In 2008 the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) appointed an Audit Panel to undertake a quality audit of RMIT University. The Panel included a nominee of the VRQA who was supported by a researcher to consider the VET samples. Within the scope of the particular audit, AUQA’s Cycle 2 audits emphasise institutional standards and performance outcomes, with attention to benchmarking activities and their effect on standards and outcomes.

In addition to the National Protocols for Higher Education Approval Processes, relevant external reference points for this audit include:

- AVCC (now Universities Australia) Provision of Education to International Students: Code of Practice and Guidelines for Australian Universities
- Education Services for Overseas Students Act 2000
- National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students
- Australian Qualifications Framework
- Australian Quality Training Framework
- Institution Assessment Framework Portfolio
- Course Experience Questionnaire
- Graduate Destination Survey
- Council of Australian University Librarians
- Tertiary Education Facilities Management Association
- Council of Australian University Directors of IT
- Australian Universities International Directors Forum

Quotations taken from the Portfolio are identified in the Report as (PF p).

The mission, objectives, vision and values of AUQA are shown in Appendix B, membership of the Audit Panel is provided in Appendix C and Appendix D defines abbreviations and technical terms used in this Report.

Full details of the Cycle 2 audit process are available in the AUQA Audit Manual.

AUQA preselected the theme of ‘Internationalisation’ for the audit of RMIT, taking into account: the offshore campus of RMIT in Vietnam, presence of offshore programs, the proportion of international students studying RMIT courses (39%); and recommendations from the 2003 AUQA audit (eg recommendations 19–21).

The theme of ‘Industry Engagement’, proposed by RMIT, was selected by AUQA in view of its significance for the University’s strategic planning, its dual sector nature, and the nature of the joint audit with VRQA.

The Audit Panel selected recommendations 11–17 on research and research training for follow-up, as attention to research related matters was a significant issue in the 2003 AUQA audit.
On 22 December 2008, RMIT presented its submission (Performance Portfolio) to AUQA, including 43 supporting materials. The Audit Panel met on 22 January 2009 to consider these materials.

The Audit Panel Chairperson and Audit Director undertook a Preparatory Visit to RMIT on 03 February. During that visit, the answers to questions and additional information requested by the Panel were discussed, as well as the Audit Visit program.

A visit to four educational partners of RMIT in the delivery of offshore programs was conducted from 10 to 11 February and from 26 to 28 February 2009. The Vietnam campus of RMIT was visited from 23 to 24 February and 2 March 2009. A written report of these activities was circulated to the full Audit Panel prior to the main Audit Visit. The main Audit Visit to the University’s city campus took place between 16 and 20 March 2009.

In all, the Audit Panel spoke with around 274 people in the City Campus during the course of the audit, including the Vice-Chancellor, the Chancellor, senior management, academic and general staff, external stakeholders, and undergraduate and postgraduate students (including international students); the Panel delegation spoke to a number of people in the offshore partnership programs and around 125 people in the Vietnam campus. Open sessions were available for any member of the University community to meet the Audit Panel and four people took advantage of this opportunity.

AUQA expresses its appreciation to Professor Jim Barber and others at RMIT for their assistance throughout the audit process. AUQA also thanks RMIT for its ready production of additional information and for granting the Panel secure access to its intranet for the period of the audit.

This Report relates to the situation current at the time of the Audit Visit, which ended on 20 March 2009, and does not take account of any changes that may have occurred subsequently. The Report records the conclusions reached by the Audit Panel based on the documentation provided by RMIT as well as information gained through interviews, discussion and observation.

While every attempt has been made to reach a comprehensive understanding of the University’s activities within the scope of the audit, the Report does not identify every aspect of quality assurance and its effectiveness or shortcomings.
APPENDIX A2: AQTF AUDIT OF RMIT 2009

A: Introduction
An AQTF audit of RMIT’s vocational education and training (VET) operations was conducted in conjunction with the AUQA audit of RMIT.

The focus of the AUQA audit and the AQTF audit are similar. The AUQA audit method evaluates aspects of an institution’s quality assurance arrangements on the following dimensions: objectives, approach, deployment, results and improvement. The AQTF emphasises a systematic approach to management and delivery of services, as well as the organisation’s continuous improvement processes.

A component of the second cycle audit by AUQA included an exploration of the themes of ‘industry engagement’ and ‘internationalisation’.

The level and degree of industry engagement affects the implementation of AQTF standards 1.1, 1.3, 1.4 and 1.5 – standards, which relate to the University providing quality vocational education training and assessment services. The industry engagement theme also linked well with AQTF Standard 1.2, which relates to the development of training and assessment strategies in consultation with industry.

The internationalisation theme, especially in terms of offshore programs, allowed exploration of AQTF Standard 3.2, which relates to the University monitoring training and assessment provided on its behalf.

The themes as they relate to the AUQA audit are not discussed or reviewed in detail in this AQTF summary report. These themes are considered at whole of University level in the main body of the Report.

RMIT provided a Portfolio and supporting documents, which addressed matters of relevance to both AUQA and the VRQA. The Portfolio related to whole of University rather than one that delineated between the higher education operations and VET operations. In the Performance Portfolio RMIT stated that it adopts ‘an integrated approach to the way it manages VET and Higher Education operations’...and that it ‘operates strategically and organisationally in a way that integrates VET and Higher Education (HE) to the greatest possible extent’ (Summary of Key Activities with AQTF Essential Standards (Alignment with AQTF) p2)). Hence this AQTF summary does not seek to duplicate information already included in the main Report that relates to whole of University processes.

B: Methodology
One VRQA auditor was a member on the AUQA Panel and another VRQA AQTF audit researcher undertook the concurrent audit of four qualifications to supplement the information provided in the RMIT Portfolio and test the deployment of the AQTF and outcomes achieved by the University.

The AUQA Panel member reviewed at University level AQTF standards 1.1, 2.1, 2.4, 2.6 and 3.1 as part of AUQA review panel processes, including review of the Performance Portfolio. The VRQA AUQA Panel member provided the link between the AUQA Panel and that of the AQTF audit researcher; providing information to the AUQA Panel and also requesting the AQTF audit researcher for further details in areas of interest.

Following discussions at the Portfolio Meeting four qualifications were selected for audit. The four qualifications sampled for audited were:

- TAA40104 Certificate IV in Training and Assessment
- LMF30302 Certificate III in Furniture Making
- BSB50101 Diploma of Business
- HLT43507 Certificate IV in Optical Dispensing.

These four qualifications covered the following areas of provision:
- Transnational provision
- Onshore international provision
- Traineeship and apprenticeship provision
- Cross school delivery.

The sample chosen for the audit was a small one and was not intended to be representative of the University which has over 300 VET programs. However, the opportunity to examine four qualifications in depth provided additional information for RMIT to consider about the implementation of the AQTF and outcