



AFTRS Progress Report

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Australian Government

Australian Film Television and Radio School

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Recommendation 1

AUQA recommends that the Academic Board pay further attention to its role in monitoring quality and standards to ensure robust academic oversight of all curriculum matters, including curriculum renewal, new developments and credit transfer.

A range of initiatives have been undertaken by AFTRS to strengthen and monitor the academic quality and standard of all matters relating to curriculum. A major strategic initiative has been the establishment of a Division of Research and Education to facilitate the development and strengthening of the quality and standards of AFTRS' courses through advice on such matters. To assure the success of this initiative AFTRS has appointed to the executive a senior academic (Professor Katherine Blashki) to lead the Division of Research and Education. Following on from this initiative, AFTRS has also conducted a major review of all curricula focusing on key questions of curriculum relevance and appropriateness in the context of current trends and future needs of both students and industry.

The major review of curriculum was led by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) with the Directors of the Teaching Divisions. All teaching staff were consulted through this process. The review resulted in the development of a new award program including the establishment of an undergraduate course, the Foundation Diploma, in addition to major changes to the current postgraduate courses being the Graduate Certificates, Graduate Diplomas, and the Master of Arts (Honours) degree. These major changes included the development of new curricula; the standardisation and consistency of education hours; the setting of assessment tasks; and the defining of grading guidelines for each qualification.

The standardisation of education hours in the postgraduate program was set at 240 credit points for Graduate Certificates; 480 credit points for Graduate Diplomas; and 720 credit points for the Masters program (to be offered from 2010). The standardisation of courses has been effected on the basis of one credit point being equivalent to 10 indicative teaching hours. Graduate attributes which AFTRS defines as professional conduct that meets industry standards form an assessable component of all courses.

The new award program provides separate entry levels to each of 6 program levels. It provides greater accessibility to students by offering three pathways: one for those getting started in industry; part-time courses for those wishing to combine work and study; and full-time specialised courses for highly experienced practitioners. The new award program includes a Foundation Diploma, Graduate Certificates, and Graduate Diplomas. In addition to the ongoing MA (Honours) the new award program will commence in Semester 1, 2009.

Unlike the academic boards of most universities which are constituted through their enabling legislation, the AFTRS Academic Board exists as a sub-committee of the AFTRS Council. The Academic Board's role in responding to the introduction of new curricula has been to ensure:

- That all courses comply with national accreditation and quality assurance expectations
- That it provides policies and procedures to facilitate the development and continuous improvement of curricula to meet and anticipate the needs of highly talented and creative individuals and the training needs of industry.
- That its quality assurance processes are integrated and streamlined.

Recommendation 2

AUQA recommends that AFTRS strengthen the formal performance review of staff at all levels.

AFTRS has reviewed its performance management system. A new, more corporate objective focused process has been established and is being rolled out across the School. The intention of the performance management system is to enhance staff development and performance and to assist AFTRS to meet its objectives.

In reviewing its performance management system AFTRS created an incentive to assist with its implementation. The incentive links AFTRS achieving 80% staff participation in the performance management system with a salary increase to be delivered through the AFTRS Union Collective Agreement which was certified in late 2007.

Performance management has been identified in the AFTRS Risk Management Plan and a formal internal audit will be undertaken to monitor its success or otherwise. The Performance Management system will be reviewed by the Finance, Audit and Risk Management Committee (FARM) which is a sub-committee of Council.

Recommendation 3

AUQA recommends that AFTRS embed its intended graduate attributes into programs and courses and ensure a stronger alignment of assessment tasks and grade criteria with the attributes.

Through the review of curricula and the development of a new award program AFTRS has reviewed its policies on assessment, grading and progression rules.

The common attribute for all AFTRS graduates is defined as professional conduct. Professional conduct is an assessable component of all courses and as such is an explicit expectation of students to meet through their course of study. These attributes are articulated in the Course of Study rules students sign upon enrolment. Additionally attributes required for each discipline specialisation are reflected in the structure, intent and outcomes of the assessment tasks. Students are made aware of the achievement of these attributes through their syllabus documents.

Recommendation 4

AUQA recommends that AFTRS strengthen its oversight and monitoring of student assessment procedures to ensure that the system provides fair, valid and consistent judgements of student work

In its Corporate Plan for 2008-2011, approved by the Minister for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts, AFTRS has incorporated the strategy of introducing a process of continual improvement to strengthen the oversight and monitoring of student assessments. With the development of a new award program in 2009 there has been a clear focus on the standardisation of assessment tasks and grading guidelines to ensure consistency, rigour and fairness in the judgement of student work. The application of consistent grading guidelines across all programs is incorporated in all syllabus documents so that students have a full understanding of the criteria which determines their grades. The grading guidelines are as follows:

High Distinction (85% - 100%) (HD)

This category is reserved for students who demonstrate exceptional achievement in all aspects. They demonstrate innovation, high-level collaboration and advanced skills.

