Victoria University Progress Report to
AUQA Cycle 1 Audit

August 2008
Background

Victoria University (VU) was audited by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) in October 2006, after the University submitted its Performance Portfolio in July 2006. AUQA published its Audit Report in December 2006. Since that time, VU has been addressing the Affirmations and Recommendations identified in the Report, together with issues identified by senior management at VU in the text of the Audit Report and issues considered as improvement priorities in the VU Performance Portfolio. Progress on implementation has been tracked in the VU AUQA Action Plan, under the auspices of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Institutional Services) in consultation with the Vice-Chancellor. Reporting on the progress of implementing the AUQA Action Plan has been included in the University’s Quality Improvement Review (QIR) process, which is an annual process of self-assessment and peer-review. Regular reporting on the implementation of Affirmations and Recommendations has also been provided to Council.

This Progress Report provides an account of what has been achieved to date with regard to the Affirmations and Recommendations in the AUQA Report, what actions are still outstanding and what actions are proposed in the future. Most of the findings of the AUQA Audit Report have already been addressed either having been completed or embedded in the ongoing management of the University. Where findings are yet to be fully implemented details of the planned completion date are provided.

Affirmations

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

The Quality Improvement Review (QIR) is an annual, collegial review process whereby organisational units review their performance against plans for the current year, report on QIR recommendations from the previous year and provide a draft operational plan for the forthcoming year. This self-assessment is considered by a review panel comprising senior officers of the University. The process aims to provide a university-wide perspective on performance and planning. The emphasis is on the ‘Improve’ phase of the University’s Plan-Do-Review-Improve (PDRI) quality cycle.

The QIR process was reviewed and improvements made in the 2007 process. A further review of the 2007 QIR has resulted in minor amendments being made and incorporated into guidelines for QIR 2008. Workshops on the QIR 2008 process including the new strategic planning framework (Making VU 2016: A Statement of Purpose) are planned for the second half of 2008. These workshops will be built around the PDRI cycle and are designed to assist staff to further embed PDRI into work practices.

The Quality Information and Planning (QIP) Branch established a ‘good practice database’ on its intranet site following QIR in 2006. Based on the AUQA definition of good practice the QIR Good Practice Database displays examples of VU good practices identified each year through QIR.

Benchmarking principles are currently being incorporated into the Quality and Planning policy as part of systematic policy review. A benchmarking website has been developed and is located on the Quality intranet site. An audit of all VU internal and external benchmarking activities is planned for the second half of 2008 possibly as part of the 2008 QIR. This will allow VU to identify areas for improvement and further embed the PDRI approach across the University.

Affirmation completion date: Ongoing

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

The previous strategic and functional plans have been replaced by a revised strategic planning framework - Making VU 2016: A Statement of Purpose. This document has two parts - a statement of
VU's strategic intent and a statement of university priorities - and was endorsed by Council in February 2008. The simplified format has streamlined the form and content of the functional plans and enabled greater alignment between the high level University strategies and the manner in which these plans are implemented at the local business-unit level.

Affirmation completion date: Process completed February 2008

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

A new data framework and reporting protocol involving an upgrade to Business Objects was being developed in 2007 to provide a consistent university-wide approach to data management. This data framework was also designed to enable a more effective KPI reporting against University strategies. Because of changes in the external environment involving the Business Objects company, VU is now reconsidering the most effective way forward in terms of the longer-term Business Intelligence system requirements. The KPI reporting framework, which was amended as part of the development of the new strategic planning framework Making VU 2016: A Statement of Purpose Statement of Purpose is operational and will be used to report to Council in January 2009.

The University has recently decided to move the VU student data management system, VUSIS to Callista, which will be implemented by 2010. This will substantially improve VU's most significant student data repository.

Affirmation completion date: Ongoing

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

The VU Leadership and Management Development Strategy 2008 – 2010 will be presented to the Vice-Chancellor for approval in August 2008. Supplementing the strategy will be a Leadership and Management Capability Framework (LMCF). Currently under development, and due for completion in October, the LMCF will be a university-wide agreement about what constitutes exemplary leadership and management practice at VU. In addition to informing all VU's leadership development initiatives from 2009 and beyond, the LMCF will form part of the employment relationship staff have with VU. It will be embedded in VU selection and confirmation, performance, promotion, transfer and workforce planning processes.

