commitment to improvements in teaching based on collecting, analysing and acting upon student feedback. However, SET is voluntary (this provision is within the University's Enterprise Agreement) and participation rates are low – to the extent that meaningful and useful aggregate statistics are difficult to obtain. As such, there is very limited systematic use made of the information to target improvement efforts.

The University is starting to respond to this issue. The Quality Management Checklist for Schools/Departments (section 2.6) requires that there is a clear process regarding the collection and consideration of SET including reporting outcomes to School/Department members, participating students and the dean. Also, the Interim Learning and Teaching Plan 2004 seeks to establish systematic student evaluation of teaching (and subjects) in a manner that will inform probation and promotion decision.

The Audit Panel supports this renewed commitment but notes that teaching evaluation could also be promoted for more formative purposes. This may include, for example, consideration of results in confidential discussions with peers or with support from the ADU.

Affirmation 8

AUQA affirms La Trobe University's plans to promote greater use of its Student Evaluation of Teaching survey, but particularly so that more staff will seek and act upon student feedback on their teaching through a system that may provide for benchmarking and professional support.

4 RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING

The University's strategic direction for research and research training in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008 is:

To enhance the research and research training profile of the University, focusing on areas of existing and emerging research priorities and providing a supportive environment for University researchers.

4.1 *Research and Research Training Management and Planning*

The research activities of the University fall within the policy governance of the Academic Board, which exercises much of its responsibilities through its Research and Graduate Studies Committee. Management responsibility for research and research training rests with the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) assisted by the Research and Graduate Studies Office (RGSO). In the faculties, this responsibility is exercised through the deans and associate deans (research). This common research management structure within faculties appears sound and well-designed to assist with implementation of research policies. The Audit Panel explored the issue of research management with relevant staff.

The University's research intentions are set out in the Research and Research Training Management Plan 2002-2006 (RRMTP) and associated faculty RRTMPs, against which they produce annual reports (RRTMRs). As part of this overall research planning, the University has developed and applied a well-constructed set of criteria for determining its research strengths. Thirteen areas have been identified, which between them cover 60% of all research activity and 80% of research income. These areas are used to prioritise the allocation of internal research funding,

There are clear examples of research excellence throughout the University. What is less clear is the effectiveness of the strategic planning processes for research in coordinating and driving research resourcing activities and outcomes across the University. Many major elements of the research activity are inadequately aligned, with the consequence that opportunities are not realised. The planning process appears to favour certain areas in the absence of strategic rationale. This was identified in the University's Risk Ownership Report. Examples of elements not fully aligned include the research parks (section 4.8) and the Institute for Advanced Study (section 4.3.1).

The University intends to benchmark its research activities (in terms of funding schemes and research results) internationally. This has not yet commenced, although the University's membership of the International Network of Universities, a consortium currently chaired by the Vice-Chancellor, may provide suitable opportunity in the near future. Nationally, the University has commenced benchmarking through the Innovative Research Universities–Australia, another consortium of which LTU is a member.

4.2 *Staff Research*

One of the University's specific objectives in its Research and Research Training Management Plan 2002-2006 (RRTMP) is:

To conduct research which makes a significant contribution to the advancement of knowledge and enhances the reputation and international standing of the University

The University has recently reduced its range of internal research funding schemes (eg it no longer has an Early Career Researcher Scheme, although it does have a large postdoctoral cohort) and made a strategic decision to emphasise competitive scholarships. Approximately one half of Institutional Grants Scheme (IGS) funding is distributed through the Research and Graduate Studies Committee (RGSC), mainly in the form of LTU postgraduate scholarships, with the balance being distributed to faculties based upon their performance against the IGS formula.

As yet, it is not fully evident that these changes have been successful. The number of research active staff is consistent with the national average of about 50%. However, LTU's publication rates are decreasing. Notably, weighted publications have decreased by about 12% over four years. On the broadest level, this does not appear to endorse the effectiveness of the University's research funding schemes. However, there is not a uniform decrease across all schools. For example, the Audit Panel was advised that the Graduate School of Management has increased its research output from virtually nil in 1999 to 2.6 DEST points per staff in 2003. This was the consequence of a deliberate plan that included a range of strategies, such as the appointment of a research director to, *inter alia*, facilitate access to external funding sources. It is a good example in the area of research management of the University identifying an opportunity and successfully implementing an improvement strategy.

Commendation 7

AUQA commends La Trobe University for identifying the need for improvements in research outcomes in the Graduate School of Management and responding with strategies which have proved to be very successful.

In some areas research mentoring appears to be effective and valued by staff. Also, staff are assisted in attracting external research revenue through a variety of means that differ between faculties. Most faculties provide funding for research grant development and in some, funding is applied to have external research applications externally assessed.

4.2.1 Staff Research at the Bendigo Campus

Research activity at the Bendigo campus, in particular, is in need of attention. Previously a College of Advanced Education without significant research activity, Bendigo requires particular support if it is to develop a strong and embedded research culture. At present there is little sign of such a campus-wide research culture. From discussions with academic staff and students it was apparent that there is a paucity of visitors, cross-disciplinary and/or cross-campus research collaboration, joint research seminars with colleagues at other campuses, etc. The campus does run discipline-specific PhD seminars. Currently the campus claims 25% research active staff, of which a small number are particularly accomplished.

The University has provided special grant monies to a Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities, which is based at the Bendigo Campus, in order to engender research activity. It is likely that additional and broader strategies will also be required.

4.3 *Research Centres*

Proposals to establish research centres are considered by RGSC and then forwarded to Academic Board and then Council for approval. About \$500k is spent on internal research centres each year and all are reviewed on a five-year cycle.

A number of the University's research centres have been particularly successful in facilitating research outputs of the highest calibre. These include, for example, the Australian Research Centre in Sex, Health and Society at the City campus (section 1.4.2) and the Centre for Materials and Surface Science. These have strong and appropriate management arrangements and enjoy

productive associations and interaction in research and research training with relevant faculties, schools and departments.

The University has also had a number of successes in developing partnerships with the community through which its research can be advanced and applied. One example is the Refugee Health Research Centre, which is a partnership with the Victorian Foundation for Survivors of Torture. Another example is the National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research (NCHSR). The NCHSR was established in recognition of the large Hellenic population in Australia, and in Melbourne in particular (for example, there are half a million Greek people in Australia, with half of them residing in Melbourne). It was an initiative of the University as well as the Greek and Cypriot Ambassadors to Australia, and receives the majority of its funding from European governments. The NCHSR enjoys a Society of Friends, comprising over 800 members throughout Australia, who assist with fundraising; help disseminate the centre's research outputs; and facilitate travelling academics engaged in centre activities around the country.

Within the Faculty of Health Sciences a number of research centres and institutes include 'Australian' or 'National' in their titles. Although there are no national rules governing the use of these terms, their use does raise expectations of the existence of an independent validation of the character of the respective centres. A review of the annual reports of some of these LTU Faculty of Health Sciences centres shows that they have advisory boards and projects that involve major competitive grants and national collaborations, and produce high quality (in some cases, award-winning) research outputs. However, these impressive indicators do not provide differentiation from other centres within the University that do not claim Australian or National status. It is important for the University to ensure that it is able to justify, perhaps through a revised research centre policy, the names it assigns to its research centres and institutes in the context of the Australian higher education and research sector.

4.3.1 Institute for Advanced Study

One particular centre of note is the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), which incorporates the Research Centre for Linguistic Typology. Founded in 2000 (but officially opened in May 2004), the IAS is generously funded from the Vice-Chancellor's budget and, like the NCHSR, is located independently of the faculties. Its purpose is to strengthen the climate for research and to promote the University's research profile by bringing to the University outstanding scholars who are international leaders in their discipline (Visiting Fellows) or new researchers of considerable promise (IAS Associates) and providing them with accommodation and time to engage in unfettered research activity.

Potential visiting scholars must be invited by the University. Decisions about nominations are made by the IAS management committee and require the support of a faculty. Over the past few years dozens of scholars have been able to visit and undertake research through the IAS. In many cases, these scholars are able to link in with LTU research staff for joint projects, although this is not an explicit requirement.

The Audit Panel met a number of people involved in the management of the IAS as well as one visiting scholar, and discussed the IAS more broadly with the University's academic staff. It concludes that the IAS is undoubtedly borne of strong leadership and has facilitated significant research output.

However, the Audit Panel also learned of a number of concerns. Some research staff hold the view that funding visiting scholars as a priority over funding LTU staff research has not been well-justified or explained within the University. The IAS is not aligned with (indeed, not mentioned in) the RRTMP. Some staff consider that the management of the IAS is opaque and that academic discussion of the role of the IAS in the wider research activity of the University is not encouraged. Also, it was suggested that some of the faculties have clearly benefited more

than others in terms of the choice of visiting scholars. This appears to be supported by an analysis of Visiting Fellows listed in the IAS annual reports, which show the Faculty for Regional Development and Faculty of Law and Management have not yet been successful in nominating Visiting Fellows.

There is an opportunity for the University to retain the benefits of the IAS while also addressing staff concerns, by integrating the IAS more fully into the overall strategic planning and budgeting of research at the University (see Recommendation 7). This may generate additional benefits, such as a better understanding of the purpose of the IAS, greater academic interaction and even new research collaborations.

Recommendation 7

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University ensure that all major research activities, centres and initiatives are brought within a single, comprehensive research strategy.

4.4 Research and Teaching Nexus

One of the University's specific objectives in its Research and Research Training Management Plan 2002-2006 is:

To apply the advancement of knowledge to the development and delivery of teaching programmes informed by research

The University asserts in its Performance Portfolio (p28-9) that its defining features "include a strong research base and orientation to student-centred learning informed by research, scholarship and professional practice. As well as incorporating the outcomes of research into curricula, active researchers have an approach to the discipline underpinned by a sense of enquiry, which leads them to foster and cultivate the same approach in students, developing students' awareness of processes and methods of enquiry and creating an inclusive culture of research." The Audit Panel sought verification of this statement.

The course approval process requires that the curricula are in keeping with the latest related research. Beyond that process, the nexus is largely in the hands of the academic staff. The Performance Portfolio states that 435/857 (51%) academic staff published in 2002. This is one measure of research activity (though not presented in the context of relevant benchmarked figures) but does not necessarily ensure that the research in any way informed the student learning experience.

The Audit Panel does not doubt that many individual staff are often focused on achieving such a nexus. There is an opportunity for the University to assist with, for example, appropriate guidelines or examples of good practice. The Audit Panel found little evidence that such systematic initiatives are extant or being developed.

Recommendation 8

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University develop a comprehensive framework for explicitly linking research with teaching and curricula, and establish means for monitoring the effectiveness of this framework.

The University is also placing reliance on the teaching: research nexus to assist with its objective of internationalising the curricula. In its Portfolio, the University states specific strategies for teaching and research staff:

- *to present their research at international conferences and in international journals;*
- *to spend at least part of their OSP [Outside Studies Program] at overseas universities;*
- *to undertake collaborative research with international partners.*

The connection between these activities and internationalised curricula is tenuous in the absence of any specific means for reporting on their efficacy. For example, it is entirely possible to present research at an international conference without affecting curriculum. The University needs to establish more explicit mechanisms for translating international learning into curriculum development.

4.5 Research Training

One of the University's specific objectives in its Research and Research Training Management Plan 2002-2006 is:

To provide high quality research training

LTU higher degree research (HDR) completion rates have remained at between 160 and 190 per annum since 1994. Although the number of masters by research completions has steadily decreased, this has been offset by an increase in PhD completions.

4.5.1 Research Training Management

Research training policy and performance is overseen by the Higher Degrees Committee (Research) (HDC(R)), a subcommittee of the RGSC. Support is provided through the RGSO.

The HDC(R) facilitated the establishment of research training competencies designed to underpin all HDR learning experiences. The Audit Panel found, through its interviews with HDR students and supervisors, that these competencies are regarded as sound and achievable in practice. The competencies are consistent with graduate competencies in the Australian higher education sector, and there may be an opportunity for LTU to enhance these with its own unique flavour, perhaps in conjunction with its regional focus development.

This committee compiles an annual report on the University's overall research training activity. There is evidence that the HDC(R) has used the information obtained through this process to generate improvements. For example, it has mandated supervision workshops to raise awareness about such issues as strategies for improving completion rates, which the University has identified as an issue requiring attention.

Each faculty also operates its own higher degrees committee and these are responsible for such issues as pre-assessing the eligibility of candidates, assuring the availability of resources (section 4.5.3) and monitoring candidates' compliance with University policies.

4.5.2 HDR Registration and Supervision

All HDR registrations are approved by the Chairperson or Deputy Chairperson of the HDC(R). Student progress is monitored through annual progress reports.

The ADU, in collaboration with the RGSO, provides a specialised training program for supervisory staff. Information on uptake of these programs was not scrutinised, but feedback from supervisors suggested that the course is valuable.

According to the University's Performance Portfolio (p45), a register of postgraduate supervisors is maintained that differentiates between principal and co-supervisors. When a new HDR student seeks registration, the principal supervisor must record how many students they are supervising as one means for assessing the University's capacity to properly attend to the supervisory needs of the student. The Audit Panel supports this process but, through its interviews with supervising staff and HDR students, found numerous instances of supervisory policy not being adhered to. Students reported that they had supervisors who were not proficient in the students' research discipline, and some of these had only one supervisor. Staff and students reported excessive supervisory loads, in some cases very excessive, which constrain the ability of supervisors to offer adequate time and attention to each student.

This also applied offshore. The Offshore Delegation (section 6.5) met a number of masters and doctoral candidates at one partnership. These students were very satisfied with their supervision. However, they reported that they had only one supervisor each. Moreover, a quick calculation (based on incomplete data) shows that the two supervisors concerned had extremely high supervision workloads. Although the specific situation appears to be operating well, it would appear that this is based largely on the efforts of individual staff rather than the effective implementation of the University's policies.

There is also an opportunity to enhance the levels of encouragement and provision for HDR students to access supervisors or research networks and resources located at other campuses. This is a particular resourcing consequence of being a multi-campus institution, and one which the University has yet to adequately address.

Recommendation 9

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University establish monitoring systems to ensure that its policies and processes for postgraduate supervisors and supervision are implemented consistently.

4.5.3 HDR Resourcing and Support

Research Training Scheme (RTS) funding is allocated to faculties according to their performance against the RTS formula. About one half of the Institutional Grants Scheme revenue is allocated to competitive postgraduate scholarships (LTUPS).

Applications by HDR students for LTUPS are ranked first within departments/schools and then within each faculty. A normalisation process is used to take account of the differing demands of disciplines. The formula and the results are a highly contentious issue within the University, with many believing that it does not equitably address disciplinary differences and is, therefore, inherently biased towards certain areas. Others were concerned that, even if perceptions of inequity are impossible to overcome with such a scheme, the bias may not necessarily favour the agreed strategic directions for research. This is one clear example of where the University's 13 areas of research strength could come into play. The University still has work to do in developing a shared understanding of the precise roles of defined research strengths, so that expectations, resources and efforts can be better aligned.

In addition to the scholarships, LTU operates guidelines for general minimum resourcing of HDR students. These are set out in the Handbook for Candidates and Supervisors and are checked via surveys every two years. In practice, however, it is apparent that these guidelines are not being consistently implemented throughout the University. Students at both the Bundoora and Bendigo campuses indicated considerable variety. Examples included some students having free photocopying and others not; some having access to conference funding and others not; and some having access to dedicated desk and computing resources, but others not. It was clear that for some students the levels of resourcing are inadequate.

One particular example requires further comment. The Bendigo Delegation did a site inspection in response to statements made about the inadequacy of physical support for postgraduate students. The inspection appeared to verify the statements. In one area, 12 PhD students in one discipline shared four computers, two of which were evidently inoperable. In another area, 14 PhD students shared five computers, two of which were inoperable. These 14 students were accommodated in a small, crammed and windowless resource room with six desks (for further comment on academic spaces see section 9.4). The students had no concerns about the calibre of their supervision, but were disturbed by the lack of resources. The Audit Panel agrees that this matter requires urgent attention.

Training courses are available to HDR students, some facilitated through the ADU. These include, for example, courses on thesis writing, EndNote, OVID and N*Vivo. Students advised the Audit Panel that these courses, which they describe as popular and valuable, are only provided during normal working hours, which makes them inaccessible to many HDR students who have employment obligations. There may be an opportunity to improve this area through assessing the availability of services against HDR needs.

In summary, there is more effort required by the University both in monitoring the implementation of the guidelines on resources and facilities for candidates, and in reviewing the adequacy of these guidelines.

Recommendation 10

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University review the adequacy of its resourcing of higher degree research students.

4.5.4 Postgraduate Coordinators

LTU has a number of designated postgraduate coordinators located throughout the University. The responsibilities of this position may vary and are set out in program, school and faculty postgraduate handbooks. In general, they oversee HDR induction, facilitate HDR training opportunities (for example, arranging courses on EndNote software) and arrange regular seminars. Most also undertake annual meetings with the HDR students within their care, with a view to providing extra-supervisory support. In one school interviewed by the Audit Panel, the postgraduate coordinators are available to the students for confidential discussions about their supervision experiences. These arrangements are greatly appreciated by students and demonstrate genuine commitment to their progress.

Commendation 8

AUQA commends La Trobe University for an effective system of postgraduate coordinators, which is appreciated by postgraduate students and demonstrates genuine commitment by the University to student learning.

4.6 *Human Ethics*

Research involving humans requires approval from the University Human Ethics Committee. In order to expedite applications, most standard applications are managed through faculty ethics committees. This appears to be a successful strategy, with LTU reporting an average time from application to provisional approval of one month. The University also advises that it is rare for applications to be sent back more than once, owing to the level of support available to applicants in preparing their submissions. For the most part, these assertions were corroborated by research active staff and HDR students, who found the process thorough and appropriate.

Consistency of judgement is assured through a common set of guidelines, and through chairpersons of the faculty committees being members of the University committee (which also sets policy). However, in order to ensure that complex applications receive adequate scrutiny, all applications which involve legal, Indigenous or external funding issues, must be considered by the University committee.

The Audit Panel found that the University's approach to managing human ethics approvals was satisfactory.

4.7 Research Commercialisation

LTU's research commercialisation activities to date place it in the top third of Australian universities on most indicators (according to the DEST *National Survey of Research Commercialisation: Year 2000*). The University has a centralised approach to the commercialisation of research. This includes contract negotiation, approval and review processes managed through a clear schedule of delegated authorities. Professional marketing advisers and patent attorneys are involved early to assess commercialisation potential and undertake any necessary due diligence processes.

Commendation 9

AUQA commends La Trobe University for a well-developed system for managing intellectual property and licensing.

4.8 Research Parks

The University is involved in the running of two Research and Development (R&D) Parks: one at its Bundoora campus and another at its Bendigo campus. The Audit Panel and its Bendigo Delegation met staff, partners and tenants of these research parks.

In each case, the R&D Parks were the consequence of LTU responding positively to approaches from the community or external business interests; in the case of Bundoora, through Rio Tinto's antecedent CRA, and in the case of Bendigo, through the Bendigo Bank, Bendigo Community Telco and Bendigo City. They now provide opportunities for external businesses to access the research capabilities of the University's staff and students, as well as providing the University community with an opportunity to either directly commercialise research outcomes or gain experience by liaising with others involved in that activity.

Tenants and external communities expressed their appreciation to the University for the opportunity to be involved with the R&D Parks. However, there is concern that the parks are not being leveraged to their full potential. The value-adding proposition for all parties is to maximise connections between tenants and the University's research community, and specifically in ways which are aligned to the research needs of the communities LTU serves. While the University is clearly seeking to achieve this, it appears that the current levels of commitment and integration are insufficient. LTU provides some staff support to these parks, primarily (but not only) in terms of landlord responsibilities. There is no comprehensive research commercialisation strategy integrating the R&D Parks with overall University research planning. The coordination of the R&D Parks is not incorporated into the risk management processes (section 2.2), nor does the University's legal office include the R&D Park and its tenants within its brief. External business and legal experts helpfully provide a basic level of assistance to tenants through informal, pro bono arrangements.

