

AUSTRALIAN  
UNIVERSITIES  
QUALITY AGENCY

**Report of an Audit of  
Swinburne University of Technology**

**March 2003**

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## ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

The following abbreviations and acronyms are used in this report. As necessary, they are explained in context.

AGSE	Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
APPC	Academic Policy and Planning Committee
APQC	Academic Programs Quality Committee
DEST	Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training
EFTSU	effective full-time student units
IBL	Industry-Based Learning
ISU	International Student Unit
HDR	higher degree by research
JPRC	Joint Planning and Resources Committee
LEAD	Leadership and Entrepreneurial Attributes Development Program
LTS	Learning and Teaching Support
SQRS	Swinburne Quality Review System
SSIT	Swinburne Sarawak Institute of Technology
SUT	Swinburne University of Technology
TAFE	Technical and Further Education



## OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

### *Background*

In 2001, the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to carry out an academic audit of Swinburne University of Technology (SUT).

A brief introduction to SUT is given in Appendix A. The objects of AUQA are shown in Appendix B. The membership of the audit panel is provided in Appendix C.

### *The Audit Process*

AUQA bases its audits on each organisation's own objectives, together with the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) Protocols. The major aim of the audit is to consider and review the processes and procedures an organisation has in place to monitor and achieve its objectives.

SUT submitted a Performance Portfolio and supporting documentation describing its strategic directions and the range of mechanisms it has in place to monitor the achievement of objectives, and assure and enhance quality across its core activities. The AUQA panel met to consider these materials on 18 July 2002.

On 12 August 2002, the Panel Chair and Audit Director visited SUT for a Preparatory Visit. During that visit, preliminary clarification of issues and additional information were sought and arrangements for the on-shore Audit Visit were discussed.

Prior to the Audit Visit to SUT, the Panel Chair and Audit Director visited Swinburne Sarawak Institute of Technology (SSIT), Kuching on 18-19 September 2002. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) was present at SSIT at the time of this visit.

The on-shore Audit Visit took place on 23-25 September 2002, with the panel assembling for a planning meeting on 22 September. The panel was based at the Hawthorn campus but made a brief visit to the Prahran campus.

In all, the panel spoke with over 200 people during the Audit Visits, including the senior management, academic staff, general and technical staff, undergraduate and postgraduate students (including such diversity as local, indigenous and international people), representatives from the University Council and the external community. A session was set aside to allow any member of the University community to meet with the panel and two groups took this opportunity.

This Report records the conclusions reached by AUQA based on the documentation provided by the University and interviews, discussions and observations of the panel. While every attempt has been made to ascertain a comprehensive understanding of SUT's activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every instance of quality assurance procedures, or of their effectiveness or shortcomings. This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit (23-25 September 2002), and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently.

The Report contains a summary of findings and lists of commendations and recommendations. The latter suggest possible improvements and in some cases endorse actions already being undertaken by the University.

It is acknowledged that recommendations in AUQA Audit Reports may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for universities where financial and other resources are constrained. Accordingly, AUQA does not prioritise these recommendations, and recognises that it is SUT's responsibility to respond as it sees fit.

This Report has taken as its primary structure SUT's five strategic themes; namely, flexible learning and teaching; research; the entrepreneurial university; the intersectoral advantage; and internationalisation. Chapters are also included on staffing matters and student support since these areas of activity are not related to any individual theme. Having said this, consideration of issues related to staff and student support is included in earlier chapters where appropriate.

## CONCLUSIONS

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

### *Summary of Findings*

The University is an intersectoral institution, with both Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and higher education sectors. In keeping with AUQA's Objects (see Appendix B), the audit panel concentrated its attention on the higher education sector of the University.

The Joint Planning and Resources Committee (JPRC) is a standing committee of Council constituted to advise and assist Council on policy matters pertaining to strategic and resource planning. The Committee appears to be operating effectively, although the panel considered that the terms of reference may present a challenge to senior management in terms of maintaining an appropriate and workable distinction between governance and management functions. Council members on the Committee commit considerable time to this work in addition to their direct Council responsibilities and the panel recommends that the Council and University reconsider the role and functions of the JPRC in this context.

A new planning framework is progressively being implemented within the University. This includes a series of Master Plans (one for each of the five strategic themes of the University) and eight Enabling Plans which will focus on major corporate functions necessary to underpin the achievement of the Master Plans. SUT has recently moved to integrate more closely its quality system into the planning and risk management framework. AUQA commends this development and encourages the University in this ongoing work. SUT has an obvious commitment to achieving quality in its teaching and research activities, evidenced by the Vice-Chancellor's Statement of Quality, by the program of annual excellence awards and by the approaches of staff met by the panel.

SUT notes that its emphasis to date has been on comparing the University's present performance with its past performance and that systematic reference to external comparators has been less prominent. In some areas the University refers to publicly available information on other Australian universities, particularly those institutions in the Australian Technological Network. The panel acknowledges and endorses SUT's intention to move towards greater use of external benchmarking, through the Commonwealth University Management Benchmarking Programme and otherwise. It recommends that attention be paid to the development of outcome, as well as input, measures.

The detail and formality with which Academic Board monitors teaching has increased over recent years. SUT staff point to a number of different mechanisms to assist in considering the question of academic standards including arranging visits of academic staff from other institutions, external examining, professional accreditation, and involving academic staff from other universities and representatives of business and industry on Course Advisory Committees. Presently lacking at SUT is a systematic means of assuring the equivalence of academic standards of its on-campus and off-shore courses. Academic Board has also failed to be sufficiently involved in the approval and accreditation of courses offered through at least one of its off-shore partners. This leads to recommendations from the panel relating to the urgent need to clarify the accreditation status of courses at Swinburne Sarawak Institute of Technology and, more generally, for the implementation of a comprehensive framework for the quality assurance of its courses being delivered at that site. The University has recognised the need for the framework in relation to the Sarawak operation and has constructed a suitable action plan. The panel further recommends that SUT develop systems for the regular review of the operations of all off-shore partner organisations, as they relate to SUT courses to ensure compliance with SUT policy.

A significant feature of a number of SUT's courses is the opportunity for an Industry-Based Learning component and AUQA commends SUT for this program, which is assisting it in achieving the objective of providing programs with an applied orientation. The panel notes the recent approval of University-wide policies and procedures for IBL and the explicit attention being paid to some risk management issues.

A major emphasis was placed on research when SUT became a University in 1992 and an overriding objective is for the Higher Education Division to become 'research-intensive'. On a variety of measures of research performance, there is evidence of a significant increasing trend from a relatively low base. In managing its research, the University has recently identified nine research areas in which it wishes to achieve national or international prominence in research. At this early stage, it is difficult for the panel to determine what value the identification of the nine areas and the appointment of co-ordinators for each area might bring, although it is possible that the co-ordinators may assist in providing an increased external profile to the University's research activities. The panel recommends that further attention be paid to developing a common understanding of the University's definition of 'research intensive'.

SUT has a goal to link its teaching and research. It appeared to the panel that there is no formal relationship between the teaching priorities of the University that have a very applied focus and the choice of research priorities. In developing the Research Management Plan, the panel recommends that specific attention be paid to clarifying these linkages and identifying ways in which they can be strengthened.

The Office of Research and Graduate Studies undertook a review of research training in 2002, which recommended a number of measures for improving research supervision, for bringing some consistency to approaches across the University and for greater sharing of good practices. Work has already begun to address these issues and this is commended. The University has an objective to create a vibrant research culture. This is happening in some schools and units, although discussions with students suggested that students would value more opportunities to meet with others across the University and increased attention to this aspect of the research training program is recommended.

SUT is aware of the limitations of its library collection for meeting the research needs of students and staff, and this is obviously a challenge as the University continues to scale up its research activities. The Board of Research Working Party on Library Resources for Research reported in 2001 on the limitations of the library collection, while noting that the service provided by library staff is well regarded by users. Library staff have been proactive in trying to meet the challenges faced. The Library generally has good systems for seeking and responding to feedback from users, although students studying off-shore are an exception to this and it is recommended that this be addressed.

SUT aspires to become a renowned centre for entrepreneurship and innovation and for entrepreneurship and innovation to be a hallmark of everything that it does. The panel investigated the meaning and consequences of this objective in some detail, while recognising that the first strategic development plan for the entrepreneurial theme was finalised only in 2001. The extent to which entrepreneurship is understood and practised varies considerably across SUT. The Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship is a significant focus for teaching and research into entrepreneurship at SUT. In other schools, little consideration has yet been given to how the University's strategic theme of entrepreneurship relates to their disciplines. The panel was provided with a number of examples of entrepreneurial activity and particularly commends the Leadership and Entrepreneurial Attributes Development Program aimed at high-potential PhD students who are interested in developing their leadership and entrepreneurial skills. The panel acknowledges the challenges inherent in the achievement of the entrepreneurial theme and, while endorsing the projects that have been established to date, recommends that further effort be directed at assisting staff to understand how this high-level strategic goal may be applied in their everyday work and to the

University's academic program. It is suggested that the expertise of staff in the Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship be further harnessed in this regard.

Capitalising on its intersectoral advantage is another of SUT's strategic themes. The Intersectoral Advisory Committee funds a number of projects annually to progress the University's objectives in relation to intersectoral linkages. The panel noted positively the range of the projects funded by the Committee and encourages further such development projects. A number of academic units have developed 'fully nested courses' or 'multiplex degrees' which integrate course content from both the Higher Education and TAFE Divisions. The panel suggests further investigation of the pedagogical differences and the impact of any differences on student learning, student support and administrative processes between the TAFE and higher education systems in these nested courses.

All aspects of the staffing policies and practices of the University have been under review at SUT recently and the panel endorses the work that has been undertaken. The panel noted the enthusiasm and commitment evident among the staff it met. Staff from the schools the panel met spoke with very clear pride in the achievements of their units and the University.

In terms of its student services, a major Student Experience Project Group was in the final stages of concluding its report at the time of the panel's visit. The focus of the project was the planning, deployment and delivery of administrative and other support services for students. AUQA commends SUT for the thorough nature of this project, which addresses in considerable detail the changes that are required to improve the provision of services to students.

AUQA commends SUT for the positive and effective way it has responded to its legislative obligation to serve Melbourne's Outer Eastern region through the activities of Swinburne Lilydale.

Note that the Commendations and Recommendations are not prioritised by the audit panel. They are listed in the order in which they appear in the Report.