Three new programs for Educational Leaders commenced in 2008 as detailed below.

1. A ‘Transitions’ program orients recently appointed leaders to their role, and to VU. Twenty-one educational leaders have participated in the program this year, which runs over a six months period.

2. A ‘Community and Professional Development’ program commenced in March with a two-day retreat for 100 of the University’s senior leaders. Discussion centred on the leader’s role in supporting VU’s strategic plan: Making VU 2016: A Statement of Purpose. Four additional events have been planned for the remainder of the year.

3. In August VU will be selecting participants for the inaugural Emerging Educational Leaders Program, targeted at Level C/D academic staff, and course coordinators. This is a succession program designed to build a ‘pipeline’ of next-generation leaders across VU.

A series of three pilot leadership development programs for general staff commenced in October 2007 and will conclude in December 2008. Two other rounds of these programs are planned for 2008/2009
and 2009/2010. Programs target staff at HEW 4/5, 6/7 and 8/9 levels, run for 12 - 14 months, and provide staff with formal qualifications. Approximately 60 general staff have been successful in gaining a place in the pilot programs. These programs are supported by the major grant from the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (Workplace Productivity Program Round 2). An evaluation strategy is in place, which will inform the program review at the end of 2008. The 2008/2009 series of programs is scheduled to commence at the end of September 2008. These programs are heavily contextualised and aim to fully ground participants in Making VU Projects drawn from topics provided by the Making VU Program Office. The projects themselves are exemplars of Learning in the Workplace and Community.

Affirmation completion date: October 2008
Program review to be undertaken October 2008

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

A new Course Approval and Management System (CAMS) has been implemented. CAMS is an IT system and database which stores and manages the University's definitive repository of curriculum information across HE, VE and FE. CAMS simplifies, enhances and strengthens the quality of course approvals, qualification governance and registration processes. Key capabilities of CAMS include the ability to track course and unit development from proposal through to final approval through to archiving, provides version control and maintains the relationship between superseded and replacement qualifications.

One of VU's key educational policies the Academic Review Policy is currently under review. One purpose of the policy is to prescribe the internal review processes and practices at VU of its HE, VE and FE offerings and the management of organisational units. The Terms of Reference of the review include developing a course viability indicator based on agreed KPIs and to provide a process for identifying and retiring those courses that are no longer sustainable. The policy review is scheduled for completion by December 2008.

Affirmation completion date: December 2008

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

The Core Graduates Attributes policy is currently under review. It is anticipated that the reviewed policy is likely to be called the Graduate Capabilities Policy. The review is scheduled for completion by December 2008. Currently the policy only applies to the HE sector. The review will ensure that the policy will apply to all sectors and include two new attributes.

Student Career Development (SCD) employs a range of strategies to assist all students, not those only in first year, to use the VU graduate capabilities to build and evidence employment-related skills across their course of study. For example, the University makes available an e-portfolio system with which students are encouraged to record examples of their development of graduate capabilities. A working party is currently exploring the possible enhancement of the capacity of the existing e-portfolio as well as exploring other systems on the market. In addition, SCD is currently working with faculties to develop strategies to support their work in embedding the graduate capabilities into teaching and learning practice. Career educators are assigned to a faculty and their role is to engage with teaching staff to embed graduate capabilities and career development learning more broadly.

Affirmation completion date: December 2008
7. AUQA affirms Victoria University's revision of its policy on academic honesty and suggests the University include a statement on the educative use of plagiarism detection software and student access to such software.

The Academic Honesty and Preventing Plagiarism policy has been reviewed and now includes a statement on the educative use of plagiarism detection software and student access to such software in the policy. Regular workshops on utilising Turnitin for educative purposes are now available for staff through the Staff College.

