

# Australian Catholic University

## Talloires Network Institutional Assessment June, 2007

### 1. *Mission and History*

#### 1.1 What relevant objectives are set for the institution in its founding document (charter or equivalent)

The University was established in 1992 as a company limited by guarantee. The Constitution of Australian Catholic University Limited includes the following statements:

*(d)...For the purpose of the Objects of the Company, to furnish and allocate, in accordance with the educational policies of the University from time to time, sufficient funds and resources to the States and Territory where the educational establishments conducted by the Predecessor Colleges were formerly conducted to enable the University:...*

*(iv) To enhance the University's relationship with the local community in the State or Territory...*

*(g) To establish facilities for providing courses of study or instruction at such levels of attainment as the Senate considers proper to meet the needs of the community.*

*These objectives of the company are pursued within the mission of the University which includes the following statements:*

*Through fostering and advancing knowledge in education, health, commerce, the humanities, the sciences and technologies, and the creative arts, Australian Catholic University seeks to make a specific contribution to its local, national and international communities....*

*Its ideal graduates will be highly competent in their chosen fields, ethical in their behaviour, with a developed critical habit of mind, an appreciation of the sacred in life, and a commitment to serving the common good.*

**1.2 What relevant expectations are held by those who fund your work and support it (including politically)?**

The stakeholders in the University are, in the first instance, the members of the Company that conducts the University, the federal government of the Commonwealth of Australia through its Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) that funds part of the University's recurrent and capital needs, and the students who pay fees to study its courses. The expectations of the company are that the University will pursue its mission and in so doing give effect to the aspirations for service held by the religious institutes and dioceses responsible for the colleges from which the University formed. For DEST, the expectation is that the University will contribute high quality teaching and scholarship in a diverse higher education system and provide graduate professionals and leaders to staff health, education, and welfare agencies including importantly those operated by the Catholic Church in Australia. As for the University's students, they expect a high quality education in the Catholic intellectual tradition, which includes a keen awareness of social justice, human dignity, and the common good.

**1.3 Which external groups are represented *ex officio* and *de facto* on the institution's governance or senior management bodies? How are the relevant individuals chosen and how do they see their roles?**

The Senate of the University is responsible to the Company for the good governance of the University. The Senate comprises:

- two persons (Chancellor and Vice-Chancellor) who are members *ex-officio*;
- the Pro-Chancellor;
- eight persons elected by the members of the Company having regard among other things) to the need for broad community involvement;
- three persons elected by and from the academic staff of the University;
- one person elected by and from the general staff of the University;
- one student of the University.'

A self-evaluation of its operations by Senate in 2005 indicated some concerns that its links to community interests were worthy of more enhancement and this has led to a review of the ways advice on local needs and demands can be improved. A report from the review is awaited.

The Executive Committee comprises senior managers in the University and includes a representative of the Indigenous community.

**1.4 To whom does the institution regard itself as accountable for its civic mission? For example, is there a “stakeholder group” such as a University Court, and if so, how does this work?**

The University is responsible to the Company and to the federal government for remaining true to its mission. The Senate reports annually to the Company on the discharge of the University’s responsibilities including those relating to its ‘civic mission’, and the Vice-Chancellor reports to DEST annually in terms of a series of indicators of overall performance, including specific reference to community engagement.

**1.5 Are civic engagement and social responsibility objectives (as defined by answers to question 1.1 above) specified in the institution’s strategic plan? If so, how, and with what indicators of success?**

Yes. The following sections of the Strategic Plan 1999-2008 (Revised) apply.