It is clear that the R&D Parks are very positive developments, but that there is considerably more that the University could do to realise their potential benefits, both for tenants and the University research community.

Recommendation 11

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University connect its Research and Development Parks more closely to the research capabilities of the University in order to maximise commercialisation opportunities and the potential of this resource to contribute to the overall research effort of the University.

5 REGIONALISATION AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

The University's Strategic Plan 2004-2008 addresses this theme via two separate statements of strategic direction. The University's strategic direction for regional engagement is:

To build on the long-term commitment of the University to its regional communities.

The University's strategic direction for community engagement is:

To enhance the engagement of the University with the communities it serves.

LTU defines itself as Victoria's largest regional university. With that position comes a host of challenges, opportunities and responsibilities. The Audit Panel considered how the University is addressing these issues and other aspects of community engagement.

The University has identified, in its Risk Ownership Report, a need to improve coordination of its various regional and community (of place and interest) engagement activities. The Audit Panel recognises the state of transition, and concluded that the current lack of clear identity for LTU is constraining strategic developments – particularly in terms of regionalisation.

5.1 *Management and Planning*

5.1.1 Regionalisation

The University's commitment to regionalisation as a key strategy is relatively recent in its history, notwithstanding that it has, through its regional campuses, had a significant regional presence for some time. It recently compiled a list of faculty-based regionalisation activities as an initial step in determining the quantum and nature of such activities within the University. Through having persons with specific regional responsibilities or foci on the University Council and on the Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee, the University is well placed at the leadership level to ensure that regional issues are factored into the University's deliberations.

The University also undertook a Review of Regional Operations, and committed itself to consequential developments led by a Council Regional Review Implementation Committee. This committee has, through campus-based committees, produced implementation plans for the regional campuses. The Audit Panel reviewed these plans and concluded that the University is aware of the need for a comprehensive approach to regionalisation which encompasses the entire organisation. It is clearly taking steps to address this issue.

Affirmation 9

AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to develop a clear position on what it means to be a regional university and incorporate this position into its strategic and operational planning processes.

5.1.2 Community Engagement

At present, the University does not have a comprehensive, University-wide community engagement plan. There is the potential to generally increase the coordination of community engagement activities. However, this is recognised and has been targeted for action in the Strategic Plan 2004-2008 and a community engagement plan is scheduled for development in early 2005. A community relations officer was appointed at the start of 2004 to start coordinating

community engagement efforts (and specific comments about engaging with Indigenous communities are included in section 7.5).

5.2 *Regional Advisory Boards*

The University operates four Regional Advisory Boards (RABs); one each at its Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Mildura and Shepparton campuses. Membership of the RABs include prominent community representatives. For example, the Bendigo RAB includes, among others, the CEO of the City of Greater Bendigo, the Principal of Bendigo Senior Secondary College, the CEO of the Bendigo Regional Institute of TAFE, and the CEOs of two major local businesses. RABs report directly to Council. The Audit Panel considered the terms of reference for the RABs and a number of their reports and met a number of members. It concluded that RABs are an effective mechanism for ensuring that the University is linked with community leaders.

Commendation 10

AUQA commends La Trobe University for maintaining strong linkages with its campuses' local communities through Regional Advisory Boards.

The University is changing and developing its regional presence. As such, it is becoming apparent that the precise roles of RABs now needs to be reconsidered and clarified. For example, in regional communities, where a sense of local ownership over the University's activities is prevalent, such boards can assume a governance-type role that is inconsistent with an integrated, multi-campus university. In order for RABs to continue to be a valuable means of connecting the University with the geographic communities it serves, the University may now wish to review the precise status, role and functioning of the RABs so as to enhance their effectiveness.

5.3 *Links with Alumni*

LTU has established an Office of Alumni Relations to foster connections between the University and its graduates. The Audit Panel reviewed a report on alumni activities and met the Alumni Liaison Officer and a number of alumni.

There are currently 65,000 students on the alumni database, of which the University has email contact with about 5000. Satellite alumni chapters are being established in six countries, primarily in Asia, and this is an area targeted for further development. Services to alumni (such as the newsletters) are still reasonably limited, although LTU has recently introduced an alumni benefits card and an alumni credit card (which was organised with the assistance of an LTU Alumni).

The University is still in the early stages of developing an effective and active alumni relationship (for example, revenue raised through alumni does not yet exceed the cost of fostering the alumni relationships). The University appears to be taking appropriate steps to address this issue.

5.4 *Links with Schools*

LTU enjoys positive relationships and has a good image with secondary schools in its catchment area. Communication mechanisms and information transfer with these schools are generally well regarded. The interest and effort that LTU and its staff make including participation in a range of targeted activities related to student recruitment, transition to university and careers selection are strongly appreciated.

5.5 *Linking Research with Regionalisation*

Specific objectives in the Research and Research Training Management Plan 2002-2006 are:

- *to establish linkages with business and industry to benefit the Australian economy by the transfer of knowledge derived from research to the community; and*
- *to establish linkages with a range of community and social organisations to benefit society and culture from the transfer of knowledge derived from research across the University.*

The Audit Panel looked for alignment between these goals and the University's new focus as encapsulated in the strategic directions on regional and community engagement. There are some excellent examples of research activity based upon linkages with external communities nationally and internationally. Whereas some of these are facilitated through linkage grants, others are more a result of the University's own efforts and networks (such as the NCHSR – section 4.3). Some have been facilitated through the efforts of RABs and other members of local communities (such as Riverlink and the Barkindji Biosphere at Mildura) and the Centre for Sustainable Regional Communities (section 4.2.1).

There is still an opportunity for the University to gain better leverage from its regional presence to develop regionally-relevant research programs. Thus far, the University's regional efforts have focused predominantly on teaching activities. The Audit Panel met people across a range of campuses, both staff and external stakeholders, who indicated a strong desire for the substance of the regional linkages to be more steeped in research opportunities and research application focused on the needs of these communities. This is not only in terms of promoting the University's research to the region, but also in terms of the region having channels whereby it may raise research possibilities with the University. It may be that the RABs could assist with creating and stimulating these channels (section 5.2).

6 INTERNATIONALISATION

The University's strategic direction for internationalisation in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008 is:

To develop and enhance the internationalisation of the University.

LTU has over 3,300 international students studying at its Australian campuses and 2,000 students studying with partners onshore and in other countries. Teaching international students onshore and offshore are areas targeted for growth. Therefore, the Audit Panel included this topic in the audit sample.

6.1 *Internationalisation Management and Planning*

According to its Strategic Plan 2004-08, the University is aiming to increase its international revenue by at least 50% from 2004 to 2008. More specifically, it is planning for international students to comprise at least 20% of total student load by 2008. Detailed planning is coordinated within the International Plan, which is the responsibility of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (International) (PVC(I)), and a number of international commercial strategies are managed through La Trobe University International (LTI) – a wholly owned subsidiary of the University. LTI and the International Programs Office (IPO), the central administrative unit of the University, have their own strategic plans. Alignment of these plans is ensured through the office of the PVC(I).

The University maintains oversight of the business aspects of its offshore partnerships through its Committee on External Programs (CEP), which has been operating for over ten years. CEP has recently amended its terms of reference to include consideration of academic matters.

Leadership in the area of internationalisation is provided within faculties by associate deans (international).

As an outcome of the institutional self review, three manuals are being developed to improve quality assurance for offshore activities. The first focuses on project management for offshore programs; the second on obligations for partners; and the third on academic management, which is primarily the responsibility of the faculties. At the time of the Audit Visit the first of these mentioned had been approved by Council and the last was still in draft form and, although its effectiveness could therefore not be determined, its drafting signals an improvement to the University's management of this area of activity.

6.2 *University Promotion*

The University has teaching activities operating in seven countries (in addition to Australia) and recruits international students from all over the world. The Audit Panel reviewed a range of promotional and marketing materials, and the process for managing the production and dissemination of these materials to determine the extent to which LTU is ensuring that it is being accurately represented to external stakeholders such as prospective international students. It cross-checked its findings through interviews with international students onshore and offshore, and with the University's offshore partners.

It appears that LTU has been careful to ensure that it represents itself accurately to prospective students. Students and partners express a high level of satisfaction with the manner in which the University promotes itself and its courses, and believe that the marketing materials are accurate and consistent with the University's academic offerings and standards (but see sections 3.2.3 and 6.5.2).

6.3 *Admissions*

The admission and enrolment of international students used to be managed at a number of different loci within the University. At the Bendigo campus, the International Office enrolled its onshore international students whereas the enrolment of its offshore international students (being a large proportion of LTU's overall international students offshore) was managed by the Offshore Program Office. Enrolment of other international students into LTU was managed by the IPO at the Bundoora campus. One consequence was that the University had poor central data on international students as a whole, suggesting also poor management control. Two months before the Audit Visit, responsibility for all enrolment of offshore international students was transferred to the IPO. It was too soon to assess the effectiveness of this change, but in principle it ought to lead to improved information and quality control.

Affirmation 10

AUQA affirms La Trobe University's decision to centralise coordination of offshore international student enrolment for now, in order to ensure that standards are implemented consistently.

Offshore enrolments are facilitated by the University's partners. In some partnerships, the partner collects all original documentation and forwards it to LTU for verification and processing. In other partnerships, the partner collects and verifies the students' original documentation, and then forwards only the application to LTU for processing. In the case of the latter, it will be necessary for LTU to have in place a robust audit system to ensure that the original documentation is appropriately verified; it was not apparent that such a system was in place.

Admission into a number of the University's programs offshore involves the determination of advanced standing for enrolling students. The Offshore Delegation considered this issue closely and found that the University has been meticulous in maintaining its academic standards in this regard.