### ***Commendations***

1. AUQA commends the approach being planned by the Foresight, Planning and Review Unit in the process review system that will maximise the benefits that staff obtain from participating in these reviews..... 15
2. AUQA commends SUT for its obvious commitment to achieving quality and for the efforts underway at more fully integrating its quality, planning and risk management frameworks..... 15
3. AUQA commends SUT for its Industry-Based Learning program, which is assisting it in achieving the objective of providing programs with an applied orientation. .... 21
4. AUQA commends SUT for undertaking a review of its research training program and for the manner in which it has begun to respond to the review's findings. .... 28
5. AUQA commends the Leadership and Entrepreneurial Attributes Development Program as an appropriate and valued contribution to SUT's implementation of its entrepreneurial theme. .... 32
6. AUQA commends the mentor program for international students at Swinburne Lilydale as an effective means of supporting international students. .... 39

7. AUQA commends SUT for the thorough nature of its Student Experience Project Group, which addresses in considerable detail the changes that are required to improve the provision of services to students. .... 41
8. AUQA commends SUT for the positive and effective way it has responded to its legislative obligation to serve Melbourne's outer eastern region through the activities of Swinburne Lilydale. .... 42

### ***Recommendations***

1. That the Council and University review the role and functions of the Joint Planning and Resources Committee in the context of the considerable additional time commitment required of the Council members serving on that Committee. .... 14
2. That, in developing a more systematic approach to external benchmarking, attention be paid to outcome, as well as input, measures. .... 16
3. That, as part of the foreshadowed review of course accreditation and reaccreditation procedures, an explicit review of the current operation and terms of reference of Course Advisory Committees be undertaken. As part of this review, consideration needs to be given to whether the current operation of the Course Advisory Committees in accreditation mode allows sufficiently for academic and pedagogic issues to be taken into account in (re)accreditation decisions. .... 19
4. That a review of the Subject Evaluation System be conducted, including a review of the effectiveness of the various mechanisms that exist within academic units for monitoring and acting on the results of the subject evaluations, of the University's ability to maintain sufficient oversight of the system and of the mechanisms that are in place to provide feedback to students. A review of the Subject Evaluation System was under consideration by SUT at the time of the audit. .... 20
5. That, in the development of the Flexible Learning and Teaching Master Plan, further consideration be given to more specifically linking graduate attributes to the University's overarching objectives for learning and teaching and research training, and that the revised attributes statement then be considered by all higher education schools in the development and review of courses. .... 23
6. That SUT develop amongst staff a more consistent understanding of the definition of 'research intensive' and promulgate it widely throughout the University and to its stakeholders. Further, that it more explicitly define the role of the co-ordinators of the nine identified areas of research activity. .... 26
7. That greater consideration be given to the opportunities for research higher degree students from across the University to interact academically and more informally. .... 28
8. That, in developing the Research Master Plan, specific attention be paid to clarifying the linkages between research and teaching and the ways in which such links can be encouraged for the mutual benefit of both activities. .... 29
9. That the recommendations of the Working Party on Library Resources for Research, which seek to improve library services supporting research activities of SUT, be implemented as soon as practicable. .... 29

10. That the Library pay explicit attention to the information resource and support needs of students studying off-shore and institute systems for seeking and responding systematically to feedback from these groups of students as it has done for its on-campus users. .... 30
11. That SUT encourage further discussion across the University of what is meant by entrepreneurship and assist staff to identify the ways in which this high-level strategic theme may be made more explicit in its learning and teaching activities and in research. There is considerable scope for the expertise of the Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship to be further harnessed in this regard..... 32
12. That the Intersectoral Advisory Committee sponsor research to investigate in more detail the pedagogical and student support implications of the fully nested degree courses..... 33
13. That, in developing the Internationalisation Master Plan, further attention be paid to identifying an agreed definition of what is meant by the term ‘internationalisation’ at SUT and that this then be promulgated widely. .... 35
14. That SUT’s Academic Board resolve, with urgency, the accreditation status of the courses being offered through SSIT and that the current academic and professional accreditation status of these courses be made clear to students. More generally, the Academic Board should assure itself that its decision-making processes with regard to all SUT’s courses offered off-shore are sufficiently robust. .... 36
15. That SUT ensure that a comprehensive framework for the quality assurance of its courses offered through SSIT be implemented without delay. The University has recognised the need for this framework and is in the process of constructing a suitable action plan. .... 37
16. That SUT clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of its own staff and staff of off-shore partner organisations, with respect to responsibility for curriculum development and for quality assurance. .... 37
17. That SUT establish effective communication mechanisms and ensure that robust quality assurance systems are in place for its operations with off-shore partner organisations within the Swinburne Global Learning Network so that it has the means to ensure that the partner’s activities (as they relate to SUT courses) are fully compliant with SUT policy and practice. .... 38
18. That the planned development of an overall framework for quality assurance of SUT courses delivered off-shore be undertaken and implemented. .... 38

## 1. ORGANISATIONAL OVERVIEW

SUT formally became a University in 1992. Its origins are as a technical college for Melbourne's eastern suburbs (established in 1908) and then an Institute of Technology (for further detail, see Appendix A).

The University is an intersectoral institution, with both Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and higher education sectors. Within the higher education sector, there are two divisions: the Higher Education Division (based at Hawthorn and Prahran campuses) and Swinburne University, Lilydale (see section 3.2 and 9.1).

In keeping with AUQA's Objects (see Appendix B), the audit panel concentrated its attention on the higher education sector of the University. The interface between the higher education and TAFE sectors was also of interest to the panel, particularly given SUT's strategic theme of taking advantage of its intersectoral nature (see Chapter 5).

### 1.1 *Vision and Mission*

The University's vision is "to be a pre-eminent entrepreneurial university from the Asia-Pacific, thriving on new ideas and knowledge and exploiting our intersectoral heritage to create value for our stakeholders".

The mission is:

- "to pursue the generation, transfer and creative application of knowledge and skills, using our intersectoral operations and programs;
- to provide innovative education, research and training for the benefit of students, strategic partners, industry and business generally, staff and the diverse communities and societies in which we operate".

The University's strategic plan, the Statement of Direction 2010, published in 2000 sets directions and priorities for the University by identifying five strategic themes viz. flexible learning and teaching; research; the entrepreneurial university; the intersectoral advantage; and internationalisation.

### 1.2 *Governance*

The Council Review of University Governance undertaken in 1996 recommended two major changes to the system of governance and leadership; namely, that clear delegation of executive authority should be made at all levels to individuals, not to committees or boards and that a collegial line of decision-making should lead from the academic units through the Academic Board to Council. These principles are largely applied throughout the University. In some areas, however, the panel felt that clarification of the delegations and responsibilities was required. This is particularly with respect to research management and is addressed in Chapter 3 of this Report.

Council conducts evaluations of certain aspects of its own function. For instance, questionnaires are regularly sent to Council members asking for feedback on the adequacy and timeliness of documentation provided at meetings. In addition, the Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor conduct an informal evaluation annually of the performance of individual Council members, and this has resulted in some counselling of and assistance to Council members where necessary.

At the time of the panel's visit, a briefing package, for new members of Council was in the process of being developed, which should supplement the more informal induction processes at present. An example of the latter is arranging for new Council members to meet with as many senior managers as possible. Beyond the planned briefing package which Council members will welcome, some current members felt that further formal induction activities would be beneficial. Possibilities include a Council retreat at which members could discuss issues with senior management or a program of structured visits to various areas of the University to meet with staff and gain an appreciation of matters of importance to them.

Council members have been centrally involved in strategic decision making and in the identification of the five strategic themes of the Statement of Direction 2010. In 1998, members of the Council and senior members of the University's management conducted a two-week study tour of 22 institutions across nine countries. The study tour, and a previous one conducted in 1993, were sponsored by the then Chancellor. The purpose of both tours was to investigate the strategic directions SUT needed to pursue in order to become a world-class university of technology. It was clear to the panel that the tours had indeed stimulated the Council's discussion of future strategic directions for the University and that these discussions had then led to the approval of the current Statement of Direction.

### 1.3 *Quality and Planning*

The Joint Planning and Resources Committee (JPRC) is a standing committee of Council constituted to advise and assist it on policy matters pertaining to strategic and resource planning. Its terms of reference are very broad, including:

- co-ordinating and conducting a biennial review of the University Planning Framework and recommending revisions;
- in consultation with the Council's statutory Boards and Committees and the wider University community, co-ordinate the medium and long term strategic planning and associated financial and human resources planning for the University;
- monitoring and evaluating external social, economic and technological developments and opportunities and ensuring that this information is available to the University to assist in shaping its strategic directions;
- developing, in consultation with other committees and groups, other University-level performance measures;
- co-ordinating and conducting periodic performance, resource and quality audits of management units and centres, of the implementation, pursuit and achievement of their stated actions plans and targets and subsequently ensuring that the outcomes of these audits are fed back into the strategic planning process to improve the action planning process at the management unit level; and
- ensuring that University resources are being effectively and appropriately utilised.

JPRC comprises the Vice-Chancellor (as Chair), three community members of Council (the respective Chairs of the Staffing; Finance; and Campus Planning and Building Committees), one staff member of Council and one student member of Council. The JPRC has five sub-committees: Board of Research, Entrepreneurship Sub-Committee, International Policy and Planning Group, Intersectoral Advisory Committee, and Learning and Teaching Policy and Planning Group. The terms of reference for each of these sub-committees include reporting to the JPRC on the relevant strategic theme (see below).

The JPRC appears to be operating effectively at present, although the panel considered that the terms of reference may present a challenge to senior management in terms of maintaining an appropriate distinction between governance and management functions. For Council's part, it is satisfied that the JPRC gives it sufficient information to fulfill effectively its governance

responsibilities. The panel noted that Council members on JPRC commit considerable time to this work in addition to their direct Council responsibilities. Future Council members may not have such periods of time at their disposal and, at an appropriate time, the role and functions of the JPRC should be reconsidered in this context.

### **Recommendation 1**

**That the Council and University review the role and functions of the Joint Planning and Resources Committee in the context of the considerable additional time commitment required of the Council members serving on that Committee.**

In 1999, the Foresight and Planning Unit (now Foresight, Planning and Review Unit) was established to take responsibility for the University's planning framework and a new framework was approved by the JPRC in late 1999. It has been progressively implemented since this time.

Strategies and targets for the five strategic themes in the Statement of Direction 2010 are to be elaborated in a series of plans, referred to as Master Plans. The intention is that there will be one Master Plan for each theme. At the time of the panel's visit, work on developing the Master Plans was ongoing and the panel saw draft versions of two Master Plans. The JPRC sub-committees each take responsibility for one of the five strategic themes. Each sub-committee is responsible for producing its Master Plan, for monitoring progress towards the objectives contained in the Plan and for reporting on this to the JPRC. Achievement of objectives in the Master Plans will be monitored against Strategic Scorecards that were introduced in 2001. The next planned phase will be the establishment of external benchmarks (see section 1.4).

