AUSTRALIAN UNIVERSITIES QUALITY AGENCY

&

NEW ZEALAND UNIVERSITIES ACADEMIC AUDIT UNIT

Report of an Audit of
The University of the South Pacific

April 2008

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OVERVIEW OF THE AUDIT

Background

The University of the South Pacific, a regional university established by 12governments of the South Pacific, has a Memorandum of Agreement with the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) and the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) to further its Quality Strategy. As provided in the Memorandum of Agreement, the University underwent a joint audit by AUQA and NZUAAU. The audit was administered by AUQA in consultation with NZUAAU.

This Report of the audit provides an overview, and then details the Audit Panel's findings, commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A brief introduction to the University of the South Pacific (hereinafter 'USP' or 'the University') is given in Appendix A; membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix B. Appendix C defines abbreviations and technical terms used in this Report.

The Audit Process

Quality audits are based on each organisation's own objectives. The major aim of the audit is to consider and review the procedures an organisation has in place to monitor and achieve its objectives. Full details of the audit process followed by AUQA and NZUAAU are available at <http://www.auqa.edu.au/qualityaudit/auditmanuals/> and <http://www.nzuaau.ac.nz>.

On 20 November 2007, USP presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) including 26 supporting documents. The Audit Panel met on 18 December 2007 to consider these materials.

The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to USP on 15 January 2008. During that visit, the answers to questions and additional information requested by the Panel were discussed with the auditee, as well as the Audit Visit program.

As a part of the audit of USP, delegations of the Panel visited the regional campuses of USP located in Samoa and Vanuatu on 8 February 2008. In each of these campuses, the delegations interviewed managerial, administrative and academic staff, students and alumni; inspected the facilities; and reviewed the documents. The Panel reviewed the findings of these visits prior to the main Audit Visit.

The main Audit Visit took place over 11–14 February 2008 at the Laucala Campus in Suva.

In all, the Audit Panel spoke with over 200 people during the Audit Visit, including external members of the Council, Chair of the Council, Academic Senate, Vice-Chancellor (Acting), senior management, academic and general staff, research students, undergraduate students, research sponsors, community partners, and other external stakeholders. Sessions were also available for any member of the USP community to meet the Audit Panel and nine people took advantage of this opportunity.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 14 February 2008 and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. It records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by USP as well as other information available to the Panel. While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of USP's activities encompassed by the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.

This Report contains a summary of findings together with lists of commendations, affirmations and recommendations. A commendation refers to the achievement of a stated goal, or to some plan or activity that has led to, or appears likely to lead to, the achievement of a stated goal, and which in the Panel's

view is particularly significant. A recommendation refers to an area in need of attention, whether in respect of approach, deployment or results, which in the Panel's view is particularly significant. Where such matters have already been identified by USP, with evidence, they are termed 'affirmations'. It is acknowledged that recommendations in this Audit Report may have resource implications, and that this can pose difficulties for the University. Accordingly, this report does not prioritise these recommendations, and recognises that it is the responsibility of USP to respond in a manner consistent with its local context.

The Audit Panel has structured this Audit Report to broadly reflect the way in which the University's Performance Portfolio had been structured. The Report represents the unanimous views of the Panel.

CONCLUSIONS

This section summarises the main findings and lists the commendations, affirmations and recommendations. Other favourable comments and suggestions are mentioned throughout the text of the Report.

Introduction to Findings

Acknowledging the contributions of the University in providing access to higher education to approximately 22,000 students spread in 12 island countries of the South Pacific, the Audit Panel commends the University of the South Pacific for its many good practices. There are also a number of areas where the University needs to pay immediate attention to safeguard the quality of its programs and services to the Pacific community. They are summarised in the following pages.

Governance and Management

The responsibility to meet the different higher education needs of 12 countries places high demands on USP's governance structure and the University has initiated a review of the Council to ensure efficiency in the governance structure. While endorsing this move this Report points to other broader options for restructuring the governance structure that may be more suitable to the University's unique context.

The Senate is functioning primarily as an approval mechanism for academic proposals and there is a need to develop the Senate as the body with the responsibility for the monitoring and improvement of academic standards in the University. This Report recommends, as a priority, a review of terms of reference, membership and committee structure of the Senate. It also recommends a system of periodic review of the performance of the Senate and its subcommittees.

Several vacancies in the senior management have reduced the effectiveness of leadership and the University has to address this issue immediately. The lack of focus and prioritisation in the Strategic Plan is another area of concern and this Report makes a recommendation on reviewing the Strategic Plan to establish key priorities, time frames, targets and key performance indicators to monitor progress towards strategic goals.

Policy development, planning and risk assessment in the University generally are weak and need serious attention. Many University-wide plans that are essential to achieving the strategic goals are either yet to be developed or are in the draft stage. Establishment of a policy and planning unit would signal a higher priority for policy development.

The Panel saw ample evidence of the enthusiasm and commitment of the campus directors to providing high quality learning experiences to students. However, the management needs of the regional campuses require urgent attention and there is also scope for involving the Industry Advisory Groups in the USP regional campus development more.

Teaching and Learning

The University has been successful in promoting an understanding of the diverse cultures and environments of the Pacific and its staff are well regarded for their knowledge of and contribution to the Pacific region and its communities. This Report commends USP for respecting and valuing the great diversity of its student and faculty population.

The University has expanded and strengthened its flexible delivery and related support structures. However, unviable courses need to be phased out without compromising the labour market needs of the member countries. Programs need to be externally reviewed and due consideration must be given to the needs of the regional campuses.

The Panel found evidence of some excellent practices such as the effort of some regional campuses to enrol students in cohorts in order to provide students with more effective academic support and a more engaging learning experience.

The attrition rates are very high among part-time students with only half of the commencing part-time students returning to the University in the following year. The Panel recommends that USP develop robust mechanisms for comparing the pass, progression, retention and completion rates of its students across all campuses and all modes of study, and for identifying students at risk.

Students and Support Services

USP has expanded and strengthened considerably its strategic support services for students during the past five years and further developments are in progress. The Pacific Collection of the USP Library is tangible evidence of the University's commitment to the Pacific region. Staff and students are in the main very positive about the Library services. The Library performance is monitored in various ways and this Report commends the Library for its good monitoring practices. An area that needs improvement is copyright management and USP needs to develop appropriate policies, processes and procedures to ensure that copyright is managed appropriately.

Effective media services are essential for USP given that more than half the student population is studying off-campus. These services need to be aligned with University-wide plans in teaching and learning and research and have clearly identified priorities. Collaboration with key stakeholders within the University needs to be strengthened so that service provision can be prioritised and coordinated. The Panel was informed that the work of the Media Centre that has been providing these services is under review to strengthen the service provision.

The University has expanded its IT facilities in recent years. The disaster recovery plan for IT services is still in a draft stage and the Panel heard that it is scheduled for further development in 2008. The information and communication technologies security policy is fragmented through different documents and appears not to be comprehensive. The Panel affirms the intentions of USP to address these issues. Accuracy and reliability of the Banner data management system needs to be ensured.

The Centre for Educational Development and Technology (CEDT) has developed a plan to guide its core business in line with USP's Strategic Plan. CEDT has put in place a series of mechanisms such as an Advisory Board and representation on faculty teaching and learning committees to support its work. It is essential that these mechanisms produce outcomes that support faculty (and University) teaching and learning plans.

USP provides administrative support to students centrally through the office of the Registrar, Student Academic Services and Community Services. The Panel found that in general USP is providing good support to its students. Students spoke well of the facilities that are available to them and the opportunities they have to provide feedback on the quality of services. In particular, students welcomed the cultural diversity of their experience at USP and the opportunities presented for learning about the cultures of the South Pacific. This Report commends USP for the positive experience it provides to its students. The University has identified a number of areas for the improvement of services such as health awareness, security and catering and steps have been taken to address them.

Research and Research Training

Increased attention to research in USP is relatively recent and, consequently many areas of research management are still evolving. The Panel recognises that the Pacific Islands region provides unique opportunities for research and USP is well placed to lead that research and become particularly unique in its expertise. However, to fully achieve the benefits of this position, USP needs to clearly define and communicate its priorities. It should urgently address the vast number of policies that are in draft form, several of them having been so for some time, and finalise the plans to implement the policies.

USP needs to appoint a research leader who is dedicated to the development of research in the University taking into account its regional context. The University should carefully consider where the responsibility for research should lie. One option may be to combine the portfolios of research and regions that will facilitate the University to feature its unique regional nature in its research and research training agenda. However, success of this option depends on the personnel USP is able to identify for these portfolios and USP should carefully explore other options as well that might be advantageous to its context.

USP has many collaborative research projects with other institutions. It has to explore the benefits of collaboration more systematically, formalise agreements, clarify accountabilities and monitor the progress on projects.

USP needs to develop a number of significant policies and processes around postgraduate research as soon as possible. Clarifying the roles of the Office of Research and Graduate Affairs in the management and administration of research training and graduate students, publishing a handbook for research degree students and ensuring access to research methodology courses are other areas that need attention.

The Panel heard of research work on the Samoa campus regarding the Taro Improvement Project and tissue cultures of regional flora that is externally funded that offers potential to grow into postgraduate centres with support and good leadership. USP should explore the potential of research such as this that is specific to the region.

Human Resources

High staff turnover and the system of three year contracts for all staff have had adverse effects on succession plans and USP needs to revisit its human resources (HR) policies. While the enthusiasm and quality of staff is a strong feature of USP, staff induction, staff development and staff appraisal all need systematic approaches.

Performance management is in a state of transition. The Faculty of Science and Technology has implemented the staff appraisal policy and its approach to peer review of teaching provides a model that might be followed or adapted by other faculties.

HR planning should recognise the need for regional campuses to adopt strategies specific to their own conditions. The HR officers appointed to the faculties should be able to address this issue. HR management and administration is supported by the Banner data management system. In order to exploit fully the potential of the Banner system for decision-making in general and the management of HR in particular, it is essential that the data provided is accurate and reliable.

Community Engagement

The Panel acknowledges that USP provides leadership in the social, cultural and economic development of its member countries through community partnerships and engagement. While USP's commitment to community engagement is evident, community services and engagement are yet to be accepted as a formal factor in workload and funding considerations. This situation needs to be revisited.

USP has an opportunity to lead the planning and mapping of post-secondary education and training provision across the region informed by the needs of its member countries. Such a mapping would avoid the spreading of resources too thinly and duplication of effort and resources, with the potential to bring about the highest return on the investment made in education and training in the Pacific region. It would also enable potential students to plan their pathways to university, and would assist government, business and industry to better plan the development of their workforces. In general, USP has ensured an interesting and effective mix of teaching, community service, and professional service in its programs.

USP has developed a range of partnerships with various academic institutions regionally, nationally and internationally. While the agreements have a positive impact on the University, the University needs to be aware of its priorities in making decisions about which partnerships to enter.

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

Commendations

Affirmations

Recommendations

1   THE CONTEXT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

There are a number of features that make the University of the South Pacific (USP) a very different higher education institution. The Audit Panel was mindful of those distinguishing features while reviewing the procedures the University has in place to monitor and achieve its strategic objectives. This Report should be read in the context of those features and the context in which this quality audit has been conducted.