**Affirmation completion date:** Completed December 2007

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

The reframing of eLearning as a 'whole of institution challenge' advanced significantly in 2007 and is continuing in 2008. Considerable work has been completed in the conceptual and operational aspects of eLearning, including the investment of increased resources in infrastructure and professional development. As a result there has been a significant increase in the rate at which eLearning opportunities are being made available and taken up by VU students. In 2007 approximately 690 HE units of study have an online presence with WebCT, an increase of 28% from the previous year. In 2008 it is anticipated that there will be in the region of 1400 HE units of study online, a 49% increase on last year.

Conceptual work undertaken includes:

- presentation of a paper to the Vice Chancellor's Advisory Committee in 2007, A Vision for Learning and Teaching in the Context of VU 2016 and ICT, which identified infrastructure changes required to support eLearning. This vision is based on flexibility and the capacity of students to exercise choice;
- adoption in 2007 of a Minimum Presence Online policy and commencement of implementation;
- development of a Code of Practice for Flexible and Distributed Learning which is currently being finalised. It is envisaged that this will be the basis for good practice at VU;
- preparation and presentation of discussion papers on, inter alia, minimum online presence and the amendment to the eLearning Strategy that takes into account Web2.0 advances;
- development of strategies to move eLearning beyond the limitations of the current Learning Management System and to embrace, develop and disseminate Web 2.0 technologies.

To improve and streamline the operational aspects of eLearning a Teaching and Learning sub-committee reporting to the Information and Knowledge Management Committee has been formed, chaired by the Head of Flexible Learning Unit, Staff College. Support for eLearning and flexible delivery is part of its Terms of Reference. The Associate Deans, Teaching and Learning and Senior Educators 3, Teaching and Learning are represented on this subcommittee, which addresses issues such as the policies and papers mentioned above, and the review of the University's Learning Management System.

In addition, in 2007 one member of staff was embedded in one faculty, one day per week, as a pilot. Recruitment of staff for embedding into all Faculties is now complete and is in force as of second semester 2008.

Resources, in the form of infrastructure improvements and professional development, have also been given high priority. In 2008 a major investment has been made to provide a lecture capture and dissemination application in 25 lecture theatres for deployment in semester 1, 2009. Investment in social networking software, second life and piloting of virtual classroom software occurred in 2007 and an eLearning blog was developed for staff.
Professional Development has been considered integral in the process of building staff capability in eLearning. Activities undertaken in 2007 and in train for 2008 include:

- a three day eLearning programme in which approximately 70-80 members of staff participated. The program is being offered in a range of modes in 2008 and is scheduled for delivery at regular intervals targeting 250 staff. This target was exceeded in June 2008 with 54 workshops being conducted and 425 staff being professionally developed. This professional development has occurred both face-to-face and using the VU virtual classroom, ‘Elluminate’;

- professional development in the area of social networking. A pilot of the tool, ‘Elgg’ is underway and is being used by Business and Law. The new VU community application is now in production. Also, an island in Second Life has been purchased and a Working Group has been established to plan activities on that island;

- a series of occasional speakers were engaged to raise the profile of eLearning at VU. In 2007 Lectopia gave a talk on podcasting and Michelle Sellinger, Global Educational Strategist, CISCO, spoke on the issue of the future of eLearning. There have been speakers from Moodle, an open source LMS. Planned events include Lectopia, and Digital Natives in Higher Education and international speakers in November/December who are in Melbourne for Asclilite. Additionally VU will host Acode 49 in 2009.

As a pilot for a commercial product, VU produced a podcast platform ‘Teachcast’ and professional development has been conducted on the application. This gives staff an opportunity to create ‘on the go’ podcasts for students.

Professional development in 2008 takes the traditional Learning Management System approach and incorporates newer forms of technology such as mashups, M-learning, virtual worlds and rapid content development.

Another major initiative is the eLearning benchmarking activity that will inform the current and future eLearning strategy. This activity is based on a pilot conducted by the Australasian Council on Open, Distance and E-Learning (ACODE). This will be done with colleagues from Edith Cowan University, the University of Wollongong and Massey University.

Affirmation completion date: Completed December 2007
Ongoing implementation with annual review and improvement.