*7.5 Community Engagement*

*Participation of both students and staff in community activities that reflect concern for the welfare of society is an essential part of the University’s raison d’être and staff and students’ identification with it. Such participation is viewed as an integral component of the concept of community engagement in which the mutuality of staff, students and community needs should be met. Consistent with its Mission, the University will engage in substantial analysis of contemporary issues in which its expertise can be publicly manifest.*

*Commercial research activities provide an excellent way to link with community needs and to improve the research performance of ACU National. Mission-focussed consultancies that are undertaken with the sponsorship of the University may further enhance engagement with the community.*

*The University has introduced an award for staff recognising excellence in community engagement. It is presented annually and has rigorous procedures and processes in place so that the criteria and procedures for candidate selection can be better understood and relevant attributes valued.*

*7.6 Partnerships*

*The University respects the diversity that different groups bring to its partnerships and joint ventures in terms of expertise, knowledge, cultures and religious values.*

*In the context of the diversity the University will join with the community in research partnerships which are outcome-focussed, ethically informed, and values-based.*

*Effective partnerships are a priority at all levels of the University and are suggested in ways which acknowledge their current and future potential.*

*The University acknowledges the importance of its partnerships with Catholic and other education, community and health sectors, with other higher education institutions nationally and internationally, and with industry and business. Engaging with these organisations and institutions in planning teaching, research and community initiatives is essential to advance the Mission of the University and in addressing its own and its partners' priorities.*

*The University values its relationships with Indigenous communities and organisations and acknowledges their importance in addressing equity issues. Partnerships which best meet the needs of regional areas through Aquinas and Signadou Campuses are a priority for developing the regional character of the University. Partnerships which facilitate the University's engagement with marginalised groups in Australia and internationally are integral to its commitment to justice and equity. Where partnerships are highly strategic there may need to be additional resources allocated to support them.*

*The unique learning that occurs from joint community-university research provides key sources of knowledge in the University's teaching and learning, and scholarship and research, and its assisting the community in addressing issues and problems of concern to the community helps to ensure that the University does not become self-referential. Accordingly, ACU National develops partnerships with universities and other institutions which give priority to learning and research through community engagement in ways that enhance a community's well being and capacity, and prepare graduates who are engaged citizens and socially and morally responsible professionals.*

**1.6 Have changes over time in the institution's composition or status (e.g. mergers, acquisitions, large scale contracts) affected the engagement agenda? If so, in what manner?**

No. The University has consolidated the number of campuses from which it operates since its foundation but has not been subject to merger. Its responsibilities

have not altered but its capacity to meet them has grown as it has matured as an organisation.

## **2. Balance of activities**

### **2.1 Give a brief assessment of the chief economic and social needs of your region and/or locality. Include a description of the main sources of this information.**

The University is based on six campuses in three states and one Territory in Australia. In several cases predecessor colleges of the University have operated from what is now a University campus and a good deal of 'local knowledge' has accrued to staff of the college (now University campus). In other cases (Melbourne and Brisbane) where the University moved to new campuses, detailed studies of the community were commissioned by the University before commencing operation. These involved study of historical, demographic, and geographic information provided by state and local government authorities.

The Brisbane campus is located in a working class area of the city with a good deal of light industry. It is in close proximity to high schools with low transfer rates of students to university.

The North Sydney campus is in an affluent area close to a commercial district and prestigious private schools.

The Strathfield campus is in a middle to upper middle class area, close to a large rail link and adjacent to a Catholic boys high school.

The Melbourne campus is in an old working class suburb. High density housing for low income earners is close by, as is a large hospital. The campus is centred in an area of high illicit drug use.

The Ballarat campus is in a formerly wealthy inland city, which is a focus for country people but has been hard hit by drought and rural recession. A second university is in the city.

The Canberra campus is located in a middle class suburb of the city, the nation's capital.

- 2.2 How does the institution’s *teaching* profile (by subject and level, and including continuous professional development (CPD) and lifelong learning) reflect the needs of the local community and region? To what extent does the curriculum incorporate relevant features of the following:**
- (a) structured and assessed work experience and/or work-based learning;**
  - (b) “service learning”; and/or**
  - (c) prior or concurrent informal work experience?**

Undergraduate courses require and/or offer students opportunities to be engaged with the community through:

- volunteer experiences;
- community engagement based components of units;
- community engagement based learning and assessment; and
- research.

The last three of these opportunities are also available to postgraduate students. Community engagement experiences for students is integral to the University’s Teaching and Learning Plan 2006-2008.