To support the Master Plans, the framework proposes Enabling Plans which will focus on the major corporate functions necessary to underpin the achievement of the Master Plans. Eight Enabling Plans are proposed to cover facilities and services; finance; human resources; information resources; information technology services; knowledge management; marketing and communication, and student services. The preparation of the Enabling Plans is to be a responsibility of the respective Corporate Service Directors, working to guidelines provided by the Foresight, Planning and Review Unit. In developing their Enabling Plans, the Corporate Service Directors must involve each of the five Master Plan sub-committees in their deliberations. The panel sees this as important in ensuring appropriate resources will be available for each Master Plan. Enabling Plans are scheduled for completion from November 2002 to July 2003. The Master and Enabling Plans will be used subsequently to inform division, school and unit planning.

The panel endorses the proposed framework of planning documents intended to underpin the Statement of Direction 2010. In implementing the framework it will be critically important to ensure that the desired linkages between the University-level plans (Master and Enabling), Divisional plans, academic unit plans and individual staff performance plans are developed.

#### ***1.3.1 Integrating quality and planning***

At the time of the audit panel's visit, SUT had recently moved to integrate more closely its quality system into the planning and risk management framework. The integrated planning and quality system was developed by a senior management group working party and approved by Council in May 2002.

SUT's quality management system has been the subject of ongoing development and evolution since it was first created. The Swinburne Quality Review System (SQRS), introduced in 2001,

was based on a set of 20 processes comprising standards and indicators of performance and guidelines for evidence to be considered, based around the Approach, Deployment, Results, Improvement (ADRI) model. Five processes were reviewed annually, with cross-functional, University-wide self-assessment teams formed to undertake each review. The teams were provided with a comprehensive self-assessment toolkit. The tools are of a very thorough nature.

The sample SQRS report provided to the panel indicated that it had been effective in identifying a number of opportunities for improvement, with corrective action proposed for each. Some of these actions have now been completed. The panel was informed that the remaining actions will be incorporated into the relevant Master or Enabling Plan and, to ensure that maximum benefit is obtained from the reviews conducted under the SQRS process, it will be important to ensure that this occurs.

SUT has directed effort at integrating its quality system with the planning system as a way of demonstrating to staff that quality management is integral to their core activities. It is intended that the integrated system will be fully implemented by 2003. Given that implementation had only just begun at the time of the panel's visit, it was not surprising that few staff were aware of the new system at this early stage.

The panel noted that increased emphasis is to be placed on "people not paper". For instance, process review (a new element of the planning framework) is to take place through interviews co-ordinated and conducted by staff of the Foresight, Planning and Review Unit with staff in relevant work areas. The outcome of the interviews will be a report indicating recommended improvement actions that will then be included in the relevant Master and/or Enabling Plans. It is likely that this approach will allow staff to see more directly the benefits of such review mechanisms than they may otherwise. Nonetheless, there is a considerable amount of documentation related to the new integrated quality and planning framework, and, in implementing the system, the Unit will need to remain mindful that the documentation should avoid complexity and that the system's intentions must be readily accessible to people using it.

### **Commendation 1**

**AUQA commends the approach being planned by the Foresight, Planning and Review Unit in the process review system that will maximise the benefits that staff obtain from participating in these reviews.**

The panel strongly encourages the University to pursue the planned development of its integrated quality and planning processes and to share the development in as timely a fashion as possible with staff.

SUT has an obvious commitment to achieving quality in its teaching and research activities, evidenced in its documentation and the approaches of staff met by the panel. A further example of this commitment is the Vice-Chancellor's Statement of Quality (January, 1999), which is displayed around the university campus. Many staff are aware of and supportive of the intentions of this statement. SUT has also developed a program of annual excellence awards. There are six annual awards covering different aspects of teaching, research and service. A total of 124 staff have received an award under this scheme since 1998. The awards are proving to be an excellent way of identifying and sharing good practice.

### **Commendation 2**

**AUQA commends SUT for its obvious commitment to achieving quality and for the efforts underway at more fully integrating its quality, planning and risk management frameworks.**

### ***1.3.2 Academic unit reviews***

One of the outcomes of the self-review that SUT undertook in advance of the audit was the decision to move from unscheduled reviews of academic units to a formal schedule of reviews every five years. The guidelines devised for these reviews require academic units to undertake a self-review to evaluate “the quality and adequacy of the plans, processes, performance, structures and academic activities of the Unit in relation to meeting the University’s objectives and goals”. The report of this self-review is then submitted to an external reviewer (appointed by the Vice-Chancellor) for consideration. The external reviewer evaluates the written submission and is at liberty to check its validity by whatever means considered necessary, including requesting additional documentation, interviewing staff and students and calling for confidential written submissions. The reviewer then prepares a written report of his/her findings.

A review of Swinburne Lilydale (commissioned in April 2002) is the first to be completed under the new guidelines. The panel obtained a copy of the external reviewer’s report and it appears to be a very helpful document in identifying current areas of strength and areas for improvement for Lilydale. In addition, the reviewer included a number of more general recommendations in the report relating to the timeframe and terms of reference for future reviews, which should serve to further refine the review process itself.

### ***1.4 External Reference Points***

SUT regards the universities in the Australian Technological Network as its natural comparator institutions within Australia and, although it is not a member of the Network, it makes use of publicly available information on certain performance indicators, such as research funding and publication rates, from these universities against which it can compare its own performance. Examples of such comparisons are included in the Performance Portfolio.

SUT participated in the Commonwealth University Management Benchmarking Programme in 1999 on the topics of human resources and staff development; managing delivery of information technology; and research management. SUT’s involvement in this programme has assisted it in identifying areas where improvement could be made and a number of measures in each topic have been implemented. SUT is participating in the programme again in 2002.

In its Portfolio, SUT notes that its emphasis to date has been on comparing the University’s present performance with its past performance and that systematic reference to external comparators has been less prominent. The panel also noted an emphasis on input rather than outcome measures. The panel acknowledges and supports SUT’s intention to move towards greater use of external benchmarking, through the Commonwealth University Management Benchmarking Programme, and otherwise.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**That, in developing a more systematic approach to external benchmarking, attention be paid to outcome, as well as input, measures.**

## 2. FLEXIBLE TEACHING AND LEARNING

SUT's traditional emphasis has been on learning and teaching, although major emphasis has also been placed on research activity since SUT became a University. Students met by the panel commented positively on the good interaction they have with their teachers. Close working relationships between students and staff is facilitated by the smaller number of higher education students at SUT (approximately 9,800 EFTSU) than at many other universities.

SUT's conception of flexible learning and teaching leads to on-line learning and teaching being regarded as just one of many modes of learning available to students. Course materials may be in hard-copy form or use video, internet or CD-ROM, and the panel was provided with numerous examples of course materials in these various modes. Individual subjects range in their use of the internet from approximately 50 per cent to 95 per cent. The provision of teaching materials in these various modes is clearly progressing the University's objective of adopting flexible course delivery methods.

Blackboard is being implemented across SUT. Many of the students met by the panel felt that the use of on-line teaching technologies were particularly helpful where they supplemented, but did not replace, face-to-face teaching and commented favourably about the increased flexibility that access to on-line materials allows.

### 2.1 Objectives

The principal goal with respect to this strategic theme is: "to build optimal learning environments throughout the University. These learning environments will develop in all students their innate capacities for creativity and deep learning, and will be characterised above all by flexible learning and a more learner-centered approach" (Statement of Direction 2010).

Specific objectives include:

- "build optimal learning environments throughout the University;
- provide excellent education and training relevant to the needs of students, business and the community;
- enhance graduate employability (and self-employability) through the provision of learning programs with an applied orientation;
- provide curricula that are informed by current research, and meet current best practice and professional standards;
- cultivate specified generic graduate attributes and professional outcomes in students, including knowledge of their chosen profession or discipline;
- develop in all students their innate capacities for creativity and independent learning;
- provide flexible opportunities for learning and adopt flexible course delivery;
- generalise and extend a learner-centered approach" (Performance Portfolio section 4, page 1).

The current Flexible Learning and Teaching Strategic Development Plan 2002-2004 is structured according to the following areas: innovative teaching, flexible learning, internationalisation, learning and teaching in an entrepreneurial university, intersectoral advantage, and quality assurance and continuous improvement. For each, it outlines specific objectives and relevant strategies, targets and indicators, and identifies the leaders for each action and dates by which they will be completed. The Plan was being redeveloped into a Master Plan at the time of the panel's visit.

## **2.2 *Course Accreditation and Reaccreditation***

The Academic Programs Quality Committee (APQC) is a standing committee of Academic Board that has recently assumed responsibility for all matters relating to the quality of academic programs including monitoring course review and the maintenance, review and improvement of academic standards in the Higher Education Division. The Academic Policy and Planning Committee (APPC, also a standing committee of Academic Board) has responsibility for matters relating to the planning and development of the academic program of the Higher Education Division.

The policy and procedures for course accreditation and reaccreditation were reviewed in 2001 and a further review was being undertaken at the time of the panel's visit. A particular area of focus in the current review is the presence and effectiveness of formal feedback and improvement loops between the central University and academic units, and also internally within some academic units. The review was prompted by the realisation that these loops are more evident and effective in some areas of the University than in others.

New courses are accredited for five years, after which an application for reaccreditation is required. Course Advisory Committees (see section 2.3.1) are required to approve such applications for endorsement by Academic Board. When operating in accreditation mode, the terms of reference for Course Advisory Committees restrict voting rights solely to external members, with the SUT staff on the Committee available for advice. The panel acknowledges that this strengthens the external component to accreditation/reaccreditation decisions. However, from its discussions with Advisory Committee members the panel felt that a greater balance of internal and external opinions may be required. This matter should be explicitly considered in the recommended review of the terms of reference and operation of Course Advisory Committees (see Recommendation 3).

## **2.3 *Academic Standards***

The detail and formality with which Academic Board monitors the development, delivery and assessment of on-shore courses has generally increased over recent years. SUT staff point to a number of different mechanisms to assist in considering the question of academic standards; including arranging visits by academic staff from different institutions, external examining, professional accreditation, and involving academic staff from other universities and representatives of business and industry on Course Advisory Committees.

Presently lacking at SUT is a systematic means of assuring the equivalence of academic standards of its on-campus and off-shore courses. This is addressed in more detail in Chapter 6.

### **2.3.1 *Course Advisory Committees***

University policy requires all higher education schools to have a Course Advisory Committee and they all do so. At least 60 per cent of members on all Course Advisory Committees must be external to SUT. External members may be from business and industry, relevant professions or academic staff from other tertiary institutions. The role of the Course Advisory Committees is to provide advice to schools on proposed and existing courses and, in particular, to advise on the needs of business and industry. The Committees are an important mechanism to assist the University in meeting its objective of providing education and training relevant to the needs of business and the community (see section 2.1).