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

The University Research Centres and University Institutes policy was approved in January 2008. The purpose of this policy is to outline the rationale for establishing University Institutes and University Research Centres, the procedures to be followed in their formation, review and termination, their relationship to University faculties and organisational units; and their management. The policy was developed within the appropriate University processes and will itself be due for review in three years time.

The Division of Research and Region is continuing to clarify priority research areas, through an extensive analysis process, as part of the VU Research Development and Investment Strategy which will develop, focus and consolidate research at VU over the next five years. The strategy will complement the Institutes and Research Centres policy and further explicate and enhance the opportunities for cross faculty and cross-organisational unit research and associated activities.

Affirmation completion date: December 2008
Ongoing implementation with regular review and improvement.
10. AUQA affirms Victoria University’s planning and initial implementation of the Workforce Renewal Project but suggests the University give greater attention to staff recruitment processes which reinforce its strategic directions.

In 2007 a Workforce Planning Office was established to develop strategic workforce plans aligned to Making VU priorities. Workforce planning strategies have been developed for a number of support areas including Library, Facilities and ICT. Work has commenced in drafting workforce plans in the Higher Education faculties. It is anticipated that Workforce plans will be developed and completed for Higher Education, Vocational Education and Further Education faculties and other support areas by December 2008. Key workforce planning activities in 2008 include:

- conducting staffing capability, capacity and gap analyses and identifying recruitment priorities;
- strategic academic and non academic recruitment in support of business plans;
- enhanced monitoring and evaluation of strategic recruitment undertaken by all academic and support units.

Complementing workforce-planning activities is a review of VU’s recruitment function. The review commenced in 2007 with the aim of enhancing the operations and efficiency of the Recruitment Unit and supporting VU as a preferred employer in an increasingly competitive national and international labour market. An interim e-recruitment solution was implemented in April 2008 which provides, amongst other benefits:

- online application functionality;
- immediate automated responses to candidates at each step of process;
- simplified forms;
- improved timelines;
- online database of candidate data.

The review is now focused on recruitment strategies, an enhanced e-recruitment solution and selection policies. It is anticipated that outcomes from this phase of the review will be implemented within the next 12 months.

**Affirmation completion date:** June 2009

**Recommendations**

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

In February 2008, University Council approved a simplified and streamlined planning framework designed to enable greater alignment between high level University strategies and strategic planning at the local business unit level. The new planning framework is outlined in ‘Making VU 2016: A Statement of Purpose’ (http://www.vu.edu.au/About_VU/Administration/index.aspx). The Statement identifies four key stakeholder groups (students, staff, local and global enterprises and communities, and governments and the public) and articulates 13 high level outcomes to be achieved by 2016 and their associated Key Performance Indicators. This small set of KPIs and a Quadruple Bottom Line Report is provided annually to Council. Underpinning the KPIs is a broader set of associated Management Performance Indicators.

The University is developing a process within which its relationships with other organisations and communities can be properly understood and managed. At the beginning of this process has been the development of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system and database that will eventually contain details of all formal partner relationships. It is planned that all such partnerships will be lodged
and suitably catalogued within the database during the remainder of 2008. The University has also recently committed additional funds to expand the capabilities of the system to store more comprehensive information on Australian businesses and organisations while customising the system to meet the requirements of different sections of the University. The database has been populated by both internal information and externally purchased business information from Dun and Bradstreet.

With all agreements properly lodged during 2008 work has also started on the development of a four-tier hierarchical structure to determine what degree of authority for relationship building and approval lies within the control of staff (Tier 1), Executive Deans and Directors (Tier 2), the Vice Chancellor (Tier 3) and the University Council (Tier 4). This simple structure is key to understanding and controlling the impact relationships of a varying nature may have upon the University and its partners.

During 2009 KPIs will be developed to monitor, understand and quantify the benefits that flow from such relationships to the University and to its partners. These benefits will be vital to the University as it builds upon its new mission and will be related directly to the four tier structure. Examples of such benefits that may lie within each tier are shown below:

Tier 1 - Individual agreements to provide differing models of Learning in the Workplace and Community;
Tier 2 - Relationships that provide income from research, commercial fees and philanthropy;
Tier 3 - Relationships that provide multiple variable benefits across the whole University;
Tier 4 - Relationships that provide significant and high profile benefits that are strategic in nature for the University as a whole.