**2.2.1 How can representatives of the local and regional economy and community influence curriculum and other choices?**

Course development and review committees include such representatives. Liaison committees have been established with key stakeholders in some areas.

**2.3 What proportion of the institution’s *research* activity is directed towards the needs of the local and regional economy and society?**

The proportion has not been quantified. Priority in research grant support is given to linkage type research with community stakeholders.

**2.3.1 How can representatives of the local and regional economy and community influence research priorities?**

Such representatives are members of the management committees of the University’s research flagships and centres.

**2.4 How would the institution describe its service objectives (i.e., its commitments to business and the community)?**

The University is committed to engagement with its communities. In each state in which the University operates there are Chapters (advisory committees) that comprise representatives drawn from the community. Senior managers in the University attend these meetings and reports are provided to the Senate at regular intervals. In addition, community representatives are members of school and faculty committees.

**2.4.1 How can representatives of the local and regional economy and community influence activities in this area?**

There is no direct representation by the local or regional community as such on University committees but good relations are maintained with key community groups by staff and senior officers.

**2.5 Using as a proxy an estimate of staff time (academic and support), how far is engagement in each of the areas outlined in this section (teaching, research and service) directed towards:**

- (a) large business and industrial interest (including global and national organisations present in the region);**
- (b) small and medium-sized enterprises;**
- (c) other public services (e.g. education, health, social services);**
- (d) the voluntary sector, community groups and NGOs; and**
- (e) cultural and artistic organisations?**

Sector	% Staff Time
Large Business and Industrial Interest	0
Small and medium sized enterprises	5
Other public services	10
Voluntary sector, community groups, NGOs	65
Cultural and artistic organisations	20
Total	100



**2.6 Does the institution have any other policies (e.g. on environmental responsibility, equality of opportunity, recruitment, procurement of goods and services) which can act positively or negatively on the region and the locality?**

The University has a strong commitment to environmental sustainability and has policies in the areas of Equal Opportunity Employment and Indigenous Employment, and cultural diversity.

**3. Organisation**

**3.1 Does the institution have specialised services to meet civic and related objectives (e.g. web-based resources, business advisory services, help-desks, formal consultancy and related services)?**

**3.1.1 If so, do these operate at a central or a devolved level, and if both how do the levels relate?**

Although the University is sensitive to the regional environments in which it operates it is organised essentially as a national university and delivers services, with few exceptions, centrally.

**3.2 Does the institution have either dedicated or shared services which are community-facing (such as libraries, performance or exhibition spaces, and sports facilities)?**

Library services are shared with local communities within the limits of copyright law. Campus run cultural events are open to the public.

**3.3 On what terms and with what frequency and volume of uptake are the institution's campus or campuses accessible to the community?**

Campus space can be hired for events. In some cases fee hire is waived in the interests of the community. Frequency of use varies considerably from campus to campus.

**3.4 What arrangements are made for the security of the members, guests, and property of the institution?**

Public events necessitate that the private security services contracted by the University be available. The cost is paid for by the user of the University facility or the fee is waived, depending on the purpose of the event. The nature of the event

may require the University's insurers to be consulted about coverage in case of an accident.

#### **4. People**

##### **4.1 Who takes primary responsibility for the institution's work in civic engagement and social responsibility as defined in response to question 1.5 (above)?**

All senior staff share a responsibility in this area, but the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Quality and Outreach) is primarily responsible to the Vice-Chancellor for this.

##### **4.2 Does the institution's policy for student recruitment have a local or a regional dimension? If so, how is this determined and what impact does it have on the make-up of the institution community?**

Student recruitment is primarily a responsibility of University Relations which works through the three faculties of the University. University Relations has staff on each campus who work to recruit students through school visits, events on campus, and the local and regional media.

##### **4.3 To what extent are civic engagement and social responsibility objectives built into contractual terms for:**

- a) senior managers;**
- b) academic staff; and**
- c) support staff (including the specialised staff referred to in question 3.1 above)?**

All staff as a condition of their appointment commit to support the Mission of the University. Academic staff are expected as part of their role to contribute to service in an engaged way with the community.

##### **4.3.1 Can achievement against such objectives positively influence decisions on promotion and re-grading?**

Senior managers are assessed in terms of performance contracts which may include specific requirements for community service and engagement. Expectations of academic staff in this area are being tightened and will influence successful review on an annual basis. Community service is currently a criterion considered for promotion of academic staff.

**4.4 Reflecting on the answer to question 2.2 (above), how far is the student body engaged in the economic and cultural life of the community through formal requirements?**

The requirements for most undergraduate programs in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences include a period of community service. For the Faculty of Education some but not all programs include such a requirement. In the Faculty of Health Sciences, demands by professional bodies for recognition largely prevent time being made available for this.

**4.5 What proportion of the student body (for example, postgraduate or post-experience students) is concurrently in full-time local or regionally-based employment?**

Unknown.

**4.6 What encouragement is there for members of staff to undertake aspects of community service (e.g. service on boards of other organisations, *pro bono* advice, elected political office)?**

Students are encouraged in pursuing the University's mission to be active in rendering service to their community and in engaging with it. Activities in this area are surveyed annually at the time staffs' research contributions are collected, and staff are aware that their efforts in this area are relevant to their promotion opportunities.

**4.7 What is the extent of student volunteering in the community, and how is this organised?**

**Does it attract:**

- (a) formal support (e.g. timetable concessions, payment of expenses); and/or**
- (b) academic credit?**

Practice varies considerably from faculty to faculty. In some cases voluntary service may contribute to or be required for satisfactory completion of a course.

## **5. Monitoring, evaluation and communication**

### **5.1 Has the institution undertaken any survey research to test internal and/or external interest in the proposals for the civic engagement and social responsibility agenda? If so, please summarise the results.**

The University was the principal partner in research into benchmarking community service in teacher education programs in Australia and a partner into the community engagement of universities in Victoria. The first research included a forum with community partners and the second research project included an extensive set of interviews with stakeholders regarding the University's community engagement. This second study provided recommendations for structural ways of enhancing communication and engagement.

### **5.2 What steps does the institution take to consult upon and publicise its civic engagement and social responsibility agenda? [It may be helpful to review such publications as Annual Reports, newsletters and alumni communications.]**

Community engagement is reviewed in the University's Annual Report. The work of the University is 'showcased' in its magazine 'Acunique'. Volume 1 was devoted to Community Engagement and described a number of projects the University was involved in with external partners.

### **5.3 What do you regard as the level of public confidence held at national, regional and local level in the overall performance of your institution? What steps can be taken either to maintain or improve this level?**

Public confidence in the University's performance should be high given its Mission and its continued involvement in activities in the community, some of which have drawn national attention. Where community groups have had first hand experience in working with the University, confidence is high that we are interested in genuine collaboration over the long term and deliver on our commitments. The University over the preceding two years has made adjustments to its structure and committed considerable resources to community engagement to ensure that this is a recognisable, valued, and distinctive aspect of its contribution to society.

## **Top Two Contributions**

1. Engaging the Homeless in University Study. Staff of the University adapted the Clemente program pioneered by Earl Shorris in the USA to provide an opportunity for homeless people first in Sydney and now in Brisbane and Canberra to take regular offerings of the University in history, theology, and art appreciation. This has led to formal course awards for some participants in the first cohort of the program in Sydney. The program is being extended to Melbourne and south west Sydney.
2. Supporting Teacher Training in East Timor. A program accredited by the University was conducted in East Timor for the preparation of school teachers. A staff member from the University's School of Education has been employed full-time for five years in East Timor on the program and staff from campuses of the University have visited the country on a regular basis. Forty-eight graduates of the program received their awards in 2006 at a graduation ceremony attended by the Vice-Chancellor. All are employed in schools in the regions they came from. These are the only graduates of a higher degree program in the country since it gained its independence. The program is continuing.