1.1   *Working with Multi-governments*

USP is jointly owned and funded by governments of twelve island countries in the South Pacific: Cook Islands, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The University has campuses in all twelve member countries with the main campus located in Fiji. The regional campuses are subject to partnership arrangements with regional governments. Working with the twelve governments that fund the operations of the University, and associated lines of accountabilities place high demands on all aspects of functioning of the University.

1.2   *Responding to Regional Needs*

Each member country is conscious of the resources it contributes to USP and has a set of needs it wishes USP to address. Taking the responsibility to meet the different higher education needs of 12 countries is a challenging task. For example, Vanuatu has two official languages–English and French–and the Francophone community of the country has expectations that USP recognise this fact in its program offerings.

Further, some of the member countries have developed their own higher education and training initiatives (eg National University of Samoa) and at least one private university has been set up in the region (University of Fiji). USP needs to be mindful of these developments while prioritising its efforts. For better use of the resources of all member countries, USP should seek dialogue with those countries that have their own national higher education entities to avoid duplication in programs and services, while avoiding any perception that USP is not responding to national needs adequately. This will require a very high level of cooperation and consultation with the member countries.

1.3   *Challenges of Distance*

The University caters to the needs of approximately 22,000 students of which more than 50 per cent study off-campus through distance and flexible learning (DFL) mode. The students are spread over 14 campuses of the University region that encompasses 33 million square kilometres of ocean. To deliver education and training to this vast region the University uses many modes of delivery supported by many technologies. With variable connectivity by air and sea among the 14 campuses, face-to-face teaching has many difficulties and there is a high level of reliance on print materials and online technologies. These techniques and technologies are not free from problems including general maintenance. Keeping up with changes in technology is also a constant challenge to the University.

1.4   *Reviews and New Developments*

In an effort to balance these challenges and serve the Pacific community more effectively, in recent years, the University has introduced many changes. The University has undertaken numerous reviews of its various structures over the last 10 years and introduced many new developments. It developed the Strategic Plan 2006–2010 to guide its actions and started

discussion on the associated plans to implement the strategies. It created a new academic structure in 2005; changed its management structure; introduced a more decentralised financial and operational management structure; consolidated the areas supporting distance and flexible learning; and restructured the Information Technology Services section in 2006.

It is in this context of changes and challenges that this audit was undertaken. The Audit Panel acknowledges that some of the very recent developments need more time to demonstrate their effectiveness and it is too early for the Audit Panel to make conclusive comments on some of those strategies. However, the Panel is of the strong opinion that the University must now have a period of consolidation and stabilisation and the comments in this Report are aimed at facilitating the University to move in that direction.

2   GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The strategic goals for Governance, Administration, and Management of USP are:

1. *Delegate an appropriate level of authority and accountability to academic and administrative units.*

2. *Increase the effectiveness of governance, administrative, and management systems.*

3. *Increase income by diversifying funding strategies.*

4. *Provide the necessary infrastructure and support for research, academic programs, and student/staff service.*

(USP Strategic Plan 2006–2010 p7)

The Strategic Plan lists a large number of actions through which USP aspires to achieve these strategic goals. If the actions and targets are to be realised they need to be prioritised and policies and implementation plans to guide the actions need to be developed. The Panel was concerned, in particular, with the length of time that has been taken in the past for policies to be finalised and suggests that this has a potentially negative impact on the ability of the University through its governance and management structures to monitor its performance.

The Panel understands that the responsibility to meet the different higher education needs of 12 countries is the most challenging task and one that places high demands on USP's governance, organisational and management structure. Recently, the USP Council has initiated a review (Task Force on Governance) to ensure efficiency in the governance structure and the Panel endorses this move. The academic restructure begun in 2005 and completed a year ago and the Internal Funding Model introduced in 2006 have delegated some decision-making and accountability to academic and administrative units. The Panel felt that there had been positive and negative outcomes from the restructuring. Although it will take some time for the effectiveness of these changes to become evident the Panel did not see any early indications of the anticipated improvements. By contrast the Panel saw evidence that suggests that the management needs of the regional campuses require urgent attention.

These and related observations are discussed in more detail below. (The goal related to 'infrastructure and support' is discussed in chapter 4.)

2.1   *Council*

The University Council is the governing authority of the University. Its membership and powers are set out in the *Charter, Statutes and Ordinances Standing Orders of the Council*, February 1970.

The Portfolio states that the Council Chair provides new members of the Council with induction kits and explains procedures to them. The Panel learnt that this is an informal arrangement and that the University plans to finalise an induction kit by July 2008. The Panel encourages the University to attend to this as soon as possible considering the challenges involved in governing a regional university of the kind that USP is; the frequency of changes in Council membership and the need to ensure corporate learning in governance.

The Council meets twice a year with the hosting of the first meeting normally rotated among the member countries and the second meeting hosted by the Laucala Campus in Suva, Fiji. Each of the Council meetings has a specific agenda. The first meeting focuses on reports of University business and Council decisions from the preceding year. The second meeting is a strategic meeting for the University and it considers reports from the key functional areas—the Vice-

Chancellor's Office through to Academic, Research, Finance, and Staffing—and approves the budget for the coming academic year. The Portfolio states that in matters referred to it between meetings, the Council, under the powers of the Statutes, has established an Executive Committee to act on its behalf. The Panel learnt that the Executive Committee has not been convened during the last five years and that it was reactivated only on 31 May 2007. At the time of the Audit Visit in February 2008, the Executive Committee was yet to hold its first meeting. The Panel doubted whether an organisation of such complexity could be effectively governed in the absence of regular executive meetings.

The Council has delegated authority to a number of committees (such as Senate, Appointments Committee, Staff Review Committee, Staff Conduct Committee, Staff Policy Committee, Discipline Appeals Committee, Finance and Investment Committee, Audit Committee) to assist in carrying out its academic and administrative responsibilities and obligation. The Panel was informed that, in 2005, many committees were abandoned as it was felt that there were far too many committees. The Panel saw no evidence that Council actively monitored the effectiveness of the remaining committees.

The Panel noted that USP is seeking to address the complexities of its current governance structure. In October 2006, a Council Task Force on Governance (GTF), chaired by the Chair of the Council, was established to review the legislative, governance and administrative issues relating to Council and to improve levels of efficiency and effectiveness. By the time of the Audit Visit, the GTF had met twice. While the Panel affirms the intentions of these initiatives, it formed the view that the GTF was exploring options around its current governance structures. The Panel encourages the University not to be restrained by historical structures but rather explore more innovative options that might better suit the University's unique circumstances. For example, the current Council (or a similarly constituted body) could act as a 'USP Assembly' meeting perhaps once a year as the long term direction-setting and policy-making body responsible for strengthening interactions and relationships with country members and their governments. The direct governance responsibilities of USP could rest with a small board drawn primarily from business, community and academic leaders external to the USP Assembly. Such a board could meet more frequently than the Assembly, at least three times in any year.

Affirmation 1

The Audit Panel affirms the USP initiative to review its governance and management structure to clarify accountabilities and improve efficiency and effectiveness in the University's operations.

2.2   Senate

The Senate is the academic authority of the University and it reports to Council as one of its committees. It has the responsibility to "*take such measures and act in such manner as shall appear to it best calculated to promote the teaching, consultancy, research and other academic work of the University*" (Powers of the Senate from the *Charter, Statutes and Ordinances Standing Orders of the Council*).

Senate is supported by eight committees. The academic restructuring of the University in 2005 influenced the review of the membership and in some instances the responsibilities of the Senate committees. There remains scope for further review. Some of the Senate's committees could be regarded as responsibilities of the management eg Open Day Committee. These could be moved elsewhere. It is not clear to the Panel why two academic programs have specific Senate subcommittees and these inconsistencies need to be reviewed.

The Panel believes that the Senate is too big currently with only a few elected non-professorial staff among its members although it includes five student members. It is suggested that an overall

membership of about 25 could be appropriately representative and allow for effective discussion and decision making. It is important to move to an elected Senate Chair from among the senior academics (excluding the Vice-Chancellor and other senior managers for whom the role could cause a conflict of interest). There is a need for strengthening the representation of elected academic staff, and there should be an elected group of professors rather than automatic membership of the entire professoriate. The provision for elected membership in the Senate policy should be made clear.

Members of Senate on all campuses are encouraged to participate in meetings through teleconference. The Panel noted that for some meetings nearly half of the membership was not present. To strengthen attendance and ensure that meetings are quorate USP needs to consider travel assistance for representatives from all regional campuses.

The Panel was also concerned about the effectiveness of the Senate as a deliberative body as it appeared not uncommon for meetings to last only 60-90 minutes yet to have covered enough business to require many pages of detailed minutes. The Panel formed the view that the Senate is functioning primarily as an approval mechanism for academic proposals put before it rather than as a body engaged in academic policy development. The academic leadership and proactive initiatives required of the premier academic authority are lacking. However, USP states that the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) which was revamped to replace the previous Academic Committee is meant to act as the body for academic discussion and debate. The Panel was advised that during the academic review in 2004-2005 for the restructure, concerns were raised over the length of Senate meetings spanning two days in most cases. To address that concern, USP decided that while Senate should be the approval body for academic planning and program development, all discussions should take place at faculty level and the ASQC. While the Panel acknowledges that the ASQC has the potential to promote academic discussions at faculty level, the academic leadership, academic policy making and accountability for monitoring academic standards of the institution need to still to rest with the Senate. There is a need to develop the Senate as the main body accountable for these responsibilities. The Senate should, as a priority, consider a review of its terms of reference, memberships and committee structure.

The Senate has never undertaken a self-review, nor been subject to an external review. It should implement a system of periodic review of its own performance and that of its subcommittees, preferably every two years.

> **Recommendation 1**
>
> **The Audit Panel recommends that USP undertake a thorough review of the Senate including its terms of reference, size, representation, membership and committee structure, and establish a mechanism for the periodic review (both self-review and external review) of its performance.**

2.3   *The Vice-Chancellor and the Executive*

The Vice-Chancellor (VC), as the chief executive, is responsible to the Council for the academic, administrative and financial affairs of the University. The VC receives advice from the Senior Management Group, made up of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC), pro vice-chancellors (PVCs), Registrar, faculty deans, University Librarian, Director of Finance (DF), Director of Information Technology Services (ITS), and Director of Centre for Educational Development and Technology (CEDT).

Several key positions on the Senior Management Group are vacant at present and this has resulted in a thin senior management structure with senior managers holding their own as well as additional portfolios. Other key positions such as Director (Planning and Development) are also vacant. The responsibilities of these positions are currently being shared among senior managers.

The extra workload for those acting in positions is substantial and affects not only the effectiveness of the senior management team and the development of the University but also blurs responsibilities and accountabilities, and inhibits performance monitoring, as well as presenting possible conflicts of interest.

The senior management structure needs urgent consideration. The position of DVC could be replaced by a new position of DVC (Academic) to whom the deans report, and would absorb the responsibilities of the present PVC (Academic) position. A senior position to take forward the regional agenda of the University is also essential. One option is to combine this portfolio with the research portfolio to strengthen the region-specific intentions in research and emphasise the key components of the USP mission; such a position could be 'PVC (Research & Regions)'. However, success of this option depends on the leadership USP is able to identify for these portfolios and USP should carefully explore other options as well that might be advantageous to its context. These new positions should report to the Vice-Chancellor. The University should consider putting in place the new senior management structure as soon as practicable, following discussion with the VC-elect (as soon as s/he is identified). (See chapter 6 on Research.)

> **Recommendation 2**
>
> **The Audit Panel recommends that USP, as a matter of urgency, fill the current vacant senior management positions and redefine the lines of reporting.**

2.4   *Policies, Plans and Risk Assessment*

Policy development, planning and risk assessment in the University generally are weak, and demand a thorough review. Many policies and University-wide plans that are essential to achieving the strategic goals are either yet to be developed or are in draft stage. In particular, there is significant risk to the University and its staff and students in the lack of intellectual property (IP) and research ethics policies. Although there are some guidelines that exist at faculty level, the level of risk remains high as a faculty is not a legal entity in its own right and therefore faculty level policies (if any) would carry little weight in a court of law.

The long gestation times in policy development suggest that there are too many layers of bureaucracy involved in the development and approval processes. The establishment of a policy and planning unit might signify a high priority for policy development. In the current structure, the executive responsibility for institutional planning lies with the Director of Planning and Development and the strategic planning process of the University is largely coordinated by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. In the absence of a substantive Director of Planning and Development, the interim arrangements since August 2007, has seen a sharing of portfolios between the DVC who handles all development matters and Dean FIO now looking after planning. Restructuring this unit and strengthening its role in policy and planning, and perhaps moving development elsewhere is an option that should be considered.

In alignment with the Strategic Plan, the University has faculty-wide plans. Missing though are the University teaching and learning, and research plans. These plans are fundamental to the University and their omission compromises the ability of the Council and Senate to monitor the performance of the University.

> **Recommendation 3**
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> **The Audit Panel recommends that USP develop as soon as possible University-level plans for teaching and learning and research, and University policies for intellectual property and ethics.**

The USP Strategic Plan 2006–2010 lists 5 goals, 20 sub-goals, and 96 actions. While the overall aspirations of the Strategic Plan are comprehensive and commendable, the lack of focus in what the University wishes to achieve within a specified period makes it appear no more than an aspirational document. The Strategic Plan should identify a selected set of priorities and specify a timeline to achieve them. Such a Plan will better guide the directions of the University in a more focused manner and provide the basis for the allocation of resources.

USP has developed a medium-term strategic framework based on proposed key performance indicators (KPIs) and the USP Strategic Plan. The KPIs as yet are not well defined and there is an urgent need for these to be clarified so that they are measurable and can then enable comparison with other universities. The development of the KPIs could be a task for the new or restructured policy and planning unit.

> **Recommendation 4**
>
> **The Audit Panel recommends that USP review the Strategic Plan, establish its key priorities and objectives, set time frames and realistic targets and develop key performance indicators to monitor progress towards objectives.**

While acting on this recommendation, USP will find it useful to use data obtained from the Banner data management system to inform its decision making (Recommendation 11).

The University has not thoroughly assessed its exposure to a number of key risks in addition to the lack of IP and research ethics policies mentioned above and it is essential that the University develops an appropriate risk framework and risk register and implements regular reporting on risk mitigation.

2.5   *Academic Restructure*

The University created a new academic structure in 2005 to improve its decision making and enhance its efficiency by developing and implementing sound policies and processes at all levels of its activities.

The four faculties established in 2005 provide the structure through which the teaching and learning and research at USP are coordinated. Each faculty is led by a dean, who is responsible for overall management of the faculty as well as contributing to the management of the University. The deans are supported by faculty executive committees, consisting of associate deans, representatives of the constituent schools and senior faculty administrative staff. Strong leadership and cross-faculty collaboration will be required to prevent the development of four independent faculties and the silo effect.

The Panel noted that three faculties are formed around a traditional disciplinary structure while the fourth is interdisciplinary and unique to USP. Inherent in this structure is the risk of unnecessary duplication and overlap. If changes are to be made to address these issues, they need to be done soon, before the current structure becomes too impervious to change. Consideration should be given to move to fewer faculties, probably two (or, less effective, three faculties) by merging and avoiding overlaps, as well as reducing inefficiencies and costs related to both the senior management structure and within the faculties. Irrespective of the faculty structure that is developed, the University should preserve the strong 'Islands and Ocean' flavour which is a distinguishing characteristic of USP underpinning its mission. USP is currently developing a mechanism to review the effectiveness of its academic restructure and the Panel encourages USP to use this opportunity to implement further refinements to its academic structure.

The impact of the restructure in strengthening governance and management is yet to become evident. It is not clear that the balance between central and devolved functions and

accountabilities is appropriate. The restructure has given many responsibilities to the deans and the deans are now in a position to provide effective leadership to their faculties. However, it is not clear that the devolution of accountabilities to the deans is being monitored rigorously or that senior management decision making is as efficient and effective as it could be.

2.6   *Internal Funding Model*

One of the sub-goals of the University under Governance, Administration and Management as outlined in the USP Strategic Plan 2006–2010 (p8) is to "increase income by diversifying funding" though it was not clear how it was planned to achieve this intention. USP remains heavily reliant on government and aid/donor funding and the Panel did not see evidence of plans to diversify the funding base. The University is urged to examine other sources of funding such as study abroad programs for students from outside the USP region to study at USP and fee-for-service programs.

USP has introduced an Internal Funding Model for distributing resources to its faculties. This model provides budgetary incentive for faculties to achieve the academic goals of the University. The Panel was informed that the use of weightings and parameters within the Model allows the allocation of more funding to those faculties that are progressing towards the University's corporate objectives relative to those that are not. In the absence of clearly defined priorities and accompanying KPIs, judgements about a faculty's progress are less than transparent.

The University has changed its processes for setting its budget from 2008 and an Internal Budget Committee has been established to manage this task and provide transparency. It is important that the University budget reflects as closely as possible the strategic priorities of the University, particularly in teaching and learning and research. Once again the challenges faced by USP in the absence of University plans in these key areas are evident.

2.7   *Regional Campus Management*

USP has 14 campuses–three in Fiji and one in each of the other 11 member countries. Regional campuses are subject to partnership arrangements with their respective national governments. Each campus is headed by a campus director, who reports to the PVC (Regional). Since that position has been vacant, the campus directors report to the DVC, who is also the Acting VC.

The main responsibility of the campus director is to ensure timely delivery of programs and courses. The Panel acknowledges that the most demanding challenge for the University in regard to the regional campuses is to ensure equivalence of standards in the delivery of programs to students and the support of student learning. Success in addressing this challenge depends largely on the IT infrastructure available in the regional campuses, the services available through the USPNet, the availability of competent staff and sufficient resources. Consequently, student experience across the campuses is not equitable.

For each regional campus an Advisory Group, whose membership includes representatives from the community, has been established to encourage local community identification with and support of campus activities and to maintain relationships between the University and the regional communities. Some of the Advisory Groups have been established recently. While some of them are very active and enthusiastic about their relationship with USP, others need to be reenergised and involved more closely in the USP regional campus development.

USP should consider whether the programs it offers complement the directions and programs offered through the educational and labour market planning initiatives of its member states in terms of quantity and quality. Consideration for complementarity should not be construed as a restriction. While communicating with other key players in the member states and looking to complement the direction and programs in offer in those states, USP might be in a better position

to offer certain programs of better quality than the ones that are being offered by other providers. USP should identify these areas and interaction with member states would make this clear.

Overall, management of the regional campuses and ensuring equitable learning experiences to students across all campuses require urgent attention.

Recommendation 5

The Audit Panel recommends that USP, as a matter of urgency, review the management needs of the regional campuses and explore ways to support their resource requirements to provide for equitable student experiences across all campuses.

Amidst all these challenges, the Panel saw ample evidence of the enthusiasm and commitment of the campus directors to providing a high quality learning experience to students. The campus directors have monthly teleconferences and annual face-to-face meetings to compare experiences and exchange examples of good practice. The Panel strongly encourages the continuation of these regular interactions which might provide a model for the engagement of other cross-campus staff.

Commendation 1

The Audit Panel commends USP for establishing effective communication channels among the campus directors to share experiences.

Delegations of the Panel visited the Alafua Campus in Samoa and the Emalus Campus in Vanuatu. The observations of the Panel have been integrated into the Report. However, the Panel would like to draw to the attention of the University some campus specific comments.

Alafua Campus, Samoa

The Alafua Campus is in very urgent need of strategic direction, that includes detailed planning, effective resource utilisation, and dynamic leadership if it is to remain viable. The Campus Director of the Alafua Campus in Samoa is based in the Laucala Campus in Fiji and by default some strategic as well as operational matters fall to the on-site Campus Manager for resolution. Given the challenges of managing a distant campus, the Panel is not convinced of the effectiveness of this arrangement. The context of Samoa warrants special attention. USP needs to consider local developments particularly in post-secondary education including the establishment of the National University of Samoa, and interact more effectively with key stakeholders in the country. There is a need for strong on-the-ground academic leadership to give direction to academic program development and research activity on the Alafua Campus as well as maintain and strengthen productive relationships with key stakeholders in Samoa.

While USP (Suva) needs to actively lead any major changes on the Alafua Campus, people on the campus need to focus more on what they need to do to 'revitalise' their academic programs and research. While the staff who met with the Panel tend to blame the larger campus–Laucala Campus–situated in Fiji for the current stagnant situation, they need to take some ownership of it themselves. The relationship with the Laucala Campus has left the Alafua-based staff with a sense of disempowerment. The Panel appreciates that the ongoing economic situation between the centre of USP and its far flung campuses is difficult. Nonetheless, staff of the Alafua Campus need to be supported strongly by USP and resourced appropriately in energising themselves and building a positive and vital culture on the campus.

Emalus Campus, Vanuatu

The Panel delegation that visited Vanuatu spoke to representatives from both within the University and the community. Those interviewed informed the Panel that USP does not

recognise in its program offerings the fact that Vanuatu has two official languages (English and French). The Francophone community is a small proportion of the potential student market for USP in its overall region and therefore no programs are offered in French. The Panel recognises that with its limited resources USP might not be able to offer programs in French. However, it needs to acknowledge that some of its potential Vanuatuan students may need more support in English to assist them in successfully completing their USP qualifications. The Panel also noted that the University currently offers an initial level English course to assist students in their levels of English competency for University studies.

3   TEACHING AND LEARNING

The USP Strategic Plan 2006–2010 lists the Teaching and Learning goals as:

1.   *Assure the quality and relevance of programs and their delivery.*

2.   *Promote Pacific regional unity and integration.*

3.   *Increase student retention and performance.*

4.   *Develop a long-term student enrolment strategy.*

5.   *Expand the provision of relevant continuing education and community outreach activities.*

(USP Strategic Plan 2006–2010 p7)

USP has made some progress towards these goals with more work remaining in the regional campuses in all the five areas mentioned in the Strategic Plan. The University has been successful in establishing its place in promoting an understanding of the diverse cultures and environments of the Pacific and its staff are well regarded for their knowledge of and contribution to the Pacific region and its communities. The University has expanded and strengthened its flexible delivery and related support structures. It has expanded access to postgraduate and doctoral programs during the past five years. A schedule has been developed for periodic review of programs and courses. Plans are being developed to address the issues related to student enrolment and performance. Overall, it is an encouraging picture although with tentative plans and variable progress. The University will need to take firm steps to address those areas where progress towards goals has been lagging.