6.4 *Supporting International Students Onshore*

The University is proactive in identifying and responding to the support needs of onshore international students, for example via a representative ESOS Advisory Group which reports to the PVC(I) on risks to the success and satisfaction of international students.

Commendation 11

AUQA commends La Trobe University for being proactive in identifying and responding to the support needs of onshore international students, for example via the ESOS Advisory Group.

6.5 *Teaching International Students Offshore*

LTU teaches, via various means, in China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Singapore, Vietnam and Bhutan. The Audit Panel spent time exploring this issue at the Australian campuses and an Offshore Delegation of the Audit Panel visited a sample of the University's activities offshore, accompanied and assisted by LTU personnel. These activities included:

- Bachelor of Nursing Studies (BNS) run through the School of Continuing Studies, Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK);
- Bachelor of Business (BBus Marketing and Human Resource Management) run through the Asia Pacific Management Institute (APMI) in Hong Kong;

- Diploma of Business Administration (DBA [sic]), Bachelor of Business (BBus) and Master of Business Administration (MBA) run through the Hanoi University of Foreign Studies (HUFS);
- Master of Applied Linguistics (MAL) and Doctor of Education (EdD) run through the Vietnam National University (VNU).

In general terms the University's offshore teaching activities are satisfactory. However, there are also some problematic issues suggesting that the University has yet to ensure its quality assurance processes are comprehensive. Indeed, the strength of the relationships with LTU's partners is largely dependent upon the impressive dedication of LTU staff in lieu of sound quality assurance processes. A number of good practices and areas requiring improvement are listed in the sections that follow.

6.5.1 Partners

The Risk Ownership Report indicates that the University is at risk generally from inappropriate arrangements with third parties as a result of inadequate due diligence processes and poor business planning and management practices. This is an issue that the University acknowledges and plans to address. The Audit Panel was advised that this risk assessment did not include consideration of the University's offshore partners. This was not apparent from the documentation and would be an unfortunate oversight, given the importance of these partnerships to the University and its students. The Audit Panel suggests that the next iteration of the Risk Ownership Report should include consideration of the systems in place for managing relationships with offshore partners.

That said, and on the basis of its sample, the Audit Panel found a number of partnerships with reputable offshore partners which are operating very successfully. In some cases, the partnerships have been successful for more than a decade.

In 2004, the University Council approved a new External Programs Manual – Associates Version for partners to help ensure that LTU's partnerships are mutually satisfactory, while maintaining the University's standards. The version of this manual provided to the Audit Panel (v2) postdated the Offshore Audit Visit, and it was clear that many of the policies and procedures were too new for their effectiveness to be fully determined. Nonetheless, the procedures set out in the manual are well designed to ensure that risks will be appropriately managed and due attention is paid to stakeholder feedback.

The combination of long term institutional partnerships, excellent working relationships between the partner and LTU staff concerned, and the continuous improvement in relationship management as evidenced in the development of the manual, are combining to form demonstrable good practice in this area.

Commendation 12

AUQA commends La Trobe University for some good examples of positive and well-managed relationships with offshore partners which help enable the University to provide quality education to students overseas.

6.5.2 Course Standards

The Audit Panel sought verification that course standards offshore are the same or equivalent to course standards in place at the University's Australian campuses. For the most part, this did appear to be the case.

One particular issue concerning course standards came to the attention of the Offshore Delegation. In Hong Kong there has been a change in the professional registration requirements for nurses. It is now a requirement that all nurses have a degree. This provided the Offshore Delegation with an opportunity to consider how the University manages change in offshore conditions. The University decided to change from offering certificates, diplomas and higher diplomas to offering 'top-up' degree courses. This shows that the University was aware of and responsive to local conditions.

A particular consequence is that this top-up degree for registered nurses is now being offered to pre-registration nurses in order to shift to a new market. The first pre-registration intake had not commenced at the time of the Audit Visit, and although contractual sign-off on the change had not been completed, it was clear that both parties considered such progress to be imminent.

Those nurses have to complete their professional registration before they can be awarded the degree (which does not, in itself, include any clinical components). In other words, registration has changed from being an entrance criterion to being an exit criterion. Upon raising this with the University, the Audit Panel was advised that LTU would change the course rules to ensure that the new rules reflect this amendment. However, the Audit Panel has a second concern on this matter. The course design presupposes that students have clinical experience to aid their learning. The pedagogic issues associated with the change did not appear to have been considered (this is similar to the English language issue discussed in section 6.6).

During the course of the Audit, the University developed a policy whereby the students would only be permitted to complete the three subjects which do not depend upon previous clinical experience, and further progress in the degree would be dependent upon attainment of full nursing registration. The Audit Panel agrees that this may be a satisfactory solution. It remains concerned, however, about the systemic failure that permitted this issue to arise. The Audit Panel suggests that this policy discussion be held through the appropriate course amendment approval processes.

Also, the Offshore Delegation was advised that BNS student results in Hong Kong are not compared with BN student results in Australia, or, that if they are, the partner is not informed of the findings. Such comparisons will become essential in order to determine equivalency of standards.

One other problem was identified with regard to the definition of course standards. In one partnership in Vietnam, the University offers a masters program and a doctoral program which are governed by the same regulations as for those programs in Australia. However, the translation of those regulations into the revised International Coursework Agreement between LTU and its partner was insufficiently rigorous and resulted in a lack of clarity as to what was required of students to attain their degrees. This suggests that the University will need to be particularly diligent in ensuring strong communication between those persons responsible for the partnership contracts and those responsible for the academic standards of the programs.

The University, upon having this matter drawn to its attention, immediately commenced addressing the issue. This indicates a strong level of goodwill and commitment to both academic standards and the partnership.

The above two issues are very specific. The Audit Panel also considered the more general issue of student feedback on the courses undertaken. Copies of University correspondence to partners and university staff involved in offshore teaching indicated that Quality Assurance of Subjects (QAS) was systematically introduced to some offshore courses immediately prior to the offshore Audit Visit. QAS is an important aspect of the University's overall system for ensuring that courses meet and maintain appropriate standards. It is important that QAS be incorporated into the general planning and approval framework for offshore activities.

6.5.3 Teaching

Most teaching in offshore courses is undertaken by LTU staff, with partner staff providing tutorial support. It is clear that this has been central to the maintenance of course quality, and has been highly appreciated by the students whom the Offshore Delegation met. However, in three of the four partnerships visited, the partners are taking on an increasing proportion of the overall teaching role. In order for this to be appropriate, the University will need to implement additional quality assurance processes concerning approval of staff selection, moderation (section 6.5.4) and teaching induction, support and evaluation.

The Offshore Delegation found instances where such processes are clearly not in place. For example, one partner lecturer in Vietnam was teaching in a subject in which they had neither qualifications nor specific experience. At another partnership, in Hong Kong, the staff advised that they had no contact with their LTU module coordinators, no teaching induction, and received no feedback on their teaching unless they specifically requested it. Moreover, although LTU advised that they prepare all the teaching materials, this was refuted by some partner staff who said that they prepare their own materials. Only in one case was it claimed that these materials were checked by LTU.

The Offshore Delegation met a number of masters and doctoral candidates at one partnership. Comments on this issue are reported in section 4.5.

6.5.4 Assessment, Moderation and Comparison

Where assessment is undertaken by LTU staff, students expressed a measure of satisfaction. However, where the assessment is undertaken by partners' staff, the students reported very slow turnaround times and lack of feedback to assist their learning.

The number of cases in which teaching and assessment is being conducted by the partners' staff is growing. In those cases, the University uses moderation as a key means of assuring quality. The Delegation considered the overall process for moderation. It found considerable variety in practice. At some partnerships, there was little evidence to prove that moderation is always taking place as required by the applicable policies, but at other partnerships it was clear that moderation is being fully and effectively implemented.

At one partnership there is an arrangement to have assignments and examinations marked, moderated and results returned to students within 45 days of their final exam; at another partnership the time span is 20 days. This suggests that there is an opportunity for improvements to be generated if the University arranged for those staff involved in offshore activities to meet from time to time and exchange information about their practices.

One instance caused particular concern. A class of students in Hong Kong had received the grades from their locally-marked assignments, and their overall subject assessment, prior to moderation having taken place. The LTU moderator (who was the subject coordinator) then determined that the marking had been too generous and that, while examination marking was satisfactory, some final gradings were not in accordance with University assessment policy. The University did manage to reach a satisfactory resolution to this specific problem. However, there was also a systemic problem. Previously, moderation had been inconsistently undertaken, and as changes had not been required, the management of the overall process – and particularly the timing/sequencing of certain stages – had become lax. It is necessary, therefore, for the University to also address this systemic issue in order to ensure there can be no recurrence of this problem.

Additional to the moderation of assignments and examinations is the more macro-analysis of student results in comparable onshore and offshore courses. As has been mentioned previously,

such analyses are not being conducted (or, at least, are not being discussed with partners) in a number of cases. Such analyses are an important step in determining the equivalence of onshore and offshore courses, which are required by the National Protocols.

Recommendation 12

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University establishes a mechanism for ensuring that moderation is appropriately and consistently implemented for all applicable offshore courses, and that results for comparable onshore and offshore courses are considered as one means for determining equivalence.

6.5.5 Supporting Offshore Courses

In most cases the level of Library involvement in the establishment and servicing of offshore programs was limited to providing online services. In one partnership, undergraduate students could only access these services upon payment of an additional fee of A\$100 (the students concerned believed the figure was \$150), which none of them had paid or intended to pay – with the consequence that they were not accessing the Library. Upon further exploration, it became apparent that this fee was a result of a misunderstanding between the faculty concerned and the Library as to the status of offshore students. As a matter of University policy no external LTU student ought to pay extra library fees. This is the sort of misunderstanding that quality assurance processes are designed to prevent and, in this case, did not.

Moreover, some countries are not well served with Internet connectivity (indeed, there appears to be no involvement from the University's information technology services in planning or delivering courses offshore). Therefore, at some partnerships, the bandwidth is a significantly constraining factor. Postgraduate students advised the Offshore Delegation that, as a consequence, Internet access to the LTU Library is frustratingly slow. The issue of access to the Library's electronic resources for off-campus students featured strongly among the top ten improvement opportunities in the Library survey (section 9.1). Some partners provide a library, but this amounts to little more than single copies of the prescribed textbook being available.