At the end of 2009 the University will be better able to understand and measure the value of its relationships with a view to optimal investments being made to deliver enhanced benefits to the University and its partners, and in direct support of VU's key objectives of research, teaching and learning. Through this overall process, we plan to ensure that there remains a small over-arching set of KPIs (presented via a quadruple bottom-line reporting system) to allow Council to focus on progress against strategic objectives, that in turn will be supported by a somewhat broader set of Management KPIs specified in the Statement of Purpose.

Recommendation completion date: August 2009

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

In February 2008 Council approved a revised strategic planning framework Making VU 2016: A Statement of Purpose. As a result Information Technology Services (ITS), along with all other major organizational units, have now developed strategic plans with objectives mapped explicitly to the priorities in the Statement of Purpose. ITS maintains a Strategic Infrastructure Framework where major ICT initiatives are balanced with other priorities and resources within the University's agenda. This strategic framework is annually “rebalanced” at a conference held in February for all ITS staff, with input from an IT Advisory Network across faculties and other areas (governed by individual Service Level Agreements).

Management of Information Technology matters occurs through the Information and Knowledge Management Committee (IKMC), a Management Advisory Committee that reports to the Vice Chancellor’s Advisory Committee. The IKMC is chaired by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education Services), Professor Richard Carter, who also has portfolio responsibility for ITS.

Recommendation completion date: Ongoing

3. AUQA recommends that Victoria University, and the Education and Research Board in particular, keep under active review the implementation and effectiveness of new policies relating to academic standards.
The review of ‘academic’ policies is governed by the “Development and Review of Policies and Procedures” policy. Section 6.5 outlines the processes to be followed including the role of the Board. The Responsible Officers of the various Academic and Educational policies, upon being notified by Governance Policy and Planning Services that a policy is due for review, will seek feedback from the Board (and on occasion relevant standing committee/s of the Board) if the policy is to undergo a ‘comprehensive review’.

The terms of reference for the Education and Research Policy and Planning Committee of the Board requires that it actively participates in the review and development of education policy, plans and procedures; therefore at the beginning of the year the Committee considers what policies are overdue for review or are scheduled for review and lists them on their work plan for consideration. Other standing committees of the Board also consider certain educational policies throughout the year. Currently the Board is represented on the steering committee that is managing the comprehensive review of the Academic Review policy. Academic policies having been the subject of review and considered by the Board during 2008 include the Joint Supervision of Higher Degree by Research Students policy, the Registration of Higher Degree by Research (HDR) Supervisors policy, the Student Assessment policy and the Student Progress policy.

Recently, a new process has been implemented regarding renewing and approving new educational policies within Pro Vice Chancellor's [Teaching and Learning] Portfolio. The main step for the Board and its standing committees is that new or revised policies will be launched at the Board and the Board will decide which standing committee it will refer the policy to for consideration. Policies considered by the Board in this process include the Core Graduate Attributes policy, the Learning in the Workplace and Community policy and the Induction for Teaching policy.

**Recommendation completion date:** Ongoing

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

The Academic Review policy was due for review in 2007, however, because of the need to begin implementation of Making VU a New School of Thought it was decided to delay the review until 2008. The Academic Review policy (which includes rolling course review) is now being considered by a working party comprising staff from across the faculties and chaired by the Director: Governance, Policy and Planning Services. The working party’s terms of reference include developing a course viability indicator based on agreed KPIs and aspects of risk. The working party is scheduled to complete its review by December 2008.

**Recommendation completion date:** December 2008

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

Difficulties with data system limitations have made action on this matter very difficult. A working group was established in 2007 to manage this project to completion however the planned actions have now been superseded by the decision to roll-out Callista as a new Student Management System by 2010. Provision is being made within Callista for tracking of student performance and course selection patterns.