3.1   *Management and Planning of Teaching and Learning*

The academic leadership of teaching and learning has undergone changes recently due to the organisational restructure and recent recruitments at senior levels. Many plans remain in draft form and will need further refinement before they can be implemented and performance monitored and reported.

The institutional leadership and oversight of academic planning and program development in the teaching and learning strategies across the University rests with the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic) (PVC (A)), a position that was created only in 2006. USP states that the responsibilities of the PVC (A) are supported by the Academic Standards and Quality Committee (ASQC) which reports to both the Senate and the VC on teaching and learning matters. These reporting lines have the potential to confuse the accountabilities of the PVC (A).

The deans and heads of schools act through faculty and school structures and are responsible for the quality of teaching and learning in their units. To strengthen leadership at the faculty level, the positions of associate deans teaching and learning were established in 2006 within each faculty. Such appointments reflect USP's commitment to improving teaching and learning outcomes.

The first faculty teaching and learning plans aligned to the University Strategic Plan 2006–2010 were developed in 2006. School and departmental operational plans were then drawn up based on the faculty teaching and learning plans.

While recognising these recent developments at USP, the Panel noted significant gaps in the approach to quality assurance in teaching and learning. The Panel would have expected the University to have an agreed and focused set of teaching and learning indicators against which every faculty measured itself, evidence of ongoing monitoring of teaching and learning progress

against the indicators and evidence of improvement plans and outcomes. However, without a University level teaching and learning plan in place it is impossible to monitor any progress. Although the Strategic Plan includes a section on teaching and learning, a section of it could well form part of the University's teaching and learning plan. At this stage, however, it lacks targets and performance indicators. Those targets that are described as "monitoring variables" (USP Strategic Plan p8) are not performance indicators as such and the Panel found little evidence that the variables were in fact being monitored at a University wide level. The University needs to include a clear set of KPIs to monitor progress to support the implementation of its teaching and learning plan.

Affirmation 2

The Audit Panel affirms the intention of USP to produce a University-wide teaching & learning plan containing appropriate key performance indicators for both internal and external benchmarking of teaching and learning performance, as a matter of urgency.

The Strategic Plan 2006–2010 (p9) states that the "University is committed to ensuring that academic programs and learning environments meet or exceed international standards". The Panel expressed doubt as to whether the delivery of academic programs or the learning environments on some of the regional campuses were approaching this standard. The Panel heard frequent reports of the late delivery of learning materials, late and poor quality feedback on assignments, lack of computers and regular equipment breakdowns. USP needs to ensure that it meets its commitments to its students to a standard that meets or exceeds international standards. Attention needs to be paid to the timeliness of DFL delivery and the provision of adequate computing and other learning resources.

The practice of using external advisors to evaluate the appropriateness, coverage and standards of teaching and learning and research lapsed in 2005. In order to ensure standards and demonstrate its commitment to quality assurance, USP should reinstate some form of external review of its programs and their delivery and the moderation of academic standards.

Recommendation 6

The Audit Panel recommends that USP reintroduce regular, periodic external reviews of its academic programs.

3.2   Serving the Pacific Context

USP's commitment to the Pacific context is evident in the range of its courses and programs that address Pacific issues. The Panel was advised of courses in Pacific literature, Pacific leadership and governance, Pacific legal systems, land management, marine science, tourism, tropical agriculture, renewable energy, biodiversity, conservation and ecology in the Pacific island context. Generic issues of sustainability, economies of scale and climate change are integrated into courses with a Pacific focus. It is evident that USP is doing well in addressing issues that are of specific concern to the Pacific Island communities.

USP has also expanded its program offerings including continuing education in recent years. Although USP started as primarily an undergraduate education institution, it has expanded its postgraduate coursework and research programs during the last five years. Currently, all four faculties offer programs leading to master and doctoral awards. Many of the postgraduate programs have specific emphases on the Pacific context. By strengthening its flexible delivery, USP has expanded its continuing education and its outreach to remote communities in the region.

The Panel acknowledges the contribution of USP to the provision of learning opportunities of the Pacific community. The Panel noted that the University has been recognised by international

bodies. In 2006, USP was awarded the Commonwealth of Learning Excellence in Distance Education Award for Institutional Achievement. It was selected because 'it clearly demonstrated its long term and on-going success of making learning opportunities more accessible to students who might otherwise not have participated in learning or training experience'.

In serving the Pacific context, an espoused value of the University is "respect and value the great diversity of our student and faculty population" (Strategic Plan 2006–2010 p4). The unique diversity of its campus community is reflected in the various nationalities of its staff and students. USP dedicates itself to providing a positive and welcoming campus community for all. The Panel found abundant evidence of the application and realisation of this value. Students and staff consistently expressed their pleasure and appreciation in the diversity and inclusiveness of USP. (See chapter 5 on Student Support Services.)

> **Commendation 2**
>
> **The Audit Panel commends USP for the manner in which it has welcomed diversity and inclusiveness in the campus community.**

3.3   Quality Assurance of New Courses

The Portfolio (p24) states that a new course "must demonstrate its alignment to the strategic directions of the university, address graduate attributes and include a strong rationale based on market analysis…" In its 2007 mid-term report the University Grants Committee (p5) reported that 70% of USP's teaching and support activities are devoted to fewer than 20% of its enrolments. These figures suggest that, in addition to the courses with low enrolment that are significant to Pacific knowledge, there are other courses with low market demand. The role of the planning directorate in assisting faculties to assess market demand prior to establishing a course should be explored. The Panel heard that USP had a substantial number of courses that it described as 'undersubscribed'. The Panel was informed that undersubscribed courses were currently under scrutiny and some courses were targeted for closure. It was suggested to the Panel that USP faces some pressure from its stakeholders to introduce new course offerings on various campuses to serve regional needs regardless of the fact that market analysis might have indicated that these courses would not be viable. The Panel acknowledges the role of USP in offering courses for national development but suggests that more attention is paid to other courses that are still undersubscribed. Developing a long-term student enrolment strategy is one of the goals of USP but it will need to be addressed in a more timely way.

> **Recommendation 7**
>
> **The Audit Panel recommends that USP establish effective mechanisms for assessing the demand for proposed new courses while not compromising on the needs of the member countries and ensure a transparent and fair means for the phasing out of unviable courses.**

New programs are subject to the same approval process through the ASQC and the Senate, but with the final authority vested in the University Council. The systematic review of courses and programs which is essential to ensure currency, relevance and quality in programs and their delivery is lacking in the University. Currently, the review of courses and programs is a faculty responsibility. The Panel was advised that a policy and schedule for formal reviews of courses and programs has been developed and that the first of these will take place in 2008. The Panel encourages the University to implement the schedule as soon as possible as it will have a major impact on progress towards the achievement of the University's goal of assuring the quality and relevance of programs and their delivery.

3.4   Industry Advisory Groups

The Portfolio states that some faculties, when designing their teaching and learning plans, seek input from their Industry Advisory Groups. Other faculties are currently determining the membership and terms of reference for such groups. The Panel found that the use of industry advisory groups was not widespread across the schools. Such groups can be a useful way of not only seeking stakeholder input into course and program design but a way of promoting courses in the community and developing networks of value for research and employment outcomes for students. USP needs to emphasise the value of such groups and the action points identified by USP acknowledge a need to strengthen the Industry Advisory Groups in their functions and membership.

> **Affirmation 3**
>
> **The Audit Panel affirms USP's intention to strengthen Industry Advisory Groups in order to ensure course quality and relevance and optimise the University's external networks.**

3.5   Assessment

General assessment procedures are covered by the USP Assessment Regulations. Staff responsible for courses devise modes of assessment. The Faculty Assessment Board takes responsibility for fair and equitable evaluation practices, undertakes reviews of procedures, oversees moderation processes and determines results in accordance with university regulations. In general, on-campus students were satisfied with the implementation of assessment policies and procedures. The DFL students had many complaints about the formative assessment components. They are discussed in section 3.6.

To reinforce academic integrity and address matters of plagiarism, the regulation on plagiarism is made known to students and staff through the University calendar. The Department of Tourism has begun to use Turnitin software to detect incidents of plagiarism. ASQC has recommended University-wide use of Turnitin. Interviews and meetings with students assured the Panel that there is a high awareness of plagiarism and the penalties that students might incur.

3.6   Teaching and Learning in Regional Campuses

There is a widespread perception among the remote campuses that the restructure has not served their needs and has reduced the resources available to them for teaching and learning. Staff on every campus visited and interviewed by the Panel expressed concerns about the relationship with the Suva campus. Comments, such as "there is a need for greater understanding by Suva of our students' needs" and "out of sight is out of mind" reflected the feelings of marginalisation evident on these regional campuses.

The campuses expressed a uniform desire for more face-to-face tutoring to support DFL students. There is substantial evidence in the literature that some face-to-face teaching lessens the likelihood of distance students withdrawing from their programs or failing. USP's current policy which limits face-to-face tutoring to 200 level courses and above needs re-examination. There is a need to analyse the student experience across all campuses and provide adequate support based on the needs of the students in each of the campuses (section 3.10).

The late posting and notification of course availability poses a particular difficulty for regional campuses which are keen to support students by encouraging enrolment in cohorts. Furthermore, the shift to wholly online delivery as in the case of the program in law excludes potential students living in remote areas that do not have access to online delivery.

The Panel found some evidence of excellent practice in teaching and learning and makes special note of the success of English for Academic Purposes and the practicum experiences provided by the Community Legal Centre on Emalus Campus (Vanuatu); research done by the Taro Improvement Project and Tissue Culture Unit at Alafua Campus (Samoa); and the effort of some regional campuses to enrol students in cohorts in order to provide students with more effective academic and peer support and a more engaging learning experience.

3.7   Graduate Attributes and Student Charter

USP states that it aims to produce motivated, high-calibre graduates who can contribute to the betterment of their communities and society and are capable of dealing with the many different contexts that will face them in the region. The Portfolio made reference to USP graduate attributes and included a list of skills and qualities "that every graduate should have acquired" (PF p34). However, the Panel found that both staff and students were unaware of these attributes. CEDT should make it a priority to work with schools in embedding the nominated graduate attributes across the curriculum.

The Panel was advised that USP is in the process of drafting a student charter that will outline students' rights and responsibilities as members of USP. This is expected to be in place by 2008. However, no student interviewed by the Panel had any knowledge of the draft student charter. The Panel encourages the University to involve students and perhaps recent graduates in this development and once finalised devise an effective communication strategy to disseminate information among the student body as well as staff.

3.8   Staff Development

Staff development in teaching and learning is a faculty responsibility. The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching offers academic professional development programs to cater for staff seeking to improve their teaching. Some mentoring of new staff was observed in a few departments. Staff are encouraged by USP to undertake the Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching, a formal qualification in teaching and learning offered by the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching. Workshops are conducted for the online course management system.

USP acknowledges the need for the improvement of orientation procedures for new staff and the monitoring of staff training and development. The University is hopeful that the new staff appraisal system and the Human Resources Staff and Development Committee will help in this regard.

3.9   Recognising Good Teaching

USP has no formal mechanisms for rewarding good teaching other than contract renewal and promotion. The former is not perceived as a reward and the latter gives priority to research. Many universities have low cost but high impact means of recognising good teaching (Vice-Chancellor Awards, Certificates of Excellence). USP recognises that the introduction of a teaching excellence award for staff would signal greater respect for this key teaching and learning activity and the Panel encourages the investigation of additional approaches used by other universities.

3.10   Monitoring Student Progress and Academic Counselling

One of the sub-goals of USP under 'Teaching and Learning' is to "increase student retention and performance". Recognising the diversity in student backgrounds in terms of languages, cultures, traditions and levels of development, USP has put in place programs for first year students to ease the transition to tertiary studies and thereby to improve retention rates. The Communications and Marketing Unit of USP on the Laucala Campus organises orientation programs at the beginning of each semester for on-campus new students.

Students studying by DFL are supported through discussion groups via internet and face-to-face contact in regional campuses where practical.

Courses that were offered through WebCT have now been developed for the new learning management system (LMS) namely Moodle which went live in the second half of 2007 with 68 courses. With this move to a new LMS USP hopes to improve access for all USP students. The developments are very recent and the planning of further implementation initiatives needs to take account of the problems that have occurred to date. Because of the recent development of Moodle the Panel is unable to make any judgement on the effectiveness of Moodle in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning.

The University recognises that students need support in developing and enhancing their levels of proficiency in English language skills. The English for Academic Purposes Division provides support to develop academic skills in four genres: academic reading skills, writing skills, research skills and oral seminar skills.

The Panel learnt that due to major technical difficulties with information and communication technologies (ICT) the experience of the DFL students in regional campuses has been very frustrating. The University recognises the demand from the regional campuses for more face-to-face components in program delivery. The Panel was advised that the University is exploring the costs and benefits of the various initiatives to meet the teaching and learning demands of the regional campuses as well as the needs of students.

Academic advising at the pre-enrolment stage is done mostly online through faculty and school websites. Ad hoc workshops organised by various disciplines, materials produced for the USP Open Day and responses to student enquiries through email, telephone and personal appointments also support academic advising. Face-to-face advising is provided at the time of registration at the beginning of a semester or flexi-school period.

The College of Foundation Studies offers preparatory programs for students for pre-degree studies at USP. The curriculum is closely aligned with the disciplines in the respective faculties and the Panel was informed of many instances of students having benefited from these preparatory programs. Students of the distant campuses such as the Alafua Campus in Samoa spoke very positively about their experience with these preparatory programs.

Attrition rates are very high among part-time students with only half of the commencing part-time students returning to the University in the following year. USP recognises that retention and pass rates will be boosted by informed academic advising about subject specialisations and course choices. The situation on all campuses needs special attention.

USP should give priority to addressing a number of issues surrounding the quality of teaching and learning and student experiences. In particular, comparing the data on student progress across all campuses and all modes of study will provide valuable information for the University in ascertaining those campuses whose quality of teaching and learning and student experiences needs improving.

Recommendation 8

The Audit Panel recommends that USP develop robust mechanisms for comparing the pass, progression, retention and completion rates of its students across all campuses and all modes of study in order to track improvements and performance in teaching and learning.

3.11   Student Evaluation

USP invites feedback from students, graduates, staff and stakeholders about their experiences of teaching and learning. Student Evaluation of Courses, Graduate Destination Surveys and Program Experience Surveys have been used in recent years.

Students commented that while regularly being asked to fill in teaching and course evaluation surveys they received no feedback on how this information is used. Although the Panel found evidence of feedback being used to improve courses, it noted that this information was not conveyed to students. USP needs to explore ways in which it can inform students of actions taken in response to their feedback. The University is advised to look at practices at other universities, for example the inclusion of a statement on how feedback has informed changes in the unit outlines distributed at the commencement of semester.

Student grievances are addressed by student development committees based at Laucala, Alafua and Emalus campuses and they function as committees of the Senate. They have broad terms of reference and look into all cases where the Senate considers that the interests of the University or of the students are affected (Council Secretariat Handbook). The Laucala Campus committee is chaired by the DVC or nominee and on the other two campuses they are chaired by the PVC (Regional) or nominee. In addition, the VC can constitute committees to address student related issues as and when necessary. On assessment matters students can present their appeals to the Academic Appeals Committee. The Panel's attention was drawn to inconsistencies in the implementation of the Assessment Policy in relation to the refunding of fees paid for appeals against assessment. There was, though, ample evidence that students were satisfied with USP and the grievances they expressed were few.

4   STRATEGIC SUPPORT SERVICES

The USP Strategic Plan 2006–2010, under its Governance, Administration, and Management goals, states that the University will "*provide the necessary infrastructure and support for research, academic programs, and student/staff services*" and the University Strategic Support Services are guided by this goal. The Strategic Support Services of USP comprise four units namely the Library, Media Centre, Information Technology Services (ITS), and Centre for Educational Development and Technology (CEDT). The heads of these sections report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor.

USP has expanded and strengthened its strategic support services considerably during the past five years and further developments are in progress. The Panel identified certain areas that need attention so that these services can extend more timely and effective support to students and staff.

4.1   *Library*

The mission of the Library is to "advance the university mission by providing equitable regional access to excellent library and information services, resources and facilities for students, faculty and the wider Pacific community to facilitate their lifelong learning activities" (Strategic Plan, 2006–2010: Advancing the Library Network p5). In realising this mission, the Library has identified five strategic goals areas focusing on services to the students and staff: Customer and Information Services, Information Resources, Physical and Work Environment, Partnerships and Quality Assurance. The Panel found that the Library is progressing well in these areas.

USP manages 23 libraries in 12 countries. The main Library, based at Laucala Campus, houses approximately 1 million volumes, including a significant collection of materials on the Pacific Islands. The Library is open to the community and public access to the Pacific Collection is vital in promoting knowledge about the Pacific regions and its cultures. The Pacific Collection is tangible evidence of the University's commitment to the Pacific region and to meeting the education and research needs of the region. The Panel acknowledges the Library's achievements in this regard.

Staff and students met by the Panel were in the main very positive about the Library's services although they expressed some concern about the number of copies of books available and the currency of some of the hard copy materials. The Panel noted that the Library has identified 'improved access to online databases for science and the social sciences' as one of its priorities. In addressing the anticipated increase in the use of electronic journals during 2008 the Library will be well placed to address some of these expressed concerns.

In the context of the planned increase in the availability and use of electronic resources and the increasing delivery of courses online it is important that accountabilities for copyright especially but not limited to those that support online teaching are clarified. USP needs to develop appropriate policies, processes and procedures to ensure that copyright is managed appropriately and any risks are minimised.

Constant monitoring is necessary to ensure that Library facilities and access to materials are able to meet the needs of students and staff especially as the University is keen to further develop its research profile. There is a need for the University to question and monitor the variable charges for Inter Library Loans between undergraduate and research degree students so that research degree students are treated equitably and have the access to Library resources that they need.

Under the leadership of the University Librarian and her staff the performance of the Library is monitored in various ways including user surveys, comments in suggestion boxes, statistical

reports from the libraries in the USP network and benchmarking with other libraries. This has enabled the Library to respond to some of the needs of its users, for example in creating 24 hour access to study spaces as appropriate for the largely residential Laucala Campus.

> **Commendation 3**
>
> **The Audit Panel commends the USP Library for its approaches to measuring performance through user surveys, statistics and benchmarking with other university libraries.**

4.2   Media Centre

The Media Centre provides technical support to CEDT and ITS for media production, the development of learning resources and the student radio station. The regional staff, students and the wider community have access to the facilities and services of the Centre. The Panel acknowledges that media services is an essential support for teaching and learning and research especially given the unique characteristics of USP and the large cohort of students where more than half of the student population are studying off-campus.

Service provision of this nature needs to be in alignment with University-wide plans in teaching and learning and research and have clearly identified priorities. Collaboration with key stakeholders within the University is essential so that service provision can be prioritised and coordinated. In the absence of key University plans, in the short term the University might consider the teaching and learning plans of the faculties and identify their priorities and allocate resources accordingly for media services. Collaboration with the other support units, ITS and CEDT, is also essential.

The Panel noted the Media Centre's intention to work more closely with the faculties and urges it to do so. The Centre itself has identified interdepartmental networking via regular meetings as a way forward in coordinating the delivery of high quality media services across the University. A Media Centre Advisory Committee, recommended in the KPMG audit report, would provide the platform for such networking; the Committee is yet to be established. USP states that the work of the Media Centre is under review to consolidate and integrate Media into CEDT and ITS. The Panel was informed that, as a first step, USPNet staff in the Media Centre who managed the distance education delivery moved to ITS in December 2007. The Panel suggests that as part of this restructure a formal process and mechanism for cooperation with the schools, departments and other users should be explored and initiated as soon as possible. The University should also review the capital needs for effective media services and address them as part of the University's capital planning processes.

> **Recommendation 9**
>
> **The Audit Panel recommends that USP develop priorities for media services aligned to the faculty teaching and learning plans, and in collaboration with the Centre for Educational Development and Technology and Information Technology Services and the faculties.**

4.3   Information Technology Services

The USP Strategic Plan acknowledges that enhanced ICT capability is essential to the achievement of many of its strategic goals. USP has a draft Information and Communication Plan that provides an overall plan addressing institutional needs. The Information Technology Services (ITS) Work Plan describes the strategic objectives of ITS.

ITS is central to the operations of USP both in its core programs in education and research and in its support programs for students and staff. The Panel was assured in its campus visits, interviews

and teleconferences with staff that there are sufficient computers available to them. However students commented that there were insufficient computers across all campuses. There were also concerns expressed about the availability of technical staff to support USP's intentions and expectations of its ICT platform. The Panel noted that ITS uses IT industry benchmarks: 93% of the computers across the network are functional at any one time and faulty computers are rectified within two working days.

The Panel heard that students on Laucala campus have a monthly internet quota of 80Mb for undergraduate and 130Mb for postgraduate students. Exhausting this initial free quota, students are required to purchase additional quota. To lower internet charges to students, efforts have been made to provide them with free access to prescribed academic, learning and research resources. Staff continue to have free access. ICT funding strategies to lower internet costs is one of the priority areas of USP. A wireless-based network has been installed on Laucala Campus, allowing staff and student access to hotspots so they can connect to the internet and USPNet using laptops in various parts of Laucala. While the installation of wireless networks offers considerable flexibility to computer users there is a risk that such computer access is limited to certain groups of students. The University will need to be mindful of providing equitable access to increasingly sophisticated and flexible technologies.

The Panel was informed that work is progressing in migrating from WebCT to the new LMS, the open-source Moodle. USP states that in the long run this solution will reduce costs and increase capacity building. There were mixed views on the effectiveness of Moodle; some students and staff expressed satisfaction with courses delivered via Moodle, others not. ITS is aware of the mixed success of the implementation of Moodle. The Panel encourages ITS to address the concerns expressed as it proceeds with the roll-out of Phase 2 of Moodle implementation.

The University has enhanced USPNet coverage on all campuses. Increased bandwidth has improved access to the internet, audio and video broadcasting and teleconferencing and provided cheaper telephony across the campuses. This major enhancement was initiated in 2006, and it is essential that these ongoing developments are communicated to the USP community so that the expectations of users can be managed and met.

> **Affirmation 4**
>
> **The Audit Panel affirms recent IT developments in particular the infrastructure development of USPNet, and USP's commitment to continuing this development.**

The disaster recovery plan is still in a draft stage and the Panel heard that it is scheduled for further development in 2008. The ICT security policy in its current state is fragmented through different documents and appears to be neither comprehensive not coordinated.

> **Affirmation 5**
>
> **The Audit Panel affirms the intentions of USP to develop a disaster recovery plan and security policy and encourages the University to act as soon as possible.**

ITS manages the Banner suite of software that the University employs to facilitate its administrative functions such as student admissions and enrolment, financial management and human resources (HR) administration. The Panel had difficulty in obtaining some HR data from the Banner system and the data that was received from different officers through Banner were inconsistent (recommendations 8 and 11).

Due to rapid changes in the technology, ITS faces many challenges in keeping its technical capabilities and services current. Increasing demands and expectations of staff and students, high

costs and need for skilled personnel are among the major challenges. In meeting them in the short term priority should be given to finalising the University's Information and Communication Plan in consultation with key stakeholders, refining the ITS Work Plan and filling vacant positions at the more senior levels of ITS.

4.4   Centre for Educational Development and Technology

The Centre for Educational Development and Technology (CEDT) was recently established as part of the academic restructure and brought together three units the: Distance and Flexible Learning Support Centre (DFLSC), Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching and Continuing and Community Education. CEDT has a University-wide brief for developing educational resources, providing professional development to staff and continuing education to local communities. CEDT has developed a plan to guide its core business in line with USP's Strategic Plan.

More than 50% of USP's students are in remote locations of the region. Some of these locations have restricted access to the internet and some students have limited or no access to computers on campus. In making decisions on online delivery of programs USP needs to continue to be mindful of the diverse needs of students as well as the capacity needs of its member countries.

When CEDT's internal communication strategies are established it will be important to enhance its communication strategies with the campuses especially as the DFLSC has highlighted a need for ongoing programs in flexible and online pedagogy. In this regard the Panel was encouraged to hear that Centre staff visit campuses to offer professional development programs to USP teaching staff.

CEDT has put in place a series of mechanisms such as an Advisory Board and representation on faculty teaching and learning committees to support its work. It is essential that these mechanisms provide productive outcomes that support the existing faculty teaching and learning plans as well as the future University-wide teaching and learning plan.

> **Affirmation 6**
>
> **The Audit Panel affirms USP's intentions that the Centre for Educational Development and Technology work closely with the faculties and align its programs to the needs of both the students and the courses.**

5   STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

The University goals on student services (PF p56) are to:

1. *improve its effectiveness by ensuring that responsibilities and accountability are clearly defined within the student support areas*

2. *provide the necessary infrastructure and support for research, academic programmes, and student/staff services*

They are derived from the sub-goals of the Strategic Plan 2006–2010 on Student and Staff Support and Governance, Administration, and Management. Towards these goals, USP provides administrative support to students centrally through the office of the Registrar, Student Academic Services and Community Services. The Panel found that in general USP is providing good support to its students with some areas to be improved.

5.1   *Student Academic Services*

Student Academic Services serves as the point of contact for students from enrolment to graduation. It provides a face-to-face help desk for all students and an online service, SOLS. Student administration is managed through the integrated Banner system. This system holds students' personal and academic information and is expected to enable efficient tracking of students, improve the integrity and availability of student data and reduce repetitive data entry. The system has the potential to produce data that is useful for decision making, management of student enrolments and research on the characteristics and performance of USP's student population. The Panel heard of plans to rationalise courses and programs and accurate and reliable data from Banner will be essential for this purpose.

The Enrolment Guide explains the enrolment process and the Panel heard that students feel well supported in enrolment processes both on the main campus and on other campuses. There is though scope for improvements in online registration. There is also scope for more coordination of enrolment processes involving the remote campuses. Although the Banner system offers the opportunity for the development of University-wide processes in student administration these processes will need to be coordinated with paper-based processes for some time to come.

As part of the transition to university, an orientation program is offered to students. An Orientation Guide is produced although it is directed to students on the Lacaula, Alafua and Emalus campuses. Given that the attrition rates of first year students are commonly higher than those of later years and the rates for off-campus students are higher than for those on campus it is important that USP continues to monitor the provision of services and support to students to improve its retention rates on all campuses. It is suggested that the pathways of students into USP from schools and other institutions are systematically explored with a view to establishing connections that will facilitate the transition of students to both university life and ways of learning.

The Panel heard that tutorials are not necessarily provided for first year students in the regions in all programs although they are provided to students in later years of study. USP might wish to reconsider this practice given that face-to-face classes encourage students' engagement in their learning and with each other and can be a significant factor in student retention in the early years of their programs.

The University sends regular email communications to students. The USP website and a newsletter are also used to communicate with students. The Panel was advised that the online

survey of 1850 students in Semester I of 2007 indicated that students were generally satisfied with the services they get from Student Academic Services.

5.2   Services to Campus Community

USP offers some residential accommodation on its campuses to students and staff and a range of recreational and sporting opportunities to the USP community. The University business change team is currently reviewing the functions of the halls of residence and recommendations made in an internal audit of the catering services are being addressed. The University provides a health service for students and staff and a counselling service to all students. The Panel saw a comprehensive set of materials on health issues and concerns that are available to students on the Laucala Campus.

The Portfolio states that pass rates of sponsored students have improved through various peer tutoring, mentoring and monitoring schemes facilitated by the Counselling Centre. Given that a large proportion of students are away from their homes studying on USP campuses it is suggested that a more systematic approach is taken to the development of peer tutoring and mentoring schemes and the potential for the implementation of the schemes across all campuses is explored.

Students spoke well of the facilities that are available to them and the opportunities they have to provide feedback on the quality of services. The University has identified a number of areas for improvement such as health awareness, security and catering and steps have been taken to address them. The Panel encourages the University to act on those improvements and monitor their effectiveness.

5.3   Student Complaints and Appeals

Students commented that the University is often tardy in responding to their requests, issues and concerns. Although there are documented processes for complaints and appeals against assessment it seems that there is as yet little analysis of systemic issues and so the University is losing an opportunity to improve its processes and potentially student outcomes. The Panel noted some lack of clarity in the implementation of its policy on assessment appeals in relation to the fee paid by students and the conditions of its refund. USP needs to work with students on this matter.

5.4   Student Representation and Experience

It is clear that students are well represented on the University's key committees. The University Council has four student members, the Senate has five members, ASQC has one member and the Student Development Committee has two student representatives. Students are also represented on faculty management committees and teaching and learning committees, school boards of studies and orientation planning groups. However, as indicated in the Portfolio, the effectiveness of representation is compromised by the students' lack of familiarity with the University's processes. The Panel suggests that student representatives participate in an induction program focused on the work of the various committees and their ways of operating. This could also assist the students in the management of their own organisations and clubs. The University has identified 'lack of continuity in the management of student affairs' as an area that needs to be addressed and an induction program could assist in addressing this issue.

In addition to formal representation on University, faculty and school committees there are other opportunities for students to engage with the University and to have a voice on University matters. The Panel heard of monthly meetings between the executive of the Students' Association and senior management.

The Panel acknowledges that although there are some areas where improvements can be made, USP provides positive experiences to its students. Students and alumni who met with the Panel spoke enthusiastically about their experiences at USP. They generally spoke highly of their teachers and the opportunities they had to meet students from all parts of the region. Their pride in being graduates and students was very obvious to the Panel.

One of the strengths noted by students and alumni with whom the Panel spoke was the regional commitment of USP. For the alumni in particular their connections with their student peers have provided significant networking opportunities since graduation. Some of the alumni members have completed graduate programs at USP and others have completed graduate programs at universities overseas. They felt that they were well prepared to continue their studies and build on their initial learning at USP. In particular, students welcomed the cultural diversity they experienced at USP and the richness of the opportunities presented by USP for learning about the cultures of the South Pacific.

Commendation 4

The Audit Panel commends USP for the richness of the opportunities it provides to its students and alumni.

6   RESEARCH AND GRADUATE AFFAIRS

In 2004, USP developed the Research Strategy 2005-2007 and identified research priority areas which was approved by the Council in 2006. The Strategic Plan 2006–2010 lists the following goals with respect to research:

1.   *Promote research at all levels of the University.*

2.   *Link research and consultancy to teaching.*

3.   *Increase the quantity and quality of research.*

4.   *Provide effective management and support for the development of research.*

(USP Strategic Plan 2006–2010 p7)

USP started primarily as an undergraduate education institution and in its formative years there was less emphasis on research. Increased attention to research is relatively recent and consequently, many areas of research management are still evolving. The Panel recognises that the Pacific Islands region provides incomparable opportunities for research and USP is well placed to lead that research effort and for its researchers to build and develop unique areas of expertise. However, to fully achieve the benefits of this position, USP needs to clearly define and communicate its priorities. It should urgently address the vast number of policies that are in draft form, several of them having been so for some time, and finalise policy implementation and monitoring plans.

6.1   Policies and Planning

The University, like most universities around the world, must bring a significant focus to its research effort. That this was occurring at USP in a structured way was not apparent to the Panel. USP is well placed in this regard as there is the obvious focus on Pacific studies in the widest possible sense – art, law, environment, business, culture, history, science and technology. The identification of this focus should be the main feature of the as yet undeveloped University research plan. A clear and deliberate focus in this way would provide USP with a unique research niche and would allow it to raise its global research profile if done well.

The Portfolio identified the key policies and procedures that are under consideration and are at different stages of their development: Research Policy, Research Ethics Policy, Intellectual Property (IP) Policy, Research Ethics Handbook and Protocol of Research Engagements with Pacific Communities, Revision of the Research Permits in the Region document, template for Reporting Research Outcomes, Guideline for the Appointment of Graduate Assistants, Guideline for Research Funding Applications, Benchmarks and Indicators for Research, redrafting the Master's Degree Regulations, regulations for the presentation of theses, and redrafting the PhD regulations (PF p55). The Panel formed the view that there are far too many policies and procedures that are incomplete. The University should complete the development work as soon as possible. A risk analysis would suggest the order in which policies and procedures might be finalised. In addition to completing the development work under way communication plans should be developed and implemented.

> **Affirmation 7**
>
> **The Audit Panel affirms the efforts of USP to develop the suite of policies and procedures to strengthen its research agenda and urges the University to complete and communicate them as a matter of priority.**

As a result of the academic restructure, operational management of research has been devolved to the deans and heads of research institutes and centres. It was evident to the Panel that research activity and capability was uneven across the University. The faculties have draft research support plans in varying stages of development. Priority should be given to developing a University research and research management plan to which draft faculty plans can then be aligned.

The development of an Intellectual Property Policy needs immediate attention. The Panel heard that two overseas universities are currently working with USP on Fijian resources and on the possible development of pharmaceutical products from resources in the region. In the absence of a robust IP Policy this position presents a significant exposure to risk for the University and the region. It could also represent lost opportunities to capitalise on any developments flowing from the research. It is essential that relevant member countries are brought into discussions of research projects and IP rights.

6.2   Research Management

The position of the Pro Vice-Chancellor (PVC) (Research) was created in 2006 to provide leadership to research and research training. At the time of the audit, this position was vacant and USP has not been in a position to progress its research agenda at the rate it would wish. USP needs to appoint a research leader who is dedicated to the development of research in the University taking into account its regional context. The University should carefully consider various options to achieve this. One option may be to combine the portfolios of research and regions that will facilitate the University to feature its unique regional nature in its research and research training agenda. However, success of this option depends on the leadership USP is able to identify for these portfolios and USP should carefully explore other options as well that might be advantageous to its context.

The position of the PVC (Research) is supported through the University Research and Graduate Affairs Committee and the Office of Research and Graduate Affairs (ORGA). The University Research and Graduate Affairs Committee is a Senate Committee with a mandate to oversee, promote, coordinate and facilitate research and graduate affairs within the University. The ORGA was established towards the end of 2006 to provide management support for researchers and research activities across USP. The Panel found that the roles and responsibilities of these committees are confused. In particular the roles of ORGA in the management and administration of research training and graduate students needs to be clarified. Consideration might be given to the development of ORGA as a 'one stop shop' for research degree students and a single point of contact for graduate research student administration.

6.3   Collaboration in Research

The Panel saw many examples of collaborative research undertaken with international institutions and regional agencies. USP needs to explore the benefits of collaboration for the University more systematically so that opportunities for collaboration can be prioritised and pursued. There is a need to formalise and document some of the informal arrangements that are currently in place in order to reduce risk, clarify accountabilities and monitor the progress on projects.

USP is committed to "undertaking research that benefits its member states" (PF p54) yet there is little evidence of consultation with member states regarding their research needs. The Panel urges USP to find a mechanism whereby member countries can make their research needs known on a regular basis. Risk assessment regarding USP's exposure, while developing collaborative research with member states and other agencies and universities outside the region, needs attention.

Within the institution, USP is supportive of research projects that focus on collaboration among researchers and at times research degree students. Deans see these projects as opportunities to foster the development of early career researchers. The Panel encourages the University to allocate specific funds for cross-faculty research in order to encourage interfaculty collaboration, develop interdisciplinary research and further develop the University's research culture.

6.4   Postgraduate Research Education and Training

While graduate student numbers remain a small proportion of the student population, postgraduate enrolments are increasing. Over the past three years, there has been a steady increase in the number of effective full-time research degree students. To match this increase and to keep pace with the aspiration to further strengthen postgraduate enrolments, the University needs to fine-tune its policies and procedures dealing with postgraduate affairs.

USP needs to develop a number of significant policies and processes around postgraduate research as soon as possible. There is a lack of defined processes associated with:

- Registration of supervisors
- Training of supervisors
- Ethics processes
- Feedback procedures on supervision for postgraduate students
- Access to facilities and resources that postgraduate students can expect
- Grievance procedures
- Policy around the employment of graduate assistants in USP

The Panel recognises that for the small number of postgraduate students the University is able to function with draft policies and procedures, however the University should consider publishing a handbook for research degree students once these processes have been developed. In the meantime it is essential that students are aware of the processes as they are developed and of their rights as students (Recommendation 10).

Research methodology courses for postgraduate students are not always available. USP needs to ensure all postgraduate students have access to research methodology courses that develop their research knowledge and skills.

6.5   Supervision and Support for Research Students

The University website and the USP Calendar are the major sources of information about postgraduate and research degree programs. Faculty and school handbooks are supplements to these University publications and provide information specific to these units.

The University supports research students by providing physical space, equipment, support for conference travel, library resources and privileges and access to laboratories for research purposes. In addition to the scholarships provided by the governments of the USP region to their own students USP offers a limited number of scholarships to postgraduate students. Graduate Assistant Scholarships are also offered by faculties. The Panel heard that there is variation in the allocation and management of these scholarships within the faculties and consequently there is potential for inequitable treatment of Graduate Assistant Scholarship holders across the University.

Appropriate supervision is fundamental to ensuring quality in postgraduate research studies. Each faculty has a Research and Graduate Affairs Committee (FRGAC) chaired by the Associate Dean

Research and Graduate Affairs. Training for students and supervisors is managed at the faculty or institute level. FRGACs monitor the progress of postgraduate students on the basis of progress reports that are submitted by students twice a year. The FRGAC approves the appointment of supervisors and examiners on the recommendation of the appropriate sections within the Faculty.

Student orientations are the responsibility of the Associate Dean and supervisors and the Panel urges the University to extend institutional and faculty-level attention to the orientation and transition process. University-level attention to the entire suite of policies and procedures is essential to maintain quality and consistency for all students across all faculties (Recommendation 10).

6.6   Research Performance

A record of research and publication is now a requirement for appointment at USP where all academic staff are appointed on three year contracts. The indicative data show that about a third of all academic staff have doctoral qualifications. This needs to increase if USP wishes to become more research focused. The Panel heard of staff who wished to build their research qualifications as new accountabilities become more evident. USP could pay attention to creating opportunities for staff to upgrade qualifications.

Two faculties publish their own journals. The *South Pacific Journal of Natural Science* is a peer-reviewed annual publication that aims to support the publications of USP researchers as well as contributes to disseminating knowledge that is unique to the Pacific region. The School of Law publishes another journal. USP needs to consider monitoring these journals with respect to value for resources spent.

Alafua Campus has some untapped potential in the Taro Improvement Project and the Tissue Culture Unit. Both deal with USP's aims of developing Pacific knowledge and knowledge about the Pacific and being relevant and useful to its regional community. The Panel heard of externally funded research work on the Alafua Campus into tissue cultures of regional flora. With strong leadership and support this research has the potential to grow into a number of postgraduate research centres. The Panel urges USP to explore the potential of research such as this that is region specific.

The research work being undertaken in the Alafua Campus has the potential to be commercial and can be developed in dynamic ways. Other forms of research in the Alafua Campus seem to be independent in nature (individual academics following individual interests without too much thought to what is wanted by a wider community). Research that aligns with government policy is more likely to attract funding. Also, research that attempts to address the major problems faced by the Pacific would also have a higher likelihood of being funded (eg climate change and its effects; low cost answers for problems faced by communities; bold strategies; etc). Attracting money is something Alafua needs to do.

A template for reporting research outcomes is currently being trialled and the development of an interactive computer program based on the template is in progress. This database is expected to provide accurate data on research undertaken by the University and produce reports on a researcher, school, faculty and institute basis. When the database is functional, the University will be able to monitor and benchmark its research performance. At the moment the University has a draft Benchmark and Indicators document and the Panel endorses the University's intention to finalise this document and suggests that the work be completed soon.

Affirmation 8

The Audit Panel affirms the benchmarking intentions of USP to monitor its research performance and suggests that USP revise and complete the Benchmarks and Indicators document according to the timeline.

6.7   *Research Funding and its Allocation*

The University has increased its budget allocation for research. Funding for research is allocated to the faculties through the Internal Funding Model. The dean is responsible for allocating funds within each faculty and they are administered by the associate deans for research and graduate affairs. The Panel was informed of a revised Internal Funding Model for the next triennium (2007–2009), which will provide incentives for research. Funding for research from the University's budget is supplemented by funds from aid donors and grants secured by researchers and research teams.

Overall, research at USP presents both opportunities and threats. The Pacific context and the expertise available among USP staff provide a unique opportunity to make a significant difference to the Pacific communities and to lead the world. However, in the absence of a clear set of research priorities, guidelines for engagement in collaborative research with other institutions and a robust IP policy, USP faces the risk of becoming a desirable but 'second-fiddle' partner to other universities engaging in research in the Pacific region. The Panel cautions that there are simultaneous needs to build on the opportunities and address the risks. To do both, USP needs more focused and systematic research so that the unique opportunities can be realised to the benefit of the region and beyond.

Recommendation 10

The Audit Panel recommends that USP give priority to developing the policies around postgraduate research; and providing a handbook, orientation programs and transition processes for postgraduate students.

7   HUMAN RESOURCES

The Strategic Plan includes the following as its strategic goals with respect to staff: "*recruit, develop, and retain quality staff*" (USP Strategic Plan 2006–2010 p7). With high staff turnover and the system of three year contracts for all staff having adverse effects on succession plans, USP needs to revisit its human resources (HR) policies. While the commitment and quality of staff are strong features of USP, staff induction, staff development and staff appraisal all need systematic approaches.

7.1   Recruitment

Responsibility for staffing rests with the Office of Human Resources at USP's Laucala Campus. The Panel found the staff profile to be very diverse. Staff are enthusiastic about this diversity and dedicated to maintaining the inclusive culture and environment of USP.

The quality of staff and their interaction with students appeared to be very strong. Students consistently expressed respect for and appreciation of their teachers and other staff at the grassroots levels whom they described as "dedicated", "helpful", "knowledgeable" and "friendly". Similarly the Panel was impressed by the dedication and commitment of the teachers with whom they came into contact. Many of these teachers have high contact hours and very heavy marking loads but their concern for the welfare and progress of their students was evident.

The University's HR policies guide the recruitment of Academic and Comparable Staff and Tutors, Intermediate and Junior Staff and Permanent Hourly-Paid Staff. All staff are recruited on contract basis. Contracts can be short term for any period up to 3 years. For established positions the majority of staff are on 3 year contracts and this has posed problems of continuity in the core functions of teaching and learning and research, in particular the supervision of research degree students. Many vacancies in senior positions cause concerns. The Panel was informed that as a cost saving strategy recruitment to some key positions has been postponed. The Panel considers this approach is detrimental to the leadership and effective functioning of the University. The University should reconsider its recruitment and appointment policies.

7.2   Induction and Staff Development

Induction of new staff is left largely to the individual departments and units. The Portfolio states that the University has initiated an induction process for new USP staff at University level. The Panel found that the induction process is not as coordinated and systematic as it could be and suggests that a University induction process and program is developed and implemented, supplemented where necessary by programs, training and activities specific to particular units.

The overall responsibility for staff development currently rests with the Staff Development Committee which is a committee of the Senate. The accountability for staff development needs to be clear. The Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching provides professional development programs at University level. It faces challenges in providing support for academics teaching on remote campuses and needs to continue seeking approaches that engage this group of staff.

The University has plans to set up a Professional Development Unit to improve the coordination of the analysis of needs and the delivery of training and staff development. It is currently reviewing the terms of reference of the Staff Development Committee to ensure its linkage to the Professional Development Unit. The Panel noted the increasing reliance on online programs for training and development and suggest that the University ensures that the training meets the needs of staff including those working in specialist areas and those working on remote campuses.

The roles of the Unit and the Committee in the development and implementation of the University's staff induction and training plan will need to be clarified and communicated.

Affirmation 9

The Audit Panel affirms the plans of USP to identify the training needs of staff and to institute a systematic approach to training and staff development.

7.3   Staff Appraisal and Review

The University acknowledges that performance management is in a state of transition. At USP performance management includes staff appraisal and staff review. While staff appraisal is linked to workplans, staff review leads to decisions on increments, bonuses, promotions and renewal of contracts. Contracted staff at all levels undergo reviews as a regular part of their contract monitoring and renewal. The Panel found patchy implementation of the staff appraisal system. The Faculty of Science and Technology has implemented the staff appraisal policy and its approach to peer review of teaching provides a model that might be followed or adapted by other faculties. The Faculty has succeeded in using staff appraisal as an opportunity to recognise and celebrate good teaching and research.

The Panel also found some confusion between staff appraisal and staff review. The University should ensure that the difference between these two aspects of staff development is communicated clearly to staff and that relevant staff are trained in staff review processes. It should also ensure that the staff review process is used by staff to explore career development opportunities.

Commendation 5

The Audit Panel commends USP for the introduction of peer review of teaching linked to staff appraisal and encourages the University to ensure its implementation across all faculties.

7.4   Human Resources Policies and Planning

Following the restructure in 2005, the University is reviewing its human resources (HR) policies and practices. HR officers have been deployed to the faculties to articulate and ensure consistent HR policies across the University. Policies on HR are not clear to many staff and USP should consider improving its communication strategies for wider dissemination of HR policies and processes.

In recent years USP has experienced many changes in personnel and shifts in portfolio responsibilities. These changes and vacancies at senior levels, especially at the time of academic restructure, have affected the ability of USP to provide strong academic leadership. The Panel encourages USP to move towards consolidation and focus on achieving stability to build staff confidence.

The Panel concluded that HR planning does not always take into account the needs of remote campuses and centres. The Panel heard that some of the regional campuses have difficulties in getting financial support to recruit the staff they need for summer schools. USP should recognise the need for regional campuses to adopt strategies specific to their own conditions and consider the HR requirements of the regional campuses accordingly. The HR officers appointed to the faculties should be empowered to address this issue.

Affirmation 10

The Audit Panel affirms the initiative of USP to ensure consistent human resource (HR) policies across the University by deploying HR officers to the faculties.

7.5 *Human Resource Information Systems*

HR management and administration is supported by the Banner system introduced in 1998. The system has the potential to provide an integrated information management system and contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of the University's HR function. However, the HR data made available to the Panel was inconsistent and raised concerns about data security and integrity. In order to exploit fully the potential of the Banner system for the management of the HR function the data that is provided must be accurate and reliable. See also Recommendation 8 where use of data for tracking improvements in teaching and learning and student experience has been discussed. In general, this is applicable to decision making at all levels of the enterprise.

Recommendation 11

The Audit Panel recommends that USP ensure reliability of its data management system and also investigate more efficient ways of using data, information and knowledge to support decision making at all levels of the enterprise.

8   COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS AND ENGAGEMENT

The Panel acknowledges that USP provides leadership in the social, cultural and economic development of its member countries through community partnerships and engagement. While USP's commitment to community engagement is evident, the University acknowledges that "*community services and engagement are yet to be accepted as a formal factor in workload and funding consideration*" (PF p86). This formal factor needs to be revisited. To position itself to respond to the emerging needs of its member countries while at the same time being mindful of post-secondary education developments in those countries the University needs to prioritise its efforts in consultation with its member countries. By focusing on the expertise and services that are unique to USP in the region it will be better placed to meet the needs that are identified and to avoid any unnecessary competition or duplication of efforts.

8.1   *Engagement with the Community*

USP staff contribute to capacity building of the member countries in many ways. They are frequently involved in organising, managing and participating in lectures, talks, seminars and workshops on various topics and issues in association with governments, organisations and industry. They also serve as consultants to various bodies at regional, national and local levels. Initiatives of the Institute of Education, the Institute of Applied Science, Pacific Institute of Advanced Studies in Development and Governance, Pacific Centre for Environment and Sustainable Development, and South Pacific Regional Herbarium have very strong community engagement components.

The community members involved in the University committees strengthen the link between the University and the communities. The University Council has community representatives. Similarly, faculties have Industry Advisory Groups which assist them in their academic planning. As indicated earlier, there is scope to strengthen the involvement of the Industry Advisory Groups in developing community networks of value for research and employment outcomes for students (section 3.4).

USP has established effective linkages with secondary schools through targeted activities and school based practicums in teacher education programs. Senior secondary students are invited to the annual Open Day to familiarise themselves and their families with what the University has to offer them. Lecturers visit secondary schools as part of the annual School Liaison Program and inform prospective students of programs of study at USP and promote awareness of different disciplines and the career opportunities they provide.

In general, USP has ensured an interesting and effective mix of teaching, community service and professional service in its programs.

> **Commendation 6**
>
> **The Audit Panel commends USP for the effective mix of teaching, community service and professional service it has ensured in its programs.**

8.2   *Responding to Community Needs*

The Panel was told that USP enjoys good support in its communities. USP holds a number of events that take its 'face' to the community. Exhibitions and performances by the Oceania Centre for Arts and Culture, the USP choir and other student cultural groups have strengthened the community linkages to the Laucala Campus. The ways in which the face of USP is presented to the communities associated with other campuses is largely a matter for those campuses. The Panel heard that some regional campuses have not been visited by the Vice-Chancellor in recent

years. More regular regional visits by senior staff should be encouraged. The presentation of the face of USP across the region should be a high priority consideration for the Director of Marketing when appointed.

USP should ensure that it maintains and strengthens its good regional relationships. There is evidence that sovereign states will respond decisively if they perceive that USP is not responsive to their education and training needs over time. The Panel is aware of individual country developments and the establishment of national post-secondary and tertiary institutions. USP needs to be clear about what it can and will contribute to the region and this needs to be done in consultation with the countries themselves. USP has an opportunity to lead the planning and mapping of post-secondary education and training provision across the region informed by the needs of its member countries. Such a mapping will avoid the spreading of resources too thinly and any duplication of effort and resources with the potential to bring about the highest return on the investment made in education and training in the Pacific region. It would also enable potential students to plan their pathways to university and government, business and industry to better plan the development of their work forces.

Some students at USP are supported financially by individual governments and other stakeholders. It is important for the continuation and increase in the level of support for students that USP continues to work closely with these stakeholders in its different communities. Responsiveness in reporting to these stakeholders will ensure continuation of their support for students.

8.3   *Partnerships*

The Panel noted that, through the Committee of Regional Organisations in the Pacific, USP is engaged with regional organisations in various specialised and high priority community development projects. It collaborates with these organisations to implement the actions of the Pacific Plan.

USP has developed a range of partnerships with various academic institutions regionally, nationally and internationally. In 2006 the University reviewed all its existing agreements and a database of agreements has been established with agreements reviewed, renewed or allowed to lapse. The International Collaboration Agreement Group manages all partnership agreements and is charged with ensuring that agreements with partners meet the needs of USP as well as the partners. Currently the University has 133 agreements and in 2007 has signed about twelve new agreements largely with academic institutions. While the agreements have a positive impact on the University, there is need for rigorous cost/benefit analysis as well as an analysis of the costs of managing the agreements. The University needs to be aware of its priorities and use them in making decisions about which partnerships to enter (Recommendation 9).

8.4   *Alumni*

Although the Court of Convocation elects two members to the University Council, efforts to formalise alumni relationships in a USP Alumni association have so far met with only partial success. The bonds formed amongst the student body serve as a strong network across the region as USP graduates assume responsible positions in government, international organisations, non-government organisations and the private sector. These graduates are in a position to champion and advocate for the University and should be supported by the University to do so.

APPENDIX A: THE UNIVERSITY OF THE SOUTH PACIFIC

History and Location
The University of the South Pacific was established in 1968 at the old Royal New Zealand air force base in Suva, Fiji, where the University's central administration is located today. It was founded to serve the South Pacific island countries through a regional approach to higher education, and continues to strive to meet their current and future needs. In the past 40years,USP has consolidated its position as the premier regional university for the South Pacific providing flexible study choice On-campus, Off-campus and On-line.

Today USP has 14 campuses 3 of which are in Fiji and one each in all the other member countries. The main campus, Laucala is in Fiji. The Alafua campus located in Samoa, is where the School of Agriculture and Food Technology is situated. The Emalus campus in Vanuatu, is the location for the School of Law.

Academic Profile
USP's academic structure consists of four faculties with student population as follows:

Faculty	Student number (EFTS)
Faculty of Arts and Law	2,529
Faculty of Business and Economics	3,131
Faculty of Islands and Oceans	1,072
Faculty of Science and Technology	2,173
Non – Faculty based sections	2145

Special Characteristics
USP is multi-owned and multi-funded by 12 island countries namely, Cook Islands. Fiji, Kiribati, Marshalls Islands, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tokelau, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The multicultural nature of the staff and student body gives USP an exceptional character. The University, supported by USPNET, delivers tertiary and community education by various modes to all the countries through its 14 campuses. More than 50 % of the student population study Off-campus through Distance and Flexible Learning (DFL).

Key Statistics (2007)

Total Student Enrolments(EFTS):				11,050
Research Student Enrolments:				135
Postgraduate Student Enrolments:				605
International Student Enrolments:				128
Student Load (EFTS) by campus				
Cook Islands	90	Niue	5	
Fiji, Labasa	224	Samoa, Alafua	237	
Fiji, Laucala	7610	Solomon Islands	713	
Fiji, Lautoka	520	Tokelau	2	
Kiribati	515	Tonga	240	
Marshall Islands	48	Tuvalu	96	
Nauru	30	Vanuatu, Emalus	721	
Total Staff (FTE)		Academic:		321.3
		General:		
		Total:		
Total Operating Revenues:				**FJ$ 129,961,000**
Total Operating Expenses:				**FJ$ 130,955,334**

APPENDIX B: THE AUDIT PANEL

Emeritus Professor Gus Guthrie, Former Vice-Chancellor & President, University Technology Sydney

Professor Joyce Kirk, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Students), RMIT University

Associate Professor Elizabeth McKinley, University of Auckland, New Zealand

Professor Robyn Quin, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Curtin University (Chair)

Dr Antony Stella, Audit Director, Australian Universities Quality Agency

APPENDIX C: ABBREVIATIONS AND DEFINITIONS

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

ASQC	Academic Standards and Quality Committee
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CEDT	Centre for Educational Development and Technology
DFL	distance and flexible learning
DFLSC	Distance and Flexible Learning Support Centre
DVC	deputy vice-chancellor
FRGAC	Faculty Research and Graduate Affairs Committee
GTF	Governance Task Force
HR	human resources
ICT	information and communication technologies
IP	intellectual property
IT	information technology
ITS	Information Technology Services
KPIs	key performance indicators
LMS	learning management system
NZUAAU	New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit
ORGA	Office of Research and Graduate Affairs
PF p	Performance Portfolio page reference
Portfolio	Performance Portfolio
PVC	pro vice-chancellor
PVC (A)	Pro Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
USP	University of the South Pacific
VC	Vice-Chancellor

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