The fact that the provision of suitable bandwidth in some parts of a country is beyond the University's control demands that the University develop alternative means of ensuring students have equivalent/comparable access to education

From interviews it became clear that students studying through LTU's partners at offshore locations perceive themselves as internal students and, in some cases, this perception is reinforced through a formal expectation that they attend a number of classes. However, the level of service they receive from the Library is not comparable to the level of service that internal students at LTU's Australian campuses receive.

Indeed, upon further exploration of this issue at the Australian campuses, it became apparent that the Library has had very little involvement in the University's strategy of expansion into offshore markets. Given the importance of the Library to the overall quality of education, it is vital that LTU involve the Library more fully in this important strategy.

Recommendation 13

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University fully integrate Library and Information Technology Services considerations into the overall management of offshore activities in order to ensure that offshore students receive an equivalent level of service in support of their education.

6.6 *English Language*

All the teaching and assessment undertaken at the partnerships visited by the Offshore Delegation is conducted in English. As such, the issue of English language competency was explored.

At one partnership in Vietnam, the English language entrance standard for enrolment in the Diploma of Business Administration had been lowered in order to maintain a viable number of student enrolments. Specifically, whereas IELTS 5.5 was previously required for entrance into the Diploma of Business Administration (which, in effect, constitutes the first third of the BBus), a student may now enter with 5.0. Students cannot complete the diploma without reaching 6.0, which is the entrance standard for the BBus. The partner assists the students with additional English language courses and, where necessary, provides additional Diploma of Business Administration tuition in Vietnamese.

The Audit Panel recognises that LTU and its partner intend this as a method for ensuring that the standards of degree programs are maintained, whilst also addressing obstacles to students in non-English speaking countries in accessing Australian higher education. However, this contrasts with the students undertaking their English language training prior to enrolment in a degree or diploma program.

This raises the fundamental question of whether the English language competency is required foremost as essential for undertaking the Diploma of Business Administration learning process, or is required as a learning outcome of the Diploma of Business Administration. In order to know whether the method is educationally sound, it would be appropriate to compare the assessment results of students entering with different IELTS scores. The Audit Panel was advised that this comparison has not been conducted, and urges LTU to do so.

English language standards are also relevant to onshore teaching and learning for international students. LTU has a relationship whereby the Chinese government sponsors a number of Chinese students to undertake the MBA. These students complete part of their studies in China and part of their studies at LTU's Bundoora campus. The Audit Panel met one class of these MBA students and found, through the interview (which was conducted with the assistance of an independent translator), that the students' command of English varied considerably. LTU advised that the English language entrance criterion did not apply because all teaching is conducted in Mandarin. This did not match the Audit Panel's finding, which was that teaching and assessment at Bundoora is conducted in English and a translator, who is not a management academic, is engaged to provide in-classroom assistance to those students who have an inadequate English language competency. All written materials, including overheads and handouts, which were seen by the Audit Panel, are in English.

Graduate level study involves a considerable amount of technical terminology and semantic distinctions. The Audit Panel found that there are inadequate controls in place to conclude that using a translator is equivalent to either students having English language competency or suitably qualified and experienced staff teaching the MBA in Mandarin. Also, all assessed work, which may include assignments, presentations and examinations, is in English.

Other than this cohort, international students require an IELTS score of 6.5 in order to enrol for the MBA.

Recommendation 14

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University reconsider the application of its English language entrance standards in light of the overall demands of the teaching, reading materials and assessment methods.

7 STUDENTS AND STUDENT SUPPORT

The University's strategic direction for students in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008 is:

To continue to attract and retain a capable, diverse student cohort and to build on the University's commitment to equity, access and participation for students.

The Audit Panel spoke with over 80 students during its onshore and offshore Audit Visits including representatives from the Student Representative Council (SRC), the La Trobe University Postgraduate Association (LUPA) and other elected student representatives. These interviews were used to verify findings of the University's self-review. Results that particularly relate to student support services are in the following sections.

7.1 *Student Support Management and Planning*

The University does not currently have a comprehensive plan directing student services across its campuses. A Student Services Advisory Group provides an opportunity for different service providers across campuses to meet and discuss matters of mutual interest. These matters include statistics about usage of the services, evaluative reports and special purpose surveys, such as an innovative and very useful survey on student poverty. Numerous examples were provided to the Audit Panel indicating that the University responds well to issues raised.

Students are made aware of student services at orientation, and thereafter through brochures, the Undergraduate Handbook and Postgraduate Handbook, and a mail-out to the entire student body. Awareness of the range of services among students is high.

The lack of a strategic plan for student services does mean that some issues do not receive the attention that they otherwise might. For example, part-time students, of which the University had 8,773 in 2004, could be better supported. There are limited online and after-hours services which they can access. Also, equitable provision of services across the University's campuses is a challenge. There is evidence that students at different campuses are treated unevenly in terms of levels of support. Students understand that this is the product of economies of scale and other logistical concerns, but the University needs to establish appropriate needs analysis and response systems to ensure that the needs of students across its campuses are accurately identified and responded to as well as possible. Again, an integrated student services planning process may assist in this regard.

7.2 *Student Representative System*

The University's relationships with its student associations appears strong (eg section 1.4.2). However, the Audit Panel came to the view that the University possibly places too much reliance on the student bodies as a means for ensuring that the quality of services is maintained, by relying on student representatives to appropriately raise student concerns rather than using such a mechanism to augment and enhance the University's own systems for obtaining student feedback (but there are exceptions to this – section 7.3).

At the Bendigo campus it became clear that the student representative system is not effective as a means for ensuring that student concerns are adequately incorporated into the campus management of academic activities (such as changing course rules midway through a cohort). The University ought to ensure that it has appropriately robust means for communicating with students, both in terms of seeking input into decision-making and in terms of disseminating consequences of decisions.

Students have a number of avenues for addressing grievances, including seeking support from their associations. Ultimately, they have access to the University Ombudsman (section 8.9).

7.3 *Student Counselling Services*

The Audit Panel selected the Counselling Services as a means for sampling the University's quality assurance systems for its pastoral services.

The Counselling Services provide an example of a proactive pastoral service. Not only do they provide counselling to students, but they also run training programs for staff, which has demonstrably helped facilitate referrals of students to the service. At Bundoora, the service evaluates every session. It uses an internationally benchmarked Change Outcomes Management System, originally sourced from overseas, which is soon to be adopted by other Victorian universities, thereby also creating the potential for localised benchmarking.

The nature of a counselling service is such that it was difficult to obtain verification of the University's submission through students' direct experiences. However, students spoke positively of the Counselling Services in general terms.

Commendation 13

AUQA commends La Trobe University for its proactive and quality-conscious Counselling Services, which exemplify good practice in student services.

As with other student services and University activities in general, ensuring comparable standards of care across campuses is a challenge. There is an opportunity for greater integration of Student Counselling Services across campuses from both resource planning and practitioner perspectives.

7.4 *International Students*

The University has a sizeable cohort of international students (well over 5,000), of which the Audit Panel and its delegations met a number both onshore and offshore. In general, these students expressed a high level of satisfaction with the University and its support services.

General student services at LTU do not differentiate between domestic and international students. However, in recognition that international students also have particular needs, the University provides them with dedicated support through welfare officers based within the IPO.

One recurring concern for onshore international students was the lack of social integration, and of processes for supporting such integration. Student associations are making efforts to address this (for example, LUPA provide a Chinese Culture Night), and students believe that the University itself could place greater emphasis on this issue as part of their overall strategy to increase international student enrolments.

About 2,000 of the University's students are off campus – mostly offshore (although some are with other partners within Australia). The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Equity and Access) is a member of the CEP (section 6.1) in order to ensure that student support issues are addressed when embarking upon offshore activities, although such issues are not subsequently routinely checked.

Offshore, APMI – one of the University's partners – operates 'Student Care Plans' which have the main goal of increasing student completion rates. Results presented to the Offshore Delegation show that drop-out rates are kept below 10%, suggesting a measure of success in this regard. This good practice is not an LTU initiative per se, but it is an indication that LTU has been discerning in its choice of partners (section 6.5.1).

7.5 *Indigenous Students*

The University's strategic direction for students in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008 includes a strategy:

To consolidate and strengthen support and opportunities for Indigenous students.

The Indigenous Education Statement for the 2004-2006 triennium sets out the following:

Specific objectives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) students are to:

- *increase access, participation, success and retention of students;*
- *provide courses and flexible learning programs that meet the needs of Aboriginal communities, and*
- *increase cultural understanding.*

In overall terms, the Audit Panel found that attention to Indigenous communities and students does not feature strongly in the general culture of LTU. This is evinced through the somewhat limited documentation submitted, the general absence of Indigenous issues in response to generic questions, and the lack of any school or research centre specifically dedicated to Indigenous studies.

That said, there are several structures in place to try and improve the effectiveness of the University's service to Indigenous students and communities. Oversight of this important area is provided by the University's Indigenous Education Committee. The state of Victoria has 26 local Aboriginal Education Consultative groups, and LTU is linked with many of these; most notably the groups at Bundoora and Bendigo, of which it is a member. Through these connections the University is able to obtain advice on issues pertaining to Indigenous communities, ranging from teaching opportunities through to research projects.

LTU needs to put more effort into its linkages with Indigenous communities. There are pockets of strong activity and excellent linkages between LTU and Indigenous communities, but the effort is not systemic.

Recruitment of Indigenous students is an ongoing challenge for LTU, and the University may wish to consider this issue in the context of engagement with Indigenous communities. In 2003, 80 of the University's 26,575 enrolments were classified as Indigenous students. Statistics show that LTU is below national and state averages in access and participation rates for this equity target group.