However despite these difficulties progress has been made in regard to identifying and tracking the number and proportion of students articulating between the sectors in a number of ways.
A study undertaken under the auspice of Commitment 3: Customised Learning Experience in Making VU has identified students accessing cross-sectoral pathways between a departure course in 2006 into a destination course in 2007. It includes the generally recognised ‘forward transfer pathways’ (FE→VE, FE→HE and VE→HE cross-sectoral pathways) as well as the less considered ‘reverse transfer pathways’ (VE→FE, HE→FE and HE→VE cross-sectoral pathways). The study examined 2608 internal VU students who had changed sector from 2006 into 2007. Key findings from the study identified key strategic pathways, trends across sectoral pathways for international offshore students, the fifty most popular cross sectoral pathways and cluster based pathways data at VU. Although it has proven a time consuming and challenging process because of the current data systems limitations, pathway information across the University is now available as a basis for further development.

The establishment of Course and Pathways Services (CAPS) in late 2008 will provide centralised leadership and support for strategic courses development, management, approval, and review processes. It is expected that this unit will take a proactive role in supporting the development of industry, professional and community aligned courses and pathways by having the capacity to assess and monitor external market trends and further support the strategic analysis of internal VU data. CAPS will have an eye to internal processes by ensuring alignment to efficient courses systems and processes including course development, ERB course approvals, course monitoring and review. The new unit will take a proactive role in supporting cross-sectoral course development and pathways.

In addition the Learning Pathways and Qualifications Linkage Policy approved in February 2007 establishes the principles that allow students to combine learning from Vocational Education and its overseas equivalent, with Higher Education and to make easy transitions from one sector to another. This policy broadens the concept of inter-sectoral awards to include not only dual awards but any qualification linkage that allows students to build a personal learning program crossing conventional sectoral boundaries. At the time of policy approval VU had only seven officially approved internal pathways. After a concentrated effort during 2007, 72 internal pathways are now approved.

Recommendation completion date: December 2010

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

The Student Evaluation Survey (SES) policy was approved in July 2007. This policy provides for the systematic collection of feedback from students about their perceptions of units and teachers. The major objective of SES is to provide data to support the systematic review and improvement of the University's units and teaching.

The new online SES was piloted in summer school 2008 and a further pilot was undertaken in Semester 1 2008, involving one school from each of the HE faculties. This second pilot was required because of technical difficulties identified during the summer school pilot. The legacy paper-based survey system has been re-engineered to include the revised instrument to ensure continuity in data collection and reporting for Semester 1 2008. A full HE roll-out of the new system is planned for Semester 2 2008. The implementation of SES across the VE/FE schools is currently being scoped.

Recommendation completion date: Completed July 2008

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

The Office for Research maintains and regularly updates a comprehensive website that provides information on all aspects of funding for research. Located at: http://research.vu.edu.au/funding.php the website includes:
• a VU Grants Calendar which lists all major research funding available and details the associated application requirements;
• a Grant Search database which provides access to an external database of grant opportunities;
• details of the National Competitive Grants Program including providing information about, and links to both the Australian Research Council and the National Health and Medical Research Council funding opportunities;
• information on the VU Research Funding Schemes which lists research funding opportunities administered by the University.

Further development will be occurring to this site, and the Research website at: http://www.vu.edu.au/Research/index.aspx, to include more detail relating to funding provided to University Research Centres, Institutes and the Priority Research and Innovation Project initiative. This development will occur with the soon to be released University’s Research Development and Investment Strategy which is an overarching strategy and operational plan to develop, focus and consolidate research at VU over the next 5 years. The strategy will assist in the overall management of research funding including the rationale and distribution of research funding across the University.

Staff and students may also subscribe to the VU ‘Research-info’ list which provides news and events relating to research at VU including funding opportunities.

The Office for Research participates in the new staff induction programs conducted by the Staff College. In addition Associate Deans (Research and Research Training) disseminate this information within their faculties.

Minutes of the Research and Research Training Management Advisory Committee are available for the information of all staff.

Recommendation completion date: Completed August 2007
Ongoing implementation with annual review and improvement.

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

The Research Development Strategy at VU has implemented programs including the recruitment of 14 Postdoctoral Fellows, the continuation of the Early Career Researchers program and increased start-up funds for new researchers.