Assignments/production work for this grading will demonstrate exceptional achievement.

- A consistently excellent and accurate performance of technical/specialist ability.
- A highly developed understanding of the production process overall.
- Indication of comprehensive research methods.
- A highly developed demonstrated sense of collaboration.
- Solid application and extension of course content.
- Highly developed written and verbal communication skills.
- Highly developed ability to experiment and demonstrated willingness to take risks.

Distinction (75% - 84%) (D)

Assignments/production work for this grading will demonstrate outstanding achievement.

- A consistently high level and accurate performance of technical/specialist ability.
- A highly developed understanding of the production process overall.
- Indication of highly developed research methods (if relevant).
- A well developed sense of collaboration.
- Very solid grasp and application of course content.
- Well developed written and verbal communication skills.

Credit (65% - 74%) (C)

Assignments/production work for this grading will show an above average achievement in all areas. Compared with the distinction category, there may not be the same imagination and innovation but other elements will be present to a substantial degree. In particular, the following characteristics will be evident:

- A consistently solid and accurate performance of technical/specialist ability.
- A well developed understanding of the production process overall.
- Indication of good research methods.
- A well developed sense of collaboration.
- Clear application of course content.
- Clarity in written and verbal communication skills.

Pass Division (55% - 64%) (P)

This category represents an average level of achievement. The production process is well known technically, but may not be completely consistent. It shows evidence of sincere effort but does not have the polish or comprehensive understanding found in the higher level assessments.

The student's work demonstrates the following characteristics:

- Generally secure technical and production knowledge.
- Limited innovation.
- Limitations in communication and collaboration.

Fail (0% - 54%) (F)

- This grade is awarded when the students' work shows a serious lack of technical and production knowledge required by the course modules. There will be little evidence of coherent understanding of the production process. A supplementary examination or resubmission opportunity will be offered when the result is in the 45% - 49% range.
- If the course module is production based an alternative workshops can only be offered at the discretion of the Head of Department in consultation with Review Board.

Recommendation 5

AUQA recommends that AFTRS develop a research framework which has a clear industry research and development focus

AFTRS has prioritised the School's research strategy, planning and activities by linking it to the achievement of the School's objectives in its Corporate Plan 2008-2011. As mentioned above, AFTRS has allocated significant resources to the establishment of the Division of Research and Education and the appointment of a high-level academic. The Division of Research and Education incorporates all AFTRS departments for which research and innovation is a key objective. These departments are the Education Unit, Screen Studies, Centre for Screen Business, and the Library. The discrete research activities of the Laboratory for Advanced Media Production (LAMP) are also overseen by the Division.

The Division is currently developing the AFTRS research framework and strategy in consultation with the teaching staff, AFTRS and other key stakeholders. In view of the human and financial resources required to establish the new award program, the timeline for developing and implementing a comprehensive research plan is as follows:

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| • Development of research plan | March 2009 |
| • Implementation of research plan | July 2009 |
| • Progressive review of research activities | Biannually from December 2009. |

AFTRS has also reviewed its MA (Hons) program sourcing new supervisors and allocating appropriate resources to support those students undertaking research projects.

Recommendation 6

AUQA recommends that the Academic Board through its Research Committee take a pro-active role in establishing the research focus and direction of AFTRS

The Terms of Reference and membership of the Research Committee are being revisited as part of the development of the research strategy currently underway. The Terms of Reference for the proposed Research Committee will provide a quality assurance process for research conducted through the School.

Recommendation 7

AUQA recommends that AFTRS develop a comprehensive research implementation plan addressing the issues of staffing, infrastructure and support systems, prior to expanding its student research

As described above, the Division of Research and Education is developing a research framework, strategy and plan. A comprehensive implementation plan in which the issues of staffing and infrastructure are addressed is the third part of this planning activity. The implementation will be accordance with the infrastructure and resources available to AFTRS. AFTRS' research is a niche activity. As with all other activities of the School as prescribed in AFTRS' enabling legislation, AFTRS research must demonstrate a direct benefit to the School and industry. The timeline as described above takes into account the completion of the research plan prior to an expansion of its research student intake.

Recommendation 8

In the light of the long-standing commitment demonstrated by AFTRS toward the development of an Indigenous voice in film and broadcast, AUQA recommends that AFTRS examine the need and the opportunity to embed Indigenous perspectives into the programs across the curriculum.

It is AFTRS policy to actively support and encourage Indigenous education and participation in the screen arts and the broadcast sector. The focus of AFTRS' strategy over the reporting period has been to recruit, support and retain Indigenous students in their course of study. In 2008 AFTRS provided scholarships from its Myer Fund to 5 Indigenous students who applied to and enrolled in its flexibly delivered Graduate Certificate courses. The 2008 Macquarie Group Foundation Scholarship was held by Jeffery Dunn, the first Indigenous composer to be accepted into AFTRS.

AFTRS has also been seeking to optimise opportunities for Indigenous students by working strategically with organisations in the screen and broadcast industries. AFTRS is establishing a shared job position with Screen Australia which among other activities will support Indigenous students to transition into sustainable careers in the screen and broadcast industries.

With these strategies successfully implemented, AFTRS is now establishing a research project to investigate the most effective way to embed an indigenous perspective in the curriculum. A part of this investigation will establish how an Indigenous perspective has been embedded in the curriculum of schools and the tertiary sector. This overview will assist in evaluating the likely knowledge and understanding of Indigenous perspectives students already have when they enrol at AFTRS. The investigation will also assess the success or otherwise of the efforts of educational institutions to embed an Indigenous perspective in curriculum, and the reasons why. From this research, AFTRS intends to develop and embed in its curriculum an Indigenous perspective that is genuinely effective and contributes to the unique education experience AFTRS provides.

Affirmations

Affirmation 1

AUQA affirms the Council's recognition of the need for systems to ensure corporate continuity and corporate memory

AFTRS' governance arrangements are managed through established systems to ensure corporate continuity and corporate memory. The AFTRS Council is responsible to the Federal Parliament through the Minister for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts. All new members of the AFTRS Council receive a Corporate Governance folder on commencement of their term. The folder contains all the relevant information for them to meet their responsibilities under the *Australian Film Television Radio School Act 1973*, the *Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997* and the relevant terms of reference for Council sub-committees (the Finance and Audit Management Committee (FARM) and the Academic Board), Administrative Orders, and the Minister's Statement of Expectations which outlines the government's expectations of AFTRS. Council and its sub-committees are minuted, approved and distributed as appropriate. FARM and Academic Board meetings are scheduled to meet in accordance with their terms of reference in anticipation of Council meetings and to refer any necessary matters to Council as appropriate. Over the course of the financial year 2007-2008 the AFTRS Council met seven times. All stakeholders have access to Council minutes (except for confidential items) which are held in the AFTRS Library and in the state branch offices.

Affirmation 2

AUQA affirms the emerging attention to key performance indicators and benchmarking for quality enhancement and encourage AFTRS to explore further opportunities for formal benchmarking with international comparators

AFTRS has developed a new Corporate Plan for 2008-2011. Its broad objectives are to strengthen its distinctive role in providing advanced education and training to the screen and broadcast industries through its educational programs; research; quality assurance, relationships with industry and key stakeholders; and effective resource management. A priority in developing the strategies to meet its objectives in the Corporate Plan was to also define targets to measure the progress of the implementation of the strategies over the three year period. The progress and success in meeting the targets will be measured through numerical Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Progress against the KPIs will be measured and reported biannually in AFTRS' Corporate Performance Reports to the Minister for the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage the Arts (DEWHA). The first of the bi-annual reports measures progress for the first six months of the financial year; the second of these reports measures progress for the whole financial year. The new range of KPIs was endorsed by the DEWHA and the Corporate Plan has received the Minister's approval.

AFTRS is a member of CILECT, the global association of the world's premier film schools. This organisation will provide AFTRS with a network of international comparators to access for benchmarking activities, at a future time when priorities and resources allow for it. The CEO of AFTRS and the Director, Screen Content are attending the Cilect Annual Congress which is being held in Beijing in November 2008.

Affirmation 3

AUQA affirms AFTRS' plan of action to develop a central, searchable policy database

AFTRS has established a secretariat to support the governance and management of the School. A key function of the secretariat is oversight of the development of policy in the School. A policy process framework has been approved by the AFTRS Executive and a register of all school policies is being compiled. The secretariat is also currently participating in the review of policies in preparation for the commencement of the new award program in 2009. The development of a central searchable database will be considered on the basis of purpose and priority amongst other administrative initiatives given the small size of AFTRS.