In response, the University has established the Ngarn-gi Bagora Indigenous Centre at the Bundoora campus and the Aboriginal Tertiary Support Unit at the Bendigo campus (and other campuses may also have an Aboriginal Liaison Officer) to support prospective students. Retention and success rates are consistent with, or slightly better than, state averages (and the state tends to perform better than national averages on these indicators). This suggests that the University is successful with Indigenous students once they have enrolled.

Affirmation 11

AUQA affirms that La Trobe University needs to increase its attention to Indigenous students as an issue of relevance to the whole University community.

8 STAFF

The University's strategic direction for staff, in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008 is:

To attract, develop and retain staff of high calibre.

The Audit Panel met over 170 staff of LTU in the course of its visits to the Bundoora, Bendigo and City campuses. In general, it found a highly collegial environment amongst the staff, although the extent to which this traversed campuses often appeared to be more a factor of individual connections than institutional strategy and effort.

8.1 *Management and Planning*

The Human Resources Division (HRD) reports to the University Secretary. The University has identified a need to strategically reposition from a personnel focus/approach to a human resource focus/approach. Such repositioning could result in more systematic gathering of feedback about client needs and satisfaction with human resource services. In order to achieve this, a new structure has been formed comprising an Employee Relations Office, a Personnel Office and the Occupational Health and Safety Unit. The University does not yet have the internal capabilities to conduct needs analyses and identify best practices itself, and so is currently relying on external consultants for this purpose.

The Audit Panel agrees that such a repositioning is necessary in order to provide the necessary support to its multi-campus and devolved structure. Indeed, it appears that the conditions requiring such a repositioning have been extant for a number of years, and the University has been slow in identifying and responding to this issue. This highlights the importance of institutional self-review as an ongoing process and the Audit Panel endorses the University's commitment to ensuring that this occurs henceforth.

There is still further change that may be necessary. Human resource management at the Bendigo campus has remained independent from the new HRD structure. The Audit Panel was advised that this was in order to help facilitate, through a localised sense of ownership, the major change process in which that campus is engaged (section 1.4.1). The University's choice in structuring human resources this way is, therefore, partly a strategic matter. However, it also raises the questions of how separate human resource processes will consistently facilitate the University's quality assurance efforts as well as, indeed, the quality assurance of human resource processes themselves. The Audit Panel could not determine how this issue was being addressed. If the University is to keep human resources at Bendigo separate from the centralised HRD, it will need to make these matters a priority.

8.2 *Human Resources Policies*

LTU has published a Personnel Policy and Procedures Manual which is available online. The Audit Panel reviewed this and found it to be very comprehensive and easily accessible. Staff appreciate having this information transparently available in a single place.

HRD advises that it has been dependent upon external consultants to keep the policy manual comprehensive and consistent with best practice. LTU does not systematically conduct its own benchmarking of human resource policies and processes. There is an opportunity for HRD, as part of its strategic repositioning, to develop this competency both for professional development reasons and to better support the human resource development of the University. This is not to suggest that external consultants ought not be used but, rather, that there is a measure of

embedded, in-house policy expertise that will be required if the intended strategic repositioning of the human resource function is to be successful.

8.3 *Performance Enhancement and Development*

The University has operated a Performance Enhancement and Development Scheme (PEDS) since 1998. The purpose of this scheme is to determine means for maximising the potential of academic staff (for general staff, similar issues are addressed via IPPPS: section 8.6).

The effectiveness of PEDS does not appear to have been systematically evaluated, although the PEDS process incorporates provision for staff to comment on the effectiveness of PEDS itself, which is then forwarded to the DVC (a PEDS review report was apparently pending but not available at the time of the Audit Visit). In the absence of such an evaluation, the Audit Panel queried staff extensively on this matter. The responses varied according to level of seniority. At the highest level there was considerable support for PEDS because of the potential for useful management information to be generated from aggregated reports (such as for assessing the effectiveness of workload management plans – section 8.4). At middle management, where the implementation of PEDS requires considerable time and attention, it was less well regarded. Non-management staff were mixed in their views, ranging from unqualified support to lack of awareness of the process.

There is potential for PEDS to be a constructive element of the University's overall quality management system. In order to maximise the benefits it will be necessary to ensure full implementation and to discuss and address the concerns of school and unit heads.

8.4 *Workload Management*

The University's Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (EBA) requires that workload management models are in place. These models are central to the University's ability to organise its staff to achieve its objectives. The Audit Panel investigated the extent to which these models are established and are proving effective.

The University has been attentive to this issue. The Quality Management Checklists (section 2.6) ask whether schools and administrative units have transparent workload models that address the factors set out in the EBA. Staff at all levels of the organisation indicated agreement that this was so, and that the models were equitable. The Audit Panel heard no views to the contrary (although it was constantly advised that workload scheduling and volume are general problems shared by all).

8.5 *Promotion*

The Audit Panel considered the University's approach to academic staff promotion. The Audit Panel detected no particular problems with promotion application success rates, which vary around two thirds. Indeed, gender differences which previously favoured males seeking promotion to Levels C and D are now disappearing, lending credence to the University's EEO efforts.

However, the number of promotion applicants appears low. From 2001 to 2003, between 2.5% and 4.4% of staff at Levels A and B applied for promotion. Over the same years, between 3.4% and 6.7% of staff at Level C applied for promotion. Projections based on these figures suggest that average academic career progression at LTU is slow.

This may indicate a number of possible problems within the University's human resources systems or, perhaps, the budgetary model (section 2.3 for comment on the 80:20 policy). It may also indicate issues within the organisational culture of the University that require attention. The

Audit Panel asked academic staff about the promotions process, and the main response was a concern that the process gave insufficient weight to teaching. This may be a deterrent to staff applying for promotion. Other suggestions were also raised, such as the potential to more clearly define how the promotions criteria for more senior levels relate to the University's intention to maintain a proportional mix between professional/vocational education and traditional/basic education of 55/45 (section 2.5).

The Audit Panel concluded that LTU ought to seek a full and accurate interpretation of what its promotion application figures are indicating about the University. This exercise should, at least, include a comparison of LTU figures with those of peer institutions.

8.6 *Incremental Progression and Performance Planning System*

The University operates an Incremental Progression and Performance Planning System (IPPPS) for general staff (for academic staff, similar issues are addressed via PEDS: section 8.3). It was introduced in 2001 and fully implemented by 2002. IPPPS is used to determine staff salary progression within a range, through assessing performance against agreed plans. The Audit Panel queried a number of managers and staff about IPPS and found support for the scheme. There were a number of general staff who have been with the University for nearly a year and who were not aware of the IPPS (perhaps because of inadequacies in the University's orientation processes for new staff). LTU ought to ensure that all staff are aware of the methods by which expectations of their performance are set and measured. Also, the scheme has no impact on general staff who are at the top of their salary scale. This is a limitation of the scheme's organisation-wide effectiveness as a means for general staff development.

8.7 *Equity*

The Audit Panel explored the University's approach to workplace equity, particularly regarding gender. It reviewed the University's plans in this regard, which are set out in the Institutional Equity Plan and the Workplace Plan developed by the Equity and Access Unit.

The University operates an Equity, Access and Personal Welfare Committee. This Committee appears to be very active in setting policy, responding to issues raised by staff, and running equity awareness programs through the Equity and Access Unit. LTU has 31% senior women compared with a national average of 19% in 2003, suggesting a level of success in this area (and see comment on promotion statistics 8.5). The University's efforts have been externally endorsed by the Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace Agency (EOWA). In 2004, EOWA designated LTU, along with sixteen other universities, as 'Employers of Choice for Women'. LTU have held this designation since the inception of the EOWA award in 2001.

The Audit Panel interviewed a broad range of female staff during the course of its Audit Visits and explored gender issues in response to generic questions. On occasion, specific questions about gender barriers were also raised. There appears to be a strong level of support for the University's equity efforts and general satisfaction with the working environment. For example, some staff noted that the University's working conditions are suitably flexible to enable staff to manage children and work requirements.

The University cannot yet claim that it has resolved equity issues. However, it can claim that its equity initiatives are having the desired impact.

Commendation 14

AUQA commends La Trobe University for success in its efforts to create an equitable working environment.

8.8 *Occupational Health and Safety*

The University's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) Unit is located within the Human Resources Division. It has established and depends upon 14 Zone Committees and specialist working parties to implement OHS policies. LTU has established well-developed processes of audit, inspection and incident investigation. Success is monitored through attendance numbers at training seminars, incident reports and workers compensation claims statistics.

The University's general oversight of occupational health and safety appears sound and provides an important level of support for LTU's academic activities.

8.9 *Ombudsman*

The University's Statute 39: *Reviews and Appeals* outlines the processes for addressing student grievances. An Ombudsman has been in place for thirteen years with the purpose of providing arbitration or conciliation services independent of University management and once all other internal procedures for obtaining redress have been exhausted. In practice, the Ombudsman seeks to address grievances as informally and expeditiously as can be satisfactorily achieved. Where this is not possible, the statute provides for an Ombudsman's Committee, comprising the Ombudsman and two persons appointed by Council, who assess whether the case should be addressed formally in accordance with the regulations.

The services of the Ombudsman's office are available to all members of the LTU community (including staff, students, graduates, residents of colleges and Council members).

Each year, the Ombudsman produces a report providing a summary analysis of the activity of the office, including a costs/benefit assessment. The Audit Panel referred to these reports as well as interviews with staff and students in forming a judgement on the efficacy of this system.

The Ombudsman's office deals with about 130 contacts per year. In absolute terms the majority of these are from students, although proportional to their populations there are more contacts made by staff than by students. The University does not have benchmark data from other similar institutions against which to interpret these figures. However, that they have been largely constant over the past five years suggests, in general, a stable staff and student climate.

There is a high level of satisfaction with the institution of the Ombudsman. The vast majority of cases brought to the office are satisfactorily resolved and in a timely fashion. The Ombudsman has formed excellent relationships with the La Trobe University Postgraduate Association, which advocates on behalf of HDR students, and various University personnel with whom the position needs to liaise in order to effectively fulfil its responsibilities.

The University is to be congratulated for establishing and successfully maintaining a system which helps aid the morale of the University community and also helps in managing risks to the University and its members.

Commendation 15

AUQA commends La Trobe University for its successful Ombudsman's office, which has proven to be effective in supporting the entire University community.

9 SUPPORT SERVICES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The University's strategic direction for management in its Strategic Plan 2004-2008 includes:

To significantly enhance the infrastructure of the University.

The Audit Panel noted the wording of this strategic direction, which indicates significant room for improvement on current standards.

The University operates a range of services and facilities. Some, such as the Library and ADU, especially support the academic functions of the University. Others support the activities of the University more generically. The following sections provide comment on those services and facilities which the Audit Panel selected for its audit sample.

9.1 *Library*

LTU has five Libraries (although only four of these are listed in Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) statistical reports). Faculty liaison librarians (aka subject librarians) ensure constant communication between the Library and academic staff, as well as such localised support as information literacy programs.

LTU participates in benchmarking with other Australian libraries through the CAUL. These benchmarks have a long tradition within the sector and, while useful, are not sufficient for all the Library's benchmarking purposes. LTU has recently begun to augment the CAUL exercise with benchmarking through the Innovative Research Universities - Australia, and its own user surveys.

In 2002 the Library undertook a benchmarked survey of how its users rated its services and resources, using a scale bifurcated into importance and satisfaction. The survey shows that users were very satisfied with the Library staff, but less satisfied with resourcing issues such as availability of computers (the primary issue of concern), printing and photocopying facilities. On balance, the Library performed well against the issues that were rated as most important. The major opportunities for improvement were the adequacy of computing resources and the adequacy of collections for student study purposes. The Audit Panel learned during its own discussions with staff and students that the adequacy of computers is still one of major concern (section 9.3.2).

The Rodski survey of user satisfaction, which is a survey used by most libraries through the auspices of CAUL, shows a negative trend. Together, these surveys are very helpful and clearly set out an improvement agenda. The Audit Panel formed the view that the University is committed to acting upon this information.

The Audit Panel's own discussions with staff and students tended to corroborate the survey findings. Students at the Bundoora and Bendigo campuses were extremely complimentary about the Library staff. A concern, shared by staff and students, is that the libraries are crowded and may have inadequate computing resources to meet student demand. Students at the Bendigo campus were also critical of the stock held at that campus and the need to rely upon inter-campus loans. Although these can take place within 24 hours, they appear to deter students from accessing library resources.

The Library does not appear to be appropriately involved in the planning of new unit and course offerings. This was particularly apparent in discussions with regional campuses and offshore partners. New unit and course proposals are sometimes approved with library implications treated as 'not applicable', and after the approval it becomes apparent that this is not strictly the

case. It will be important for the University to more explicitly factor library considerations into course development and review significantly prior to final proposals being presented for approval. The issue of library involvement with course approval and delivery is particularly noticeable in relation to offshore courses (section 6.5.5).

The Library has received DEST funding to digitise a number of teaching resources such as examination papers and lecture materials in order to assist students at a distance, be they offshore or in regional Australia. This project is still in its early stages, and so the Audit Panel could not determine its effectiveness for student learning. However, it is an example of the University continually seeking to improve its services.

The Library provides a range of training courses for undergraduate and postgraduate students. The uptake of information literacy training by students seems impressive and students expressed their support for the courses.

9.2 Bookstores

Students, particularly at the Bendigo campus, were critical of their bookstores, maintaining that they under-order and are then slow to respond to additional requests. Students claim that they are then disadvantaged by not having texts until well into the semester. They also advised that there are inadequate means by which students could get this issue resolved. The Audit Panel did not cross-check these allegations with the bookstore operators, but suggests that this is an issue which the University may wish to explore further, as it has an impact on student learning opportunities.

9.3 Information Technology Services

9.3.1 ITS Management and Planning

The provision of information technology services (ITS) to the multi-campus University community has been an ongoing challenge. The University is now embarking upon a new approach. Firstly, a Chief Information Officer (CIO) position will commence in 2005. This will, for the first time, bring together responsibility for all information and communication technology (ICT), specifically looking after ITS, Business Systems Development Unit and Centre for Online and Multimedia Educational Technologies (COMET: section 9.3.3).

Secondly, a new ICT strategic plan will be developed, which sets out a new direction for ICT development and support. The University has experimented with service level agreements but these were discarded upon feedback that staff found them too complicated to be useful. A devolved model is now being attempted, whereby the first level of user support is provided locally, with provision for escalation to ITS. The second level, provided directly by ITS, focuses on enterprise-wide computing issues as well as supporting local IT staff. A third level of support is provided by external vendors. The University is basing this new approach on the Information Technology Infrastructure (ITIL) international standard. Although this development is new, there is already evidence to suggest a renewed energy among central and local IT staff, demonstrated through improved communication (for example, IT contact meetings, which involve ICT and faculty IT staff) and surveying of user requirements.

A third change will occur in terms of IT governance. A new IT Policy Committee will replace its predecessor, which was assessed as focusing more on operational issues than, with the introduction of the Information Technology Infrastructure Library (ITIL), will no longer be the most appropriate emphasis.

All these changes were new or pending at the time of the Audit Visit. In general, the Audit Panel concluded that the University is well aware of the challenges it has in the design and delivery of ICT services and has embarked upon a major improvement process in response. It was too soon

for the Audit Panel to determine the effectiveness of these changes (eg whereas a central approach to desktop support could be managed via a single helpdesk system, this will now need to be managed at multiple locations), but early indications are positive.

The University is also undertaking a business continuity planning (BCP) exercise. Three years ago ITS undertook a disaster planning and BCP assessment exercise. As a consequence, a Disaster Plan was developed, but work on BCP did not progress until early 2004. BCP has been a mainstream ICT activity for a number of years, and the Audit Panel formed the view that LTU has been late in adopting this method of risk management.

9.3.2 Personal Computing

The adequacy of access to PCs was a recurring topic of concern during the Audit Visits, for example in the Libraries (section 9.1) and for HDR students (section 4.5.3). ITS has a Standard Operating Environment (SOE) for staff and student computing. The SOE provides for, *inter alia*, routine replacement of computers at the end of their economic life (typically three years). The Audit Panel's primary means for testing the effectiveness of the SOE was by interviewing a sample of users of the equipment. It is evident that computers are either retained until they become inoperable or are passed onto part-time staff or postgraduate students as they become old and redundant. One explanation provided to the Audit Panel was that the University's budget had not adequately funded the SOE policy, thereby seriously limiting its effectiveness.

The Audit Panel's deliberations on this matter did not include sufficient evidence to form a recommendation. Rather, the Audit Panel suggests that LTU benchmark its current provision of personal computing services, in terms of both quantity and quality, with appropriate peer institutions in order to better assess the nature and extent of the issue.

9.3.3 Teaching and Learning Technologies

LTU is increasingly using new technologies to facilitate teaching and learning, particularly for those students at a distance from the larger campuses at Bundoora and Bendigo. Leadership and support in this area is provided through COMET.

The University is, compared with many other universities, a late adopter of some of these technologies and lacks a coordinated approach to their design, development and implementation – including staff training and pedagogic review. The Audit Panel particularly considered the two most prominent examples, learning management systems and video-conferencing.

LTU has been increasing the use of its preferred learning management system, WebCT™. It is still very early days for the University, with just 300 of its 3,657 subjects making some use of WebCT™ at the time of the Audit Visit. LTU advises that it was the first university to have a WebCT™ certified trainer (and now has two). However, a number of staff conveyed to the Audit Panel their experiences of being expected to teach using WebCT™ but without adequate (and, at times, any) support in how to use the technology, let alone how to effectively facilitate and encourage student learning through the use of this technology. This casts some doubt on the current adequacy of staff support. In some cases, staff are expected to prepare teaching and learning materials for WebCT™ with only a few days notice and no support.

More broadly than staff support, there appears to be no University-wide strategic approach to the design, implementation, growth and evaluation of WebCT™ as a learning management system. This is a particularly important issue for a multi-campus university with extensive outreach into its state and beyond.

One particular method used to address the challenges of teaching across campuses and distances has been video-conferencing. Indeed, this has been one of the University's strategies for

addressing the challenges of multi-campus management in general (section 1.4). The Audit Panel explored LTU's use of video-conferencing in terms of its effectiveness as a means for achieving teaching across campuses. In particular, it held discussions with students who were taught via this method, with some of the staff teaching in this way, and with executives, campus leaders and administrators responsible for the technology.

It is apparent that video-conferencing, as currently being implemented, is not a satisfactory multi-campus strategy. Staff and students (both those with the teacher and those at a distance) report that the dynamics of interaction in the teaching context are problematic. Students being taught through video-conferencing feel particularly disadvantaged compared with students being taught face-to-face. Conversely, they understand that the opportunities to study in their home location may not be available without video-conferencing. There are two issues of importance for them, namely overcoming the disadvantages of the medium, and getting an appropriate balance between video-conferencing and face-to-face teaching. A survey conducted by the Students' Association provided further evidence of dissatisfaction with video-conferencing as a teaching medium.

The Audit Panel was advised by teaching staff and administrators that the University expects to increase the amount of teaching by video-conferencing to and from Bendigo (to other campuses including Bundoora and Mildura), partly as a consequence of the restructuring. This increasing dependency on video-conferencing does not seem to be supported with either a sound pedagogic assessment of the impact of this medium on student learning, or an analysis of student satisfaction.

Recommendation 15

AUQA recommends that La Trobe University develop and implement a university-wide strategic approach to the design, implementation, growth and evaluation of online learning management systems and video-conferencing.

The University is appointing a new Chief Information Officer and it may be that this will provide the leadership necessary to effectively address the issue.

9.4 Academic Spaces and Maintenance

The Audit Panel selected teaching spaces for audit, and in the course of its deliberations it became apparent that this issue needed also to incorporate buildings and facilities maintenance.

The Audit Panel heard a number of concerns about the standard of teaching facilities. These ranged from claims that the classrooms and facilities were generally run down, to audio-visual equipment not working, to teaching spaces being too small to accommodate the number of students enrolled in the subjects. This corroborated the University's Risk Ownership Report, which identifies the adequacy of facilities for staff and students as an extreme risk arising from inadequate capital funding, over-enrolment and large class sizes.