As noted above, Advisory Committee members must approve all applications for accreditation or reaccreditation of courses. The panel has already noted the need to reconsider the current

practice of restricted voting rights in this decision-making (see section 2.2). External members of committees met by the panel felt that they were able to contribute significantly to the relevance of SUT's courses and that their input is valued and appreciated by the University.

A number of schools is now moving to establish School Advisory Boards in addition to their Course Advisory Committees. The Boards are intended to provide a broader frame of reference for schools' academic activities than is offered by the Course Advisory Committees. There is considerable potential for duplication in the work of the School Advisory Boards and Course Advisory Committees. Given that the University intends to undertake a review of its course accreditation and reaccreditation procedures, and in light of this trend towards School-level committees, a review of the role and operation of Course Advisory Committees would be timely.

### **Recommendation 3**

**That, as part of the foreshadowed review of course accreditation and reaccreditation procedures, an explicit review of the current operation and terms of reference of Course Advisory Committees be undertaken. As part of this review, consideration needs to be given to whether the current operation of the Course Advisory Committees in accreditation mode allows sufficiently for academic and pedagogic issues to be taken into account in (re)accreditation decisions.**

#### **2.3.2 Subject management and subject evaluation**

A review of the Policy and Procedures on Assessment and Appeals prior to the audit has led to changes in the subject management procedures required at academic unit level. Each subject must now have a Subject Convenor and Subject Panel. Subject Convenors are responsible for overseeing all aspects of the subject including the development of the subject outline, ensuring assessment is conducted according to University policy, the reporting of student results and co-ordinating meetings of the Subject Panel. The Subject Panel consists of all staff teaching within that subject and is responsible for ensuring the smooth running of the subject throughout the semester.

Some academic units are more advanced in adopting this policy than others. For instance, the School of Information Technology has developed a Convenors' Procedure Manual. This details the requirements of the Convenor's role and appears to be a very helpful document. The Portfolio notes that in some other academic units "consolidation of the new, more systematic approach to subject management requires a change of approach and culture on the part of academic staff". It is clear that further attention to the University-wide implementation of this policy is required. Sharing the examples of good practice already evident in some schools (such as the School of Information Technology) would be a worthwhile first step.

The Subject Evaluation System requires that all higher education subjects in accredited courses must be evaluated by students at least once in a 12-month cycle. Approximately 300 subjects are evaluated through this system each semester. Reports of the results are sent to Subject Convenors and the Heads of Academic Units, with the Heads required to monitor results. SUT's self-review has identified that different academic units have different systems for monitoring the results of these evaluations and for addressing areas for follow-up action. In some units, the Heads have devolved their responsibility for monitoring the system to a unit-level learning and teaching committee. In general it appears that the amount of feedback to students is minimal, with many students met by the panel not aware of any changes to subjects that may have been made as a result of their evaluations.

A review of the Subject Evaluation System was under consideration at the time of the audit, with the aim of broadening its evaluation methods away from reliance on quantitative surveys, making the system more applicable to those subjects delivered fully on-line, and considering the role that the evaluation system plays in the review of courses. The panel endorses these aims of the planned review. Furthermore, it will be important to consider the effectiveness of the various mechanisms that exist within academic units for monitoring and acting on the results of subject evaluations, and the ways in which the results of evaluations are fed back to students.

#### **Recommendation 4**

**That a review of the Subject Evaluation System be conducted, including a review of the effectiveness of the various mechanisms that exist within academic units for monitoring and acting on the results of the subject evaluations, of the University's ability to maintain sufficient oversight of the system and of the mechanisms that are in place to provide feedback to students. A review of the Subject Evaluation System was under consideration by SUT at the time of the audit.**

### **2.4 Industry-Based Learning**

A significant feature of a number of SUT's courses is the opportunity for an Industry-Based Learning (IBL) component. Students are placed into a business or organisation, typically for a one year placement. SUT has been offering IBL placements since 1963. A total of 47 undergraduate courses had IBL placements in 2001, amounting to approximately 600 individual placements. Because of the difficulty of guaranteeing that placements can be found, IBL has increasingly become non-compulsory and in only five courses in 2001 was the IBL component compulsory.

Students with experience of the IBL program are very appreciative of the opportunities afforded by it. Students are assigned an academic supervisor and a workplace supervisor for the duration of the placement and those students met by the panel indicated that this system provides sufficient support.

Given the long history of the IBL program at SUT, the panel had expected to see well-documented University-wide policies and procedures relating to IBL. In fact, these had only recently been approved by Academic Board (February 2002). These policies draw on some long-established practices in place in some academic units and to this extent represent a distillation of good practice at SUT. They identify increased mechanisms to inform and support IBL employers, including workshops specifically designed for their needs, increased visits to students on placement by SUT staff, and the development of an induction handbook for workplace supervisors. Each of these measures should enhance the IBL program and increase consistency of practice across the University.

The panel sought information on the risk management considerations related to the operation of the IBL program. As part of the formalisation of policies and procedures, the network of school-based IBL Co-ordinators, which meets approximately monthly, was active throughout 2001 identifying areas of risk associated with the IBL program, with a view to developing University-wide strategies to address them. A number of issues requiring further action were identified, including procedures related to occupational health and safety, the need for safeguards to protect students from discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and formalisation of procedures related to intellectual property and confidentiality for students on placement. Projects to consider these issues are now underway. The panel endorses the identification of these potential risk areas and encourages continued attention to the

development of effective treatments for those that have been identified. Instituting a system of regular, planned reviews of current and potential risk areas in relation to the IBL program should also be considered.

Comments from students have led the University to conclude that IBL can increase students' motivation for their academic studies. SUT's more formal research has shown that the opportunity to undertake an IBL placement is one of the main reasons enrolling students give for selecting SUT and this enthusiasm for the program was also evident amongst the students met by the panel who had participated in it. Likewise, in discussion with employers who accept IBL students, the panel found a generally high degree of satisfaction, with the program. Some employers indicated that they participate in the IBL program because they find it a good way of identifying potential full-time employees.

### **Commendation 3**

**AUQA commends SUT for its Industry-Based Learning program, which is assisting it in achieving the objective of providing programs with an applied orientation.**

The IBL program offered at SUT follows a relatively traditional pattern of 12-month block placement into the workforce. The exception to this is Lilydale, which also offers 6-month placements. Different models are in use in other universities. It may be that SUT's pattern becomes less appropriate as increasing emphasis is placed on flexible learning and teaching methods, as the demands of the workforce change and as the capacity of employers to offer extended placements alters. SUT has commissioned some research into possible alternative models for an IBL component, with the results of this study due in April 2003.

## **2.5 *Learning and Teaching Support***

The Learning and Teaching Support (LTS) unit is a central unit that provides general information, workshops, and personal advice, support and consultancy to SUT's higher education teachers on a wide range of teaching-related issues. LTS has six Educational Development Advisers who each have special responsibility for working with academic staff of particular schools and units.

LTS's workshop program for academic staff has included topics such as assessment techniques, use of problem-based and action learning, use of technology in teaching (applications such as Blackboard, Powerpoint) and cross-cultural perspectives on learning theories. Workshops are held at both Hawthorn and Lilydale campuses. LTS has a written evaluation for workshop participants to complete at the conclusion of each workshop. It seeks information on the content and presentation of the session, and the information obtained is taken into account in mounting future workshops.

In addition to the LTS's Educational Development Advisers, each academic unit has an Educational Development Co-ordinator who is a member of the unit's own academic staff identified to champion learning and teaching issues within the unit. A network of these Co-ordinators has been developed. This appears to be providing an excellent forum for information exchange and the sharing of good practice. Topics discussed by this group include how to manage sessional staff and pedagogical issues related to the learning management system.

The services provided by LTS and by unit-level Educational Development Co-ordinators were commented on favourably by staff who have used them and some staff clearly value them

highly. Other staff do not feel the need for such assistance and have therefore not had a great deal of interaction with LTS.

## **2.6 *Learning and Teaching Outcomes***

SUT uses a number of outcome measures for its teaching and learning. Results of the internal Subject Evaluation System are monitored, with a comprehensive report produced by the Evaluation Services Unit (including trend data). This aggregate data shows that the majority of students are generally satisfied with the quality of teaching. Lowest satisfaction ratings are obtained with respect to the provision of library resources. This is discussed in greater detail in section 3.8 of this Report. As noted above, schools are responsible for making use of the information obtained from the Subject Evaluation System and implementing changes as they see fit and the panel has recommended that a review of the mechanisms being used to monitor and act on the results should be undertaken (see Recommendation 4).

Results of the Course Experience Questionnaire ‘overall satisfaction’ and ‘good teaching’ scales have shown consistent improvement since 1998 and are at levels above the national average. Publicly available figures collected by the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) show that the employment rates of SUT graduates are comparable to a number of other Victorian-based universities.

Although not an outcome measure, other indicators used by SUT to assess learning and teaching performance are student progression and retention rates. Retention across all courses in 2001 was 74.2 per cent. Progression rates have remained relatively stable across the broad fields of study over the period 1998-2000. The progress rates for all students and for overseas students for 2001 show an increase on 2000 figures across all fields of study.

## **2.7 *Graduate Attributes***

The Portfolio notes that one of the objectives in the area of learning and teaching is “to cultivate specified generic graduate attributes and professional outcomes in students, including knowledge of their chosen profession or discipline”. The Flexible Learning and Teaching Strategic Development Plan specifies generic graduate attributes as follows:

“The University expects that its graduates:

- are entrepreneurial in contributing to innovation and development within their business, workplace, or community;
- are capable in their chosen professional, vocational or study areas;
- operate effectively in work and community situations;
- are adaptable and manage change; and
- are aware of environments in which they will be contributing.”

In April 2002, Academic Board required that these attributes should be taken into account in the accreditation and reaccreditation of courses and this is beginning to happen. Two schools have reviewed the desired learning outcomes of their undergraduate programs and have mapped these against the graduate attributes. SUT intends that this will be undertaken progressively by all higher education schools.

The panel considered the University’s overall objectives for the flexible learning and teaching theme (see section 2.1) and noted that the emphasis these place on the development of student “creativity”, “deep learning” and “independent learning” are not well reflected in the graduate attributes specified above. Indeed, it appeared to the panel that the specified attributes focus

very much on developing applied skills for the world of work. In relation to research training (considered in section 3.5), the University's overriding objectives related to the development of "interpersonal and team skills" are also not explicitly addressed in the graduate attribute statement.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**That, in the development of the Flexible Learning and Teaching Master Plan, further consideration be given to more specifically linking graduate attributes to the University's overarching objectives for learning and teaching and research training, and that the revised attributes statement then be considered by all higher education schools in the development and review of courses.**

### 3. RESEARCH AND RESEARCH TRAINING

A major emphasis was placed on research when SUT became a University in 1992. On a variety of measures of research performance, there is evidence of a significant increasing trend from a relatively low base. Examples include a marked increase in research income from 1998 to 2000 and a steady increase in research publication rate in the period 1996-2000 (see section 3.4).