Affirmation 4

AUQA notes that AFTRS has identified the need to improve the quality of teaching and learning and affirms its efforts in implementation appropriate strategies to address this issue

The Division of Research and Education is responsible for improving the quality of teaching and learning and ensuring that the development of curriculum is based on clear educational principles and quality outcomes. The expansion of the award program in 2009 requires increased numbers of teachers. To assure the quality of the delivery of programs AFTRS has developed a Graduate Certificate in Higher Education: Teaching in Creative Media. The purpose of the Graduate Certificate is to equip teachers with the skills, proficiencies and reflective capacity to be effective in a creative media environment. All teaching staff are encouraged to undertake the Graduate Certificate as a part of their professional development. The effect of this teacher training will address the gap between working in industry and teaching at AFTRS.

In addition there is substantial ongoing work in developing an online strategy for teaching and learning. A training program in Moodle/Online learning is scheduled for teaching and administration staff in November 2008 so that its use is optimised.

Affirmation 5

AUQA affirms the direction being taken by AFTRS in implementing the expansion of flexible delivery, ensuring consistency in the expansion, and the appointment of expert educational personnel to support the expansion in a systematic way

The purpose of AFTRS' flexible delivery program is to provide students who wish to continue working while studying with the opportunity to access part-time courses offered in a range of geographic locations and through various modes of delivery, for example through intensive weekend residentials or online delivery.

The Flexible Delivery Steering Committee (FDSC) was formed by AFTRS to oversee the systematic implementation of the program in Sydney, Brisbane, Melbourne, and Adelaide. The committee was comprised of key education and administrative personnel with direct responsibility for the implementation of the program.

Applications for the 2008 flexible delivery program were taken from around the country with strong interest from applicants wanting to access those programs offered locally in Brisbane, Melbourne, and Adelaide as well as in Sydney.

The flexible delivery program in 2008 was comprised of the following courses.

- Graduate Certificate in Business Administration (Creative Industries) (intensive residentials in Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney)
- Graduate Certificate: Film and Television - Digital Media 3D Animation (Adelaide, Sydney)
- Graduate Certificate in Commercial Radio Programming (distance education - online)
- Graduate Certificate: Screen Drama - Screenwriting and Producing (Melbourne, Sydney)
- Graduate Certificate: Screen Drama - Directing and Screenwriting (Brisbane, Melbourne, Sydney)
- Graduate Diploma in Radio Broadcasting (Recognised Prior Learning of assessable short courses and residentials)
- Graduate Diploma in Screen Composition (Melbourne)

In 2009 AFTRS will offer a further two flexibly delivered Graduate Diplomas in addition to its part-time Graduate Certificate courses. They are a Graduate Diploma in Screenwriting and a Graduate Diploma in Screen Business and Producing.

Affirmation 6

AUQA affirms the efforts of AFTRS to coordinate the state offices and integrate their activities and accountabilities in central, planning and to strengthen the quality control measures operating at state level.

AFTRS has brought the state offices into the Division of Corporate Services to integrate them in the School's central planning and to ensure their activities meet the standards of all other AFTRS activities. As a part of this quality control communication lines with the state offices have improved with weekly phone conferences occurring between the Sydney office and the state office managers. These conferences cover feedback on Executive decisions that impact the state offices; planning and liaising for short courses which are scheduled on a seasonal basis; updates on changes in policies; and briefings on events required by visiting AFTRS staff.

A major initiative in 2008 has been the State offices convening state based Industry Advisory Groups (IAGs) in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria to advise on training needs at a local level. These meetings have been well supported by local industry and the outcomes will assist in course development across the country.

Affirmation 7

AUQA affirms AFTRS' implementation of the integrated student information management system and urges AFTRS to pay attention to data security, quality control and staff training.

In May 2007 AFTRS' Student Services department switched over to the new Student Management System Database, the PEPi System. In November 2007, the new AFTRS website was launched allowing students to apply for AFTRS short courses via the web and to enrol them through the AFTRS website.

From January through to July 2008 testing of the integrated system (the new website and PEPi) focused on assuring security and quality control of all data including academic transcripts; connection with the online payment gateway; and compliance reporting such as Fee-HELP.

Staff Training in the system has been provided in two tranches. The first sessions were provided in May and June of 2007 when the system was first installed. In June 2008 following extensive testing of the system, training was provided to all teaching, administrative, state office, student services and finance staff. The training focused on the system's procedures relating to short course enrolments and payments, direct data entry of completed assessments and grades, and on all financial procedures.