The Research and Region Division is also preparing an overarching strategy and operational plans to develop, focus and consolidate research at VU over the next five years. It comprises:

1. a research development strategy: for all academic staff with a particular focus on developing and supporting new staff and early career researchers;
2. the Research Recognition Program: for the development, management, funding and review of research centres and institutes, and establishes the Research Active Index policy as an integral program for encouraging and recognising research performance at an acceptable level;
3. a research investment strategy: identification of a limited number of key areas which VU has or can achieve sustained national and international recognition. Resources will be invested to achieve critical mass and facilitate the co-ordination of multidisciplinary research programs in
the designated areas. Any University funding will be time limited and only used as leverage to attract significant external funding for developments.

Recommendation completion date: Completed December 2007

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

The University is preparing a postgraduate research studies strategy aiming to develop VU postgraduate research programs to place and maintain them at the forefront of postgraduate research innovation. This will be developed with the Director of Postgraduate Research in conjunction with the Postgraduate Research Studies committee of the Education and Research Board.

These activities feed into three initiatives to improve the quality of the experience and administration of postgraduate research students. The three initiatives include:

1. the development of a co-supervision policy;
2. amendment to the existing supervision policy to ensure it aligns with the co-supervision policy;
3. a university-wide policy framework on minimum standards for research students.

The first two of these strategies has been completed, and the policies related to these are before the Education Research Board for its consideration following a consultation period. The third part of the strategy is under development. The policy will articulate minimum standards for postgraduate research infrastructure and set guidelines and expectations around the provision of research culture and networks for its approximately 750 Higher Degree by Research students.

In 2008 the Office Postgraduate Research instituted a formal Evaluation of Research Supervision Questionnaire distributed annually to all enrolled HDR students. This was piloted successfully in 2007.

Recommendation completion date: December 2008

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

VU has improved its processes for systematic monitoring of annual progress reports of ethically cleared projects through the development of a database management system. The Office for Research in conjunction with the HE faculties has jointly funded the appointment of two full-time ethics officers in March 2008. These officers assist the administration of the monitoring process. In addition, a series of ethics training workshops for both postgraduate students and academic staff has been developed and implemented.

Recommendation completion date: Completed January 2008

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

Extensive consultation took place during 2007 that resulted in the development of a set of principles and subsequent policy guidelines related to equivalence. The principles were presented and adopted by the
Education and Courses Committees respectively in September 2007. However Government changes in nomenclature has resulted in further consideration being necessary to address the issue of ‘equivalence’ and ‘comparability’. Final recommendations are expected to be considered by the Courses Committee shortly. Additionally, a document has been prepared that will embed the principles in offshore program development and review. As soon as the Courses Committee agrees on the final nomenclature resolution the principles will be released and implemented.

Recommendation completion date: December 2008

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

A comprehensive discussion paper entitled ‘Support, Recognition and Enhancement of Sessional Staff’ was prepared and circulated to VU’s management in March 2008. The paper recommended a major project be undertaken on all aspects of sessional staff employment including performance management, employment and induction processes, academic support and professional development. This project commenced in April 2008 and is managed by Human Resources. A Steering Committee oversees this project and progress to date includes:

- revised contract documentation for sessional staff;
- enhanced collection and recording of sessional staff qualifications;
- establishment and ongoing development of an online resources site for sessionals – a “Sessional Staff Hub”;
- development and introduction of a streamlined time sheeting approval and processing of sessional pay in the VE/FE areas to address administrative load and time delays for payments to sessionals;
- research is underway to develop a good practice sessional employment practice database;
- a survey has been designed to gather further information on aspects of VU sessional life. It will be made available to all sessional staff and is due for completion in August 2008;
- sessional staff focus groups to discuss reward and recognition issues (part of a broader VU program) are scheduled for August 2008.

The project is due to continue until at least December 2008 with the roll-out and promotion of initiatives, practices and processes continuing throughout 2009. The recruitment and management of casual staff will be addressed by both the review of the Recruitment and Selection of Staff Policy (draft revised policy and procedures due to be circulated during July and August for consultation with approval anticipated for October 2008) and the above project.

Recommendation completion date: December 2008
   Ongoing implementation, review and improvement.