#### 3.1 *Research Objectives*

SUT's Statement of Direction 2010 notes that with respect to research "we will scale up the levels of research activity in all Schools and Institutes in the Higher Education Division so that the Division becomes truly research-intensive. All Schools will pursue research that has high impact on the scholarly world and on society at large."

At the time of the panel's visit, the Research Development Plan was being redeveloped into a Master Plan.

The Performance Portfolio lists the following research objectives:

- "scale up the levels of research activity especially in the Higher Education Division so that it becomes truly research-intensive;
- concentrate and enhance research efforts in selected areas of excellence;
- pursue research that has high impact on the scholarly world and on society at large;
- increase collaboration with industry and university partners;
- provide high quality research training; and
- create a vibrant research culture."

The Portfolio also notes that the University "places considerable emphasis on developing a research portfolio spanning the entire range from strategic basic (discovery) to applied research (linkage) [and] seeks to concentrate and enhance its research efforts in selected areas of excellence while encouraging staff from all disciplines to develop research capabilities commensurate with individual aspirations" (Performance Portfolio, section 7, page 1). Thus in its research activities the University has adopted a broader framework than it has for its teaching activities (both undergraduate and postgraduate) where the applied emphasis is much more evident and there is a strong emphasis on links with the world of work, on preparation for employment and on continuing professional development. The connection between teaching and research is further discussed in section 3.7.

#### 3.2 *Research Management*

The Board of Research, which reports to the JPRC, oversees the development and implementation of University-level research planning. This model is somewhat unusual, since University level research committees typically report to Academic Board. This is further discussed in section 3.7 in relation to the linking of teaching and research.

Terms of reference for the Board of Research specifically note that members are not representatives of their schools or units, but rather should consider the interests of the University as a whole. The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) holds overall responsibility for leading the development of SUT's research profile including research education and training, and industry and institutional alliances.

Resources for research are allocated to higher education schools on a performance-based funding model using indicators derived from those used by DEST in allocating block grants (see section 3.4). Research and research training within each academic unit are managed by its own Research Committee, chaired by the unit's Research Co-ordinator. In discussions with the Research Co-ordinators the panel found a high level of commitment to the development of a research culture and of high quality research training. It seemed, however, that views differed as to the precise role of the Research Co-ordinator, both amongst the Co-ordinators and across the University. The Panel therefore supports SUT's intention to develop a Statement of Responsibility for Research Co-ordinators (see Recommendation 6).

The panel was informed that the University Funding Model precludes Swinburne Lilydale from research funding, since its mission is not seen to include research. The panel noted that the external review of Lilydale undertaken in 2002 had addressed in considerable detail the difficulties associated with the ill-defined definition of its role with respect to research and that it had recommended that strategic planning of research activity at Lilydale should include "explicit and robust processes for resolving current anomalies surrounding funding and role". The panel endorses this view, not the least because of the University's objectives for linking teaching and research (see section 3.7).

### **3.3 *Research Intensiveness and Research Concentration***

SUT has recognised that "in order to achieve national or international prominence in its research it needs to select a limited range of activities that can be appropriately funded and nurtured" (Performance Portfolio, section 1, page 3). The Board of Research has identified nine areas of research activity within the higher education schools in which the University claims national or international competitiveness. These are:

- optics and applied laser technology;
- advanced industrial technologies;
- brain function and cognition;
- astrophysics;
- advanced computing and modeling;
- colloid and bio-colloid technology;
- entrepreneurship;
- human-centered convergent technologies and
- social sustainability and well-being.

The nine areas will be used in reporting to DEST and in marketing and promotion of the University.

The nine areas are an apparent combination of areas in which the University has a long record of teaching or where it would like to develop undergraduate courses, and areas where senior staff have considered there is an opportunity to create a niche specialty for the University. In these latter areas (for instance, astrophysics) strategic appointments have been made to initiate and develop research activity. Those research active staff whose research does not currently sit within one of the nine areas will gradually be encouraged to align themselves with one of the areas. Within the nine areas, which transcend organisational units, the University has sought to direct resources preferentially to particular centres or institutes and thereby concentrate its research effort. Three institutes and six centres have been established to date. Some further centres are in the process of becoming formally recognised.

The Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research) has recently appointed senior professors as co-ordinators for each of the nine identified areas of research activity. They have been charged with developing a portfolio to describe their respective research area, which will be updated from

time to time. Aside from this task, the parameters of the co-ordinator role are not precisely defined and, in particular, how this role varies from that of school-based Research Co-ordinators (see section 3.2) is unclear. Some area co-ordinators do not intend undertaking additional duties beyond developing the portfolio, and the co-ordinators do not intend to meet as a group. Other area co-ordinators consider that they will be more active than before in contacting potential external research partners and facilitating linkages between potential partners and academic staff. Other area co-ordinators see their role to be a mentor for staff less experienced in research.

At this early stage, it is difficult for the panel to determine what value the identification of the nine areas and the appointment of co-ordinators for each might bring, although it is possible that the co-ordinators may assist in providing an increased external profile to the nine research areas. Internally the nine areas may also provide benefits to staff working within the areas by assisting them to identify potential research collaborators.

The nine areas are relatively broad. The University acknowledges that the areas are probably too broad for the long-term and that further concentration may be required in future, but the intention at this stage is for the areas to be relatively inclusive. Alongside the recognition of the need to concentrate research in selected areas of existing or intended strength, sits SUT's desire to develop a research portfolio spanning the entire range from basic to applied research. For some staff, a broad research portfolio is understood to be the University's definition of research intensiveness, while for other staff research intensiveness is interpreted quite differently. The panel detected a variety of views amongst academic staff as to how the University would achieve its objective of becoming 'research intensive'. Some argued that the priority is for all staff to become active in research, others felt that staff should increasingly bias their research towards one of the nine identified areas, others that priority in the recruitment of new staff should be given to those with a demonstrated research record in one of the nine areas; others that the University's research resources should be concentrated in the nine areas.

The panel supports the University view that some selectivity of research areas will be required. The strategy of building research concentration around identified research centres and institutes has been demonstrated elsewhere to be an effective way of encouraging collaborative research activity and this is also beginning to be the case at SUT. The University may find it helpful to develop amongst staff a more consistent understanding of what is meant by 'research intensive'.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**That SUT develop amongst staff a more consistent understanding of the definition of 'research intensive' and promulgate it widely throughout the University and to its stakeholders. Further, that it more explicitly define the role of the co-ordinators of the nine identified areas of research activity.**

The panel detected some concern among employers of SUT graduates that a rapid move towards a research intensive university may reduce the attention being paid to undergraduate teaching and that the quality of graduates may, in future, be compromised. In moving to increased emphasis on research, SUT needs to be mindful of these concerns and ensure that it continues to provide adequate support for, and continues to recruit, academic staff with experience and interest in the courses required by industry.

### **3.4 High Impact and Collaborative Research**

As noted above, one of SUT's objectives with respect to research is that the research should have "high impact on the scholarly world and on society at large". The main performance indicators for research in use at SUT are external research funding, publication output, postgraduate research load and postgraduate research. For each of these measures, SUT has shown an increased performance for each of the past four years.

Research income per effective full-time staff member has also increased markedly; from \$15,839 in 1998 to \$22,193 in 2000 and is thus in keeping with that of Australian Technological Network universities. The research publication rate also shows a steady increase from 1996-2000.

SUT aims to increase its collaboration with industry and university partners, and there is evidence of this occurring. In many instances, such collaborative efforts have occurred within University research centres and institutes. SUT is a partner in eight Co-operative Research Centres, with two headquartered at SUT.

### **3.5 Research Training**

The Higher Degrees Committee, a standing committee of Academic Board, has overall responsibility for policies relating to higher degree study. The Office of Research and Graduate Studies provides operational support to the higher degree by research (HDR) program.

SUT's overriding objective with respect to research training is "to provide a stimulating educational experience within the framework of a vibrant research environment. In the process of the training, the student should produce new knowledge or insight through the systematic application of research methodology ... the training is designed to prepare students for industrial, commercial and professional vocations, emphasising entrepreneurial, interpersonal and team skills over a narrow academic outlook" (Performance Portfolio, section 7, page 2). As noted above, some of these characteristics are not well defined within the University's statement of graduate attributes (see section 2.7).

The panel had some difficulty in determining the extent to which the University is fulfilling its broad objectives for research training. As noted in sections 3.6 and 3.8 below, there is scope to increase the opportunities for HDR students to interact with each other and to improve the Library's ability to support research activities. Action on both these fronts would increase the stimulation provided by, and vibrancy of, the research training program.

As a means of monitoring student progress, HDR students are required to complete and submit an annual progress form. The Higher Degrees Committee has recognised that this process needs review and improvement to become a more effective means of monitoring student progress. Work is underway to strengthen this process and the panel encourages this development.

The Office of Research and Graduate Studies undertook a review of research training in 2002. This identified the different approaches that are taken in various aspects of research training by schools, institutes and centres. The review recommended a number of measures for improving research supervision, for bringing consistency to the approaches to research training across the University and for greater sharing of good practices. Work has already begun to address these issues.

One of the findings of the review highlighted in the Performance Portfolio is the need to implement good supervisory practice more consistently across the University. At the time of

the panel's visit, particular emphasis was being placed on a Supervisor Training and Development Program. The first stage of this program, to be undertaken in November 2002, is to hold a workshop with unit-level Research Co-ordinators to develop a pedagogical basis to research training at the University. Later stages of the program will be aimed at ensuring that this University-agreed approach is implemented appropriately within each academic unit.

#### **Commendation 4**

**AUQA commends SUT for undertaking a review of its research training program and for the manner in which it has begun to respond to the review's findings.**

### **3.6 *Research Culture***

SUT's objective to create a vibrant research culture is a particularly challenging one to measure. Results of the 2001 Postgraduate Research Experience Questionnaire showed that students were generally satisfied with the opportunities provided by their school or unit to become involved in broader research culture, although the percentage agreeing or strongly agreeing with the proposition was smaller than the national average. However, interpretation of these results is difficult given the relatively small number of respondents to the survey.