In the Strategic Plan 2004-2008 the University, while claiming to maintain support for the quality of facilities at its regional campuses, proposes to upgrade at least five buildings at the Bundoora campus, while also establishing a "new, fully operational, prestigious campus in inner Melbourne" by 2008. The Audit Panel believes that this will be a significant challenge for the University, given that it may be struggling to maintain adequate quality of facilities at its current regional campuses where problems with facilities are apparent (section 4.5.3).

The Audit Panel received a number of complaints from students about the size of rooms allocated to tutorial groups, including claims that students had, on occasion, been unable to attend their

tutorials because the assigned rooms were too small to accommodate demand. These claims were (in general, rather than in relation to specific instances) supported by a number of academic staff.

As a result of the needs identified by the University with respect to availability and quality of space on the Bundoora campus, the Vice-Chancellor has reconvened the Space Review Committee to ensure effective and efficient allocation of space in accordance with the University's strategic plan.

The adequacy of space for international students is of particular concern, given the growth targets in this category of enrolments. A fixed portion of revenue from international students is committed to capital, but it is not yet apparent that the University has this issue fully under control.

The University advised that it tends to view its maintenance backlog as "that which is required to maintain the building as fit for purpose – judged against the aims of the University". Consequently, the University claims that it has a low maintenance backlog. The Audit Panel was exposed to many claims, by staff and students, of inadequate and substandard buildings and facilities, particularly teaching spaces and laboratories. The Audit Panel considers it possible that the University's stated standard is being treated as sufficiently vague as to mask problems that ought to be addressed, and that there would be advantage in setting specific and clearly defined standards for what is minimally acceptable.

APPENDIX A. LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

La Trobe University, which was created under the La Trobe University Act 1964, officially opened in March 1967. Since then it has grown to accommodate some 17,000 students at its Bundoora campus and, after incorporating a number of smaller regional institutions throughout the 1990s, has a further 6,000 students at its other campuses (at Albury-Wodonga, Bendigo, Beechworth, Mildura, Mt Buller and Shepparton and Melbourne City), making it the largest provider of higher education places in regional Victoria. As well as over 3,600 international students at Australian campuses, there are more than 2,000 students studying with external partners on- and off-shore. In total this amounted to an EFTSU load of 20,781 in August 2004.

In academic terms the University now comprises five Faculties: Health Sciences, Humanities and Social Sciences, Law and Management, Science, Technology and Engineering and Education. Until late 2004 the Bendigo campus served as a multi-disciplinary Faculty for Regional Development; subsequently a Faculty of Education has been constituted so that the University now has five multi-campus Faculties. These five Faculties are responsible for programs across seven teaching campuses.

The University is active in research and hosts the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS), as well as a Research and Development Park which currently supports more than 200 jobs and hosts over 30 tenants. It also participates in seven co-operative research centres and houses some 25 research centres and institutes. Over 50 members of staff have been elected to learned Academies.

La Trobe University is a foundation member and leader in the International Network of Universities (INU), which comprises a group of thirteen universities from China, Japan, Indonesia, the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, Hungary and Sweden, co-operating through exchanges to add an international dimension to the study programs of their students. Nationally, La Trobe is a member of the group of six universities known as the Innovative Research Universities – Australia.

Key Statistics 2004 (unless otherwise stated)

Student EFTSU (all fund sources, as at census 31 August 2004)	
TOTAL (including off-shore and external)	20,781.4
Postgraduate EFTSU	4,060.6
International EFTSU	3,400.8
Students (Persons) (all fund sources, as at census 31 August 2004)	
TOTAL	28,202
Staff (FTE excluding casual staff, as at census 31 March 2004)	
Academic	1,037.5
General	1,247.2
TOTAL	2,284.7
Faculties (EFTSU, all fund sources, as at census 31 August 2004)	
Health Sciences	4,448.0
Humanities and Social Science	4,282.9
Law and Management	4,958.5
Regional Development	3,557.6
Science, Technology and Engineering	3,451.9
Programs (including off-shore, as at census 31 August 2004)	
Undergraduate	350
Postgraduate	408
Subjects	3,493
Campuses (EFTSU all fund sources, as at census 31 August 2004) excludes off-shore, APESMA, distance education, on-line and other sites.	
Albury-Wodonga	967.0
Beechworth	0.0
Bendigo	3,321.5
Bundoora	14,162.7
City	167.4
Mildura	230.9
Mt Buller	54.8
Shepparton	186.8
Research (for year ended 31-12-2003)	
Income	\$21,964,278
Publications (books; refereed papers)	784.50
Finance (for year ended 31-12-2003)	
Operating Revenue	\$333,953,000
Operating Expenses	\$320,100,000

APPENDIX B. AUQA'S MISSION, VALUES AND FOUR OBJECTIVES

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.

Values

AUQA will be:

1. Thorough: AUQA carries out all its audits as thoroughly as possible.
2. Supportive: recognising institutional autonomy in setting objectives and implementing processes to achieve them, AUQA acts to facilitate and support this.
3. Flexible: AUQA operates flexibly, in order to acknowledge and reinforce institutional diversity.
4. Co-operative: 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.
5. Collaborative: as a quality assurance agency, AUQA works collaboratively with the accrediting agencies (in addition to its audit role with respect to these agencies).
6. Transparent: AUQA's audit procedures, and its own quality assurance system, are open to public scrutiny.
7. Economical: AUQA operates cost-effectively and keeps as low as possible the demands it places on institutions and agencies.
8. Open: AUQA reports publicly and clearly on its findings in relation to institutions, agencies and the sector.

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 the 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; and
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.

APPENDIX C. THE AUDIT PANEL

Mr Martin Carroll, Audit Director and Business Development Manager, AUQA

Professor Elizabeth More (Chairperson), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Administration), Macquarie University, New South Wales

Dr Michael Green, Director, Space Licensing & Safety Office, Department of Industry, Tourism & Resources, Australian Capital Territory

Mr Rau Kirikiri, Treaty Responsibilities Manager, Landcare Research, New Zealand

Professor Charles Webb, Pro Vice-Chancellor, Teaching & Learning, Charles Darwin University, Northern Territory

APPENDIX D. ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The following abbreviations, acronyms and terms are used in this report. As necessary, they are explained in context. In some cases, URLs are provided to facilitate further enquiries about these acronyms and terms.

ADU	Academic Development Unit (http://www.latrobe.edu.au/adu)
APMI.....	Asia Pacific Management Institute (http://www.apmi.com.hk)
AQRG.....	Academic Quality Reference Group
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency (http://www.auqa.edu.au)
AVCC.....	Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (http://www.avcc.edu.au)
BBus	Bachelor of Business
BCP	Business continuity planning
BN	Bachelor of Nursing
BNS	Bachelor of Nursing Studies
Bendigo Delegation.....	A delegation of the Audit Panel which undertook an Audit Visit to the University's Bendigo campus.
CAUL.....	Council of Australian University Librarians (http://www.caul.edu.au/)
CEP.....	Committee for External Programs
CEQ.....	Course Experience Questionnaire
CIO	Chief Information Officer
COMET	Centre for Online and Multimedia Educational Technologies (http://www.latrobe.edu.au/comet)
CUHK.....	Chinese University of Hong Kong (http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/en)
DBA	Diploma of Business Administration
DEST.....	(Australian) Department of Education, Science and Training (http://www.dest.gov.au)
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EAPWC.....	Equity, Access and Personal Welfare Committee
EBA	Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
EdD.....	Doctor of Education
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
EFTSU.....	Equivalent full-time student unit
EOWA	Equal Opportunities for Women in the Workplace Agency (http://www.eowa.gov.au)
ESOS	Education Services for Overseas Students
FRD	Faculty for Regional Development
FTE.....	Full-time Equivalent (staff numbers)
HDC(R)	Higher Degrees Committee (Research)
HDR	Higher Degree Research
HRD	Human Resources Division
HUFS.....	Hanoi University of Foreign Studies (http://www.hufs.edu.vn)
IAS	Institute for Advanced Study (http://www.latrobe.edu.au/ias)
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IELTS.....	International English Language Testing System
IPPPS.....	Incremental Progression and Performance Planning Scheme
ITIL	Information Technology Infrastructure Library

IT	Information technology
ITS	Information Technology Services
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
LTUPS	La Trobe University Postgraduate Research Scholarship
LTI.....	La Trobe International Pty Ltd (a wholly-owned subsidiary company of La Trobe University)
LTU	La Trobe University (http://www.latrobe.edu.au)
LUPA.....	La Trobe University Postgraduate Association (http://www.latrobe.edu.au/lupa)
MAL	Master of Applied Linguistics
MBA.....	Master of Business Administration
MCEETYA.....	Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (http://www.mceetya.edu.au)
MIU	Management Information Unit
National Protocols	MCEETYA National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes (http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/mceetya_cop.htm)
NCHSR.....	National Centre for Hellenic Studies and Research (http://www.latrobe.edu.au/nhc)
Offshore Delegation	A delegation of the Audit Panel which undertook an Audit Visit to a sample of the University's offshore partners and activities.
OHS	Occupational Health and Safety
PEDS	Performance Enhancement and Development Scheme
Performance Portfolio	La Trobe University Performance Portfolio 2004
PVC(I)	Pro Vice-Chancellor (International)
PVC(QE)	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Quality Enhancement)
QAS	Quality Assurance of Subjects
QIPs	Quality Improvement Priorities
RAB.....	Regional Advisory Board
R&D Parks	Research and Development Parks
RGSC.....	Research and Graduate Studies Committee
RGSO	Research and Graduate Studies Office
RRTMP	Research and Research Training Management Plan 2002-2006
SET	Student Evaluation of Teaching
SOE	Standard Operating Environment
SRC	Student Representative Council (http://www.latrobe.edu.au/src)
VCAC.....	Vice-Chancellor's Advisory Committee
VNU	Vietnam National University (http://www.vnu.edu.vn)