Research Committees within each academic unit have prime responsibility for provision of research seminars and similar events. From its discussions with students, the panel noted a desire amongst most HDR students for more opportunities to interact with their peers across the University, both in informal social occasions and academically, for instance through workshops or seminars at which they could present their work for discussion and discuss matters of common interest and concern. There appears to be greater scope for the Office of Research and Graduate Studies and/or the Graduate Research Centre to play a role in this area. The panel noted that the Graduate Research Centre has as an objective the development of a collegial spirit amongst researchers.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**That greater consideration be given to the opportunities for research higher degree students from across the University to interact academically and more informally.**

### **3.7 *Teaching and Research Links***

In its Portfolio, SUT refers to its long history of producing graduates, in both the vocational education and higher education sectors, with strong vocational skills and to its commitment to maintaining its long-standing links with industry. While it is clear to the panel that the University has established a nexus between its teaching activities (both the development and delivery thereof) and industry, the relationship between teaching and research is much less evident.

The Statement of Direction 2010 notes that linking research to teaching will be one of the major strategies through which the University will achieve its research goals. A strong link between teaching and research is also implied by many other goals such as "building learning environments [that] will develop in all students their capacities for creative and deep learning". At least as presented in the Portfolio, the University does not place great emphasis on the nexus between its teaching and research activities, except at HDR level. In a structural sense, also, the teaching/research nexus is not evident in that the Board of Research reports to the JPRC, a committee of Council, rather than to Academic Board. On the other hand, the Higher Degrees

Committee is a committee of Academic Board. Furthermore, in speaking to undergraduate students, it was evident to the panel that many students were unable to identify ways in which the teaching they receive is informed by research.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**That, in developing the Research Master Plan, specific attention be paid to clarifying the linkages between research and teaching and the ways in which such links can be encouraged for the mutual benefit of both activities.**

### **3.8 Library**

As noted in section 2.6, the Subject Evaluation System has shown that student satisfaction with library resources is rated lower than items on quality of teaching. Staff met by the panel also raised the matter of inadequate library holdings and access to resources.

SUT is aware of the limitations of the library collection for meeting the research needs of students and staff and this is obviously a challenge as the University continues to scale up its research activities.

The Board of Research Working Party on Library Resources for Research (2001) reported that, while the service provided by library staff is well regarded by users, the Library's resources for research are limited. A lack of holdings of back editions of research serials was identified in the review and remarked upon by many HDR students met by the panel. The results of this study have informed the Library's request in the most recent budget round, which had just been submitted at the time of the panel's visit.

Library staff have been proactive in trying to meet the challenges faced. The Library has been steadily increasing the availability of on-line journals and has been exploring arrangements for collaborative provision of resources with other tertiary libraries in Victoria.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**That the recommendations of the Working Party on Library Resources for Research, which seek to improve library services supporting research activities of SUT, be implemented as soon as practicable.**

The Library has been engaged in a number of benchmarking projects relating to various processes (such as check-in and reshelving, and reference and information services). It has also participated in a national benchmarking study on inter-library loans. The panel encourages further involvement in similar collaborative projects, especially as service improvements can then be planned and implemented.

The panel noted positively that the Library has a range of mechanisms for collecting feedback from its on-campus users, for instance, in-house surveys and meetings with representatives of the Student Union and that it responds directly to feedback wherever practicable.

The Library supports SUT students studying off-shore through its webpage and on-line databases. It does not provide inter-campus lending and delivery services. Some Library staff have spent time in off-shore locations assisting with access to SUT's on-line systems. At the time of the panel's visit to Swinburne Sarawak Institute of Technology (SSIT), there were plans for SUT library staff to visit there in the near future. The students met by the panel at SSIT were not always aware that they were able to access on-line catalogues (see section 6.1.1.). Those who were aware reported that the connections were often slow and unreliable. The

Library at SUT does not track the usage patterns of the SSIT or other off-shore students and does not have an understanding of their particular needs. With competing demands from various staff and student groups, it appears that the particular support needs of students studying off-shore have become lost and this should be rectified. In particular, the information resources required and the assistance off-shore students need in developing their information literacy skills should be reviewed. As SUT expands its activities with other institutions in the Global Learning Network (see Chapter 6), adequately planning to define, meet and, where possible, anticipate the likely future needs of off-shore students will become even more important.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**That the Library pay explicit attention to the information resource and support needs of students studying off-shore and institute systems for seeking and responding systematically to feedback from these groups of students as it has done for its on-campus users.**

#### 4. THE ENTREPRENEURIAL UNIVERSITY

SUT aspires to become: “a renowned centre for entrepreneurship and innovation. Entrepreneurship and innovation will be a hallmark of everything that we do. We will prepare students to participate in the new economy and society of the twenty-first century and heighten their awareness of, and capacity to make the choice between, employment and self-employment” (Statement of Direction 2010). This is a highly distinctive feature of SUT’s mission and the panel spent a considerable amount of time talking to members of the University community about its aspirations, objectives and strategies for this theme. Aspirations, objectives and strategies for this theme are supported by a strategic development plan finalised in 2001.

In keeping with the abovementioned objective from the Statement of Direction, the panel was informed that SUT’s definition of entrepreneurship includes all forms of entrepreneurship (including social entrepreneurship), and is not restricted to commercial developments. A number of senior managers recognise that achieving the University’s objectives in this regard will be a major challenge for the institution.

The panel acknowledges the challenges inherent in the achievement of its entrepreneurial theme and commends SUT for the projects that have been established to date (some examples of which are mentioned below). In general, however, staff appeared to have little understanding of the University’s broad intentions in the adoption of the theme, and were unable to relate it to many of their daily activities and to the University’s academic program.

With respect to the understanding of entrepreneurialism in learning and teaching, the majority of staff met by the panel interpreted this as meaning that non-traditional sources of funding should be sought as much as possible. The expectation that SUT graduates will be entrepreneurial in their outlook is noted in the graduate attributes, but this does not appear to have an influence in course design in many instances. Some staff and students seemed more aware of the possibility that students may become self-employed after graduation than is sometimes the case, although the University does not monitor the number of graduates who subsequently became self-employed following graduation. Through the IBL program and otherwise, there is an opportunity to place greater focus on entrepreneurialism in teaching.

With respect to research, SUT regards entrepreneurship to be evidenced by its research commercialisation and intellectual property policies. The panel formed the view that neither were particularly entrepreneurial nor innovative and further attention to the ways in which these policies might assist in deploying the entrepreneurial theme would be beneficial.

In most schools, little consideration has yet been given by academic staff as to how the University’s strategic theme of entrepreneurship relates to their disciplines. SUT decided against introducing a core entrepreneurial subject, opting instead for introducing the theme of entrepreneurship in each discipline. Some disciplines have paid more attention to what this might mean for them than others. The course approval process requires an evaluation of the course against the five strategic themes but staff are often unsure how to tackle this as it relates to the entrepreneurship theme.

The Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship (AGSE) is a significant location for teaching and research into entrepreneurship at SUT. Staff of the School are involved in some teaching into courses in other areas, such as the National School of Design and the Industrial Research Institute Swinburne. The AGSE is also organising a Corporate Entrepreneurship Conference in 2003.

### **Recommendation 11**

**That SUT encourage further discussion across the University of what is meant by entrepreneurship and assist staff to identify the ways in which this high-level strategic theme may be made more explicit in its learning and teaching activities and in research. There is considerable scope for the expertise of the Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship to be further harnessed in this regard.**

Consideration could be given to seeking the AGSE's assistance in running a workshop for Heads of School to examine practical ways of developing entrepreneurial approaches relevant to their schools. A more general seminar series for staff and senior students on entrepreneurship may also be beneficial, perhaps involving presentations from individuals outside the University with a demonstrated entrepreneurial approach.

The panel was provided with a number of examples of entrepreneurial activity. Just two illustrations are recorded here.

Swinburne Venture Cup was established in 2000 and is a ten-week business planning competition. Students work in teams to develop a business proposal, with a series of workshops available to assist students in this task. Winners are awarded a cash prize to assist in further developing the business.

The Leadership and Entrepreneurial Attributes Development Program (LEAD) is aimed at high-potential PhD students who are interested in developing their leadership and entrepreneurial skills. The program is available to PhD students who have completed one year of their course. Entry is competitive and 15 places were available in 2002. Applicants must have the approval of their co-ordinating supervisor and school's Research Co-ordinator. LEAD is run over two years and comprises intensive short courses and residential components. To successfully complete the program, students are required to attend a minimum of four workshops and at least three of the four residential sessions. Topics covered in the workshops include project management, strategic planning, product commercialisation, and effective teamwork. On completion, students are issued with a certificate. Supervisors of these students are also required to attend a specially-designed LEAD workshop. The evaluations from participants in 2001 showed a high level of satisfaction.

### **Commendation 5**

**AUQA commends the Leadership and Entrepreneurial Attributes Development Program as an appropriate and valued contribution to SUT's implementation of its entrepreneurial theme.**

As a way of furthering awareness of entrepreneurial approaches, some junior academic staff may benefit from participation in the LEAD Program, or an equivalent.

The panel was provided with some good examples of entrepreneurial approaches being taken in developing commercial partnerships and links with the community, particularly through SUT's activities at Lilydale (see section 9). An example is the recent contract to build further student accommodation at Lilydale at no cost to the University. While arrangements of this nature are now increasingly common in the sector, SUT's achievement is nonetheless worthy of positive comment.

## 5. THE INTERSECTORAL ADVANTAGE

Swinburne's heritage as a vocational college is maintained in the current intersectoral nature of the University. Taking advantage of this intersectoral dimension is one of the five institutional strategic themes identified in the Statement of Direction: "we will capitalise on the advantages presented by operating at both the vocational education and training level and the higher education level in order to provide students, industry and business with manifold options" (Statement of Direction 2010).

The Intersectoral Advisory Committee, a sub-committee of the JPRC, has oversight of developments in this area. In line with the changes to the University planning framework, the Intersectoral Development Plan is in the process of being redeveloped into a Master Plan.

The Intersectoral Advisory Committee funds a number of projects annually to progress the University's objectives in relation to intersectoral linkages. The projects cover a range of different topics including gaining a better understanding of the patterns of student enrolment across the sectors, investigating and enhancing the academic support mechanisms required to assist students making a transition from one sector to another, and the development of dual sector qualifications. One project that has recently been completed was designed to facilitate the adoption of graded assessment in the TAFE Division. The panel noted positively the range of the projects funded by the Committee and encourages further such development projects.

Pathways for students to move from the TAFE to the Higher Education sector (Hawthorn, Prahan and Siwnburne Lilydale) and vice versa are generally clearly articulated and are easily accessible to students via the SUT website. The Higher Education sector has a relatively high proportion of TAFE-based admissions (14 per cent), with 47 per cent of the total number of articulating students to it in 2001 being from SUT's own TAFE Division. Indicative figures on student movement in the reverse direction (ie from higher education into TAFE) in 2001 suggest that approximately 12 per cent of the total number of students articulating moved in this direction. A total of 42 higher education courses have articulation and credit transfer arrangements, and five courses are jointly taught.

A number of academic units have developed 'fully nested courses' or 'multiplex degrees' which integrate course content from both higher education and TAFE. These courses are structured to allow students to leave the course with a Certificate III or IV, Diploma or Degree, depending on their level of achievement. While appreciating the inherent flexibility of such courses, it did not appear to the panel that sufficient consideration of the pedagogical differences and the impact of any differences on student learning, student support and administrative processes between the TAFE and higher education systems in these nested courses had been adequately recognised and taken into account at an institutional level.

### **Recommendation 12**

**That the Intersectoral Advisory Committee sponsor research to investigate in more detail the pedagogical and student support implications of the fully nested degree courses.**

In terms of capitalising on the intersectoral advantage in research activities, SUT has been able to harness the capabilities of the TAFE Division to assist in meeting needs emerging from the research activities of the Higher Education Division; for instance, in training clean-room technicians for the higher education research laboratories. A project is also currently under development that will allow TAFE teachers to buy themselves out of teaching for some months so that they can spend time working with a research centre or institute in the Higher Education Division.

SUT has a number of arrangements with industry partners to provide short courses and industry training. The industry partners report that they have found it very convenient to be able to enter into a contract with SUT that can cover the training needs of employees at varying levels, ranging from apprenticeships through to degree courses.

The panel noted that the recent external review of Swinburne Lilydale found that it is playing a major role in fulfilling the University's intersectoral objectives and that the review particularly commended this. Lilydale offers four dual sector and four integrated intersectoral qualifications.

## 6. INTERNATIONALISATION

The fifth strategic theme identified by the University is 'internationalisation'. The Statement of Direction 2010 states that "Swinburne will become known as one of Australia's most internationalised universities. All students will be able to gain exposure to international experience through the curriculum and through direct exposure to international environments. In a sense, every Swinburne student will be an international student. We will also further internationalise the student body". In 2002, the previous 'globalisation' theme was re-focused to internationalisation to better align with the other four themes. A further discussion of the distinction between the two by Council was planned for the month after the panel's visit.

The existing Internationalisation Enabling Plan 2002-2004 is a highly detailed document, which is to become reshaped into a Master Plan. The Plan defines internationalisation as "the process by which the University promotes and facilitates international perspectives and activities among staff and students, with a view to integrating the University and its programs into global developments". However, some senior staff felt that this definition is not yet generally accepted by staff. They felt that staff understanding of the broad context should emerge once the Master Plan had been developed. Consistent with this, it was evident to the panel that many staff related questions about internationalisation to either the support of international students or the provision of off-shore courses. The Performance Portfolio also addresses the question of off-shore course delivery rather than internationalisation more broadly.

### **Recommendation 13**

**That, in developing the Internationalisation Master Plan, further attention be paid to identifying an agreed definition of what is meant by the term 'internationalisation' at SUT and that this then be promulgated widely.**

In its investigations of the internationalisation theme, the panel focused its attention on off-shore provision, rather than internationalisation more broadly. The comments that follow, then, relate more to international aspects of SUT's courses, teaching and learning than to other University activities.

### **6.1 Swinburne Global Learning Network**

The Swinburne Global Learning Network is the collective name given to a cluster of SUT's arrangements with other institutions in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam. There are some plans to expand the network to sites in Europe and North America.

Swinburne Sarawak Institute of Technology (SSIT) (Malaysia) was established in 1999. It is a private higher education institution of Malaysia with SUT and Yayasan Sarawak (an educational foundation established by the Sarawak State Government) as the key partners. It is governed by a Board of Directors. Just prior to the audit panel's visit to SSIT, the Sarawak State Government, together with the SSIT Board, had taken the decision to apply to the Sarawak State Government for recognition as a branch campus of SUT. SSIT is discussed in more detail later (see section 6.1.1).

Swinburne Tummasiri Laem Chabang (Thailand) is a joint venture between SUT and the Technology Supply Group of Companies and was established in 1998. It is currently offering a range of vocational education and training programs. The panel was informed that full

accreditation as a private institute of technology is expected to be gained in late 2002, after which time the range of qualifications offered will be expanded to include degree courses.

Swinburne Vabis University of Technology (Vietnam) is a joint venture between SUT and the Vietnam Australian Building Industry Service. The panel was informed that Swinburne Vabis is in the final stages of receiving approval for an operating license from the Vietnam Minister of Education. It is intended that courses will commence in 2003 (initially the Bachelor of Business and Master of Multimedia).

### **6.1.1 Swinburne Sarawak Institute of Technology**

On 18-19 September 2002, the Panel Chair and Audit Director visited SSIT and met SUT and SSIT staff and students undertaking SUT courses. SSIT has been offering SUT courses since 2000, in addition to offering courses of its own. In 2002, there was a total of 313 EFTSU enrolled in SUT courses through SSIT. Of these, 68 were enrolled in skills enhancement and foundation studies programs, with the remainder enrolled in three bachelor award courses.

As noted above, SSIT is in the process of applying for formal approval from the Malaysian Government to be recognised as a branch campus of SUT. The panel was informed that the earliest date for this formal recognition to be granted is January 2004 but that this arrangement is favoured by the Minister and that approval of the application is expected.

Although SUT has been offering courses through SSIT for some time, the extent to which SUT academic policy has been implemented for its courses at that site has varied quite considerably. For instance, SUT assessment policy and the guidelines on moderation by SUT staff of coursework and examination scripts have not been universally applied. This appears to have arisen from a lack of understanding or acknowledgement on the part of SUT staff that the students enrolled at SSIT in SUT courses are indeed SUT students, and that the responsibility for assuring the quality of these courses rests with SUT. As a result, the agreement of some SUT schools to moderate the SUT courses offered through SSIT has been regarded by SUT staff more as a favour to SSIT than their responsibility. Senior managers report that the recent clarification of the formal relationship between SUT and SSIT will allow for aggressive and speedy implementation of the SUT framework for quality assurance of teaching and learning and it is clear to the panel that such action is necessary.

SUT acknowledges that the lack of some basic quality assurance systems in its courses offered through SSIT has meant the University has no means of determining whether these courses and their learning outcomes are equivalent to courses offered on-shore. The breakdown in regular approval and review systems has been such that students at SSIT had been accepted for enrolment in one award course not then approved by the SUT Academic Board. The problem was exacerbated by the fact that the course is in a professional discipline and that, as it was being offered through SSIT, it was not recognised by the relevant professional body. At the time of the panel's visit to SSIT, this situation was causing considerable uncertainty for some students, although not all students seemed aware of the course's accreditation status (either with respect to SUT or the professional body). The panel was informed that SSIT would be seeking professional accreditation from the relevant Malaysian professional body as soon as possible. SUT recognises that the academic accreditation of this course must be rectified as a matter of urgency.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**That SUT's Academic Board resolve, with urgency, the accreditation status of the courses being offered through SSIT and that the current academic and professional accreditation status of these courses be made clear to students. More generally, the Academic Board should assure**

**itself that its decision-making processes with regard to all SUT's courses offered off-shore are sufficiently robust.**

Immediately prior to the panel's visit to Sarawak, SUT announced an appointment to the vacant post of Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic). The panel met with the appointee while at SSIT. It is apparent that he has a good understanding of the issues relating to the SUT courses offered through SSIT and the need for SUT to put in place quality assurance systems to address problem areas. An action plan has been constructed for this purpose.

In addition, an SQRS review was completed of SSIT in late 2001. The resulting developmental action plan identified a large number of improvement actions to be undertaken covering a wide range of areas of activity. The panel was shown evidence that progress had been made in implementing some of these actions. For instance, the standard Subject Evaluation System used in Australia has recently been instituted at SSIT and some SUT courses offered there have been evaluated for the first time. The results of these evaluations are being analysed by the Foresight, Planning and Review Unit.

Some remaining recommendations from the SQRS review need to be consolidated into the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)'s action plan to ensure they are attended to. Appropriate priorities and timelines will then be required.

**Recommendation 15**

**That SUT ensure that a comprehensive framework for the quality assurance of its courses offered through SSIT be implemented without delay. The University has recognised the need for this framework and is in the process of constructing a suitable action plan.**

In more general terms, it will be important for SUT to ensure that the quality assurance procedures it develops are also implemented at both the Thai and Vietnamese operations (see Recommendation 17).

The working relationship between SSIT and SUT staff appears to be a very good one and this will serve as a solid foundation for future development of the activities at this site. The staff at SSIT, particularly the teaching staff, have been and remain very unclear about their relationship to SUT and the boundaries of their roles and responsibilities in relation to the University's courses. This needs to be clarified. Many SSIT staff hope this will be resolved now that SSIT is to become a branch campus. It was apparent to the panel that SSIT staff would very much welcome greater contact and involvement with Australian-based staff. Equally, as noted above, there is a need to clarify for SUT staff, their relationship to the SSIT campus and its activities. While this issue is of immediate importance in relation to SSIT, a similarly clear understanding of respective roles and responsibilities will need to be ensured for all SUT's off-shore operations.

**Recommendation 16**

**That SUT clarify the respective roles and responsibilities of its own staff and staff of off-shore partner organisations, with respect to responsibility for curriculum development and for quality assurance.**

SUT students studying at SSIT are generally satisfied with the facilities available to them. Classrooms and laboratories are well equipped and student access to computers appears to be adequate. SSIT, with SUT's support and assistance, is gradually developing a library of textbooks and monographs. Students reported that they access other local and State libraries and that this, and the internet, generally ensure they find sufficient, appropriate resources. As noted in section 3.8, many students seemed unaware of the possibility of accessing the on-line

catalogues available from the SUT Library. Those that had tried using the system found that it is often slow and unreliable.

The panel did not visit any other institutions that form part of the Swinburne Global Learning Network and therefore is unable to comment substantively on their operation. Clearly there is a need for SUT to put robust quality assurance systems in place to ensure that the difficulties encountered with SSIT are avoided as the activities at the other sites are developed.

#### **Recommendation 17**

**That SUT establish effective communication mechanisms and ensure that robust quality assurance systems are in place for its operations with off-shore partner organisations within the Swinburne Global Learning Network so that it has the means to ensure that the partner's activities (as they relate to SUT courses) are fully compliant with SUT policy and practice.**

### **6.2 Other Off-Shore Partnerships**

Aside from the activities of the Global Learning Network considered above, SUT allows flexibility for individual schools to develop arrangements for the off-shore teaching of courses. The contracts with off-shore partners generally specify that SUT will determine student entry standards, course content, suitability of teaching staff (where teaching is to be carried out by the partner organisation), learning and teaching methods, and the procedures for moderation of assessment. The SUT school principally involved in developing the arrangement has responsibility for specifying these contractual requirements. SUT notes in its Performance Portfolio that it plans to develop an overall framework for quality assurance of courses delivered off-shore. The panel endorses this intention. Such a framework would strengthen the University confidence in the appropriate management and delivery of off-shore courses. Before final signing, all contracts are approved by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor to ensure that they do not conflict with the University's overall priorities. A tightening of the explicit scrutiny at this institutional level of the quality assurance provisions within contracts will presumably form part of the overall framework mentioned above.

#### **Recommendation 18**

**That the planned development of an overall framework for quality assurance of SUT courses delivered off-shore be undertaken and implemented.**

Contracts are in place with partner organisations in Vietnam, Israel, Hungary, Singapore, Malaysia, and Hong Kong. The arrangements take a variety of forms and a number of these arrangements, while formally agreed, are yet to become active.

For those agreements that are active, it was not possible for the panel to investigate them all in detail. The panel requested a number of samples of moderation reports for a number of courses taught off-shore. All showed evidence of an appropriate degree of involvement by SUT staff in the monitoring of the conduct of the course and of student achievement. There was also evidence of action being taken by partner organisations in response to comments and recommendations made in moderation reports.

### 6.3 *Internationalising the Curriculum*

The Flexible Learning and Teaching Plan notes SUT's commitment "to making every Swinburne student an international student". It identifies a number of ways in which this may be made possible including all courses being offered in a culturally sensitive manner, having an international dimension to curricula and maximising opportunities for international experiences.

SUT has a number of arrangements with international institutions for student exchange. In 2001, 109 SUT students travelled overseas on some form of student exchange (involving 49 institutions) and 117 overseas students came to SUT. A Manager, Education Abroad has recently been appointed and has been given responsibility for considering each of the University's exchange agreements, for consolidating the agreements into a smaller, more manageable number, and for increasing the number of exchanges in both directions. A business plan for the Education Abroad Unit is currently under development.

Students met by the panel reported that a number of subjects include an international element, through, for instance, the use of case studies derived from overseas. Not all staff appeared to have given serious consideration to the internationalisation of the curriculum in their teaching areas. In part, this may be the result of the somewhat narrow view held by some staff on what constitutes internationalisation at SUT. The panel recommends above that further attention be paid to identifying and promulgating an agreed definition of internationalisation (see Recommendation 13). In the course of this, specific attention to the precise meaning, implications and ways of achieving the objective of all SUT students becoming international students will need to be considered.

### 6.4 *Support for On-Campus International Students*

The International Student Unit (ISU) provides support services to on-shore international students. The orientation program for commencing international higher education students is well regarded by students met by the panel, as is its general pastoral support. In terms of formal feedback on the services, SUT's Student Satisfaction Survey 2001 asked students for feedback on different aspects of ISU's services. Of the students who responded on that item, the majority were neutral in their opinions.

Swinburne Lilydale campus has established a mentoring program for international students, in which suitably skilled students are appointed and trained as mentors. The program is highly appreciated by both mentors and mentees and is proving to be an excellent means of supporting international students.

#### **Commendation 6**

**AUQA commends the mentor program for international students at Swinburne Lilydale as an effective means of supporting international students.**

## 7. HUMAN RESOURCES

The Statement of Direction 2010 notes that “the University ... recognises that the staff is the key resource that enables the achievement of the objectives set in this document”. The Human Resources Enabling Plan 2002-2004 outlines a comprehensive strategy of development, identifying the staffing objectives necessary for the achievement of the five strategic themes. All aspects of the staffing policies and practices of the University have been under review in the current year as the Human Resources Enabling Plan was developed, and as a result of the renegotiated Enterprise Agreements and the Human Resources Benchmarking project (see below). The panel endorses the extensive review that has been undertaken.

A number of measures are being established with the aim of improving staff retention, staff development and staff satisfaction. Measures in the retention strategy include opportunities for salary packaging and other performance-based remuneration packages and an employee health insurance program. The panel noted that a review of the academic promotions policy was underway at the time of the audit.

A Performance, Review and Development system for all academic and general staff is progressively being implemented across the University. Implementation of this system is in the reasonably early stages. Staff met by the panel who had participated in a review process found that it generated helpful and constructive feedback and that they were able to access staff development training and workshops as necessary.

In addition, a Management Development Program, has been developed to assist in extending the communication skills of those in management positions. It uses a system of 360 degree feedback and has good support from senior staff as a helpful personal improvement tool.

The first staff feedback survey was conducted in late 2001. SUT has noted in its Performance Portfolio that one area requiring significant improvement is in relation to communication between the central administrative areas of the University and staff. A number of specific strategies for action that will work up, down and across the institution have been devised and will be progressively implemented over 2002-2003.

Human Resources was involved in the Human Resources Benchmarking project in 2000. Participants included both tertiary and non-tertiary organisations. Five other Australian universities participated in the project. For SUT, participation resulted in the identification of some areas for further investigation and the Human Resources section is now involved in a further benchmarking study.

The panel noted the enthusiasm and commitment evident among the staff it met. Staff from the schools that the panel met spoke with very clear pride in the achievements of their units and the University.

## 8. STUDENT SUPPORT

The Student Services Division as it is currently structured was established in January 2002.

At the time of the panel's visit a major Student Experience Project Group was in the final stages of concluding its report. The major focus of the project was to investigate the planning, deployment, and delivery of administrative and other support services for students. A number of different project teams had been formed to investigate and report back on different aspects of service provision, such as service integration for prospective students, records and student data management, and awards, graduation and alumni. Most teams involved student members.

Fundamental issues that seem to underlie many of the considerations of the project teams were student knowledge of, and access to, the support services that are available. Some of the particular difficulties identified by the group include students having to go to multiple locations to resolve issues, different services being available for students from different divisions, and instances of staff being unable to accurately answer student queries regarding rules and regulations. The reports of the project groups identify in detail the issues that were considered, the University's current strengths in the area and the ways in which improvements can be made (including the possible models explored and consultation undertaken). Each team makes explicit recommendations.

One of the main recommendations of the project is the establishment of a 'one stop shop' at each of the major campuses which would be prominently located and able to facilitate access to all the necessary student services. Recommendations are also included about improving the communication between groups responsible for providing student services (both centrally and within academic units). The establishment of a Standing Committee for Student Services, which would have responsibility for regularly reviewing the adequacy and appropriateness of student services, is also recommended.

Recommendations from this project team have been approved in principle by senior management. It is intended that structural changes to the Student Services Division will be complete by November 2002, with other necessary changes to be progressively implemented by February 2003.

### **Commendation 7**

**AUQA commends SUT for the thorough nature of its Student Experience Project Group, which addresses in considerable detail the changes that are required to improve the provision of services to students.**

Some other aspects of student services, such as the Library and the International Student Unit are considered in Chapters 3 and 6 of this Report.

## 9. COMMUNITY SERVICE AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

### 9.1 *Swinburne Lilydale*

One of the objects of the Swinburne University of Technology Act (1992) is: “the development and provision of educational, cultural, professional technical and vocational services to the community and in particular the fostering of participation in a university of technology of persons living or working in the Outer Eastern region of Melbourne”. One of the main ways in which SUT pursues this objective is through its campus at Lilydale.

In 2001, approximately 70 per cent of Lilydale students resided in the outer eastern region of Melbourne or adjacent suburbs. A number of initiatives have been undertaken to increase the links with local schools and these appear to have been highly effective. Lilydale’s provision of intersectoral courses has already been mentioned. Swinburne Lilydale has become centrally involved in regional development initiatives and has developed strong links with its local community. A Memorandum of Understanding with the Shire of Yarra Ranges had recently been signed, which serves to formalise a strong relationship developing between the two organisations in recent years. The relationship between the Shire and Swinburne Lilydale has led to a number of jointly-hosted community events such as the annual Town and Gown lecture series. In 2001, a conference on sustainability was jointly organised and a program of public events marking reconciliation week was organised. It is anticipated that the number of joint events will increase in future.

#### **Commendation 8**

**AUQA commends SUT for the positive and effective way it has responded to its legislative obligation to serve Melbourne’s outer eastern region through the activities of Swinburne Lilydale.**

## **APPENDIX A: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO SWINBURNE UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY**

Swinburne University of Technology has its origins as the Eastern Suburbs Technical College founded in 1908 to serve Melbourne's eastern suburbs. In 1913 the institution changed its name to Swinburne Technical College, to commemorate the Honourable George Swinburne, a former Mayor of Hawthorn and a member of the Parliament of Victoria who was responsible for the initial establishment of the college. In 1965 Swinburne affiliated with the Victoria Institute of Colleges, which was established in that year by an Act of the Parliament of Victoria. The range of courses and the various levels at which they were offered grew to such an extent that in 1969, the boys' and girls' technical schools were taken over by the Victorian Education Department while the college remained as an autonomous institution. Under new arrangements in Victoria over the period 1976-78, Swinburne Council was given power to grant bachelor degrees. The institution became Swinburne University of Technology in 1992.

Following its amalgamation with Eastern TAFE on 1 July 1998, Swinburne's Australia operations are now conducted on six campuses: Croydon, Hawthorn, Healesville, Lilydale, Prahran and Wantirna. The majority of the higher education students are based at the Hawthorn campus, with smaller numbers also at Lilydale and Prahran.

SUT has a relatively small population of higher education students (9,951 EFTSU in 2002). The Higher Education Division employs 430 FTE academic staff, 99 part-time academic staff and approximately 250 sessional staff.

The University's programs range from apprenticeships to PhDs. The Higher Education Division offers general and niche programs ranging from bachelor degrees to postgraduate coursework and research degrees within seven broad fields of study: natural and physical sciences; business, innovation and management; computing and information technology; design; health and human services; professional engineering and multimedia. The TAFE Division offers courses at professional, para-professional and sub-professional levels covering diploma, certificate, apprenticeship, VCE and access programs. It comprises four major teaching units: School of Arts, Hospitality and Sciences, School of Business and e-Commerce, School of Engineering and School of Social Sciences. The TAFE Division has successfully adopted and been accredited to the ISO9001:2000 standard. It also complies with the requirements of the Australian Quality Training Framework.

**APPENDIX B: THE OBJECTS OF AUQA**

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

## **APPENDIX C: THE AUDIT PANEL**

Dr John Grant, Visiting Fellow, Australian National University, Canberra

Ms Robyn Harris, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency, Melbourne

Professor Joyce Kirk, Dean, Faculty Humanities & Social Sciences, University of Technology, Sydney (Panel Chair)

Mr Peter Smith, Consultant, Barton Vale Group, South Australia

Associate Professor Alex Sutherland, Dean of Engineering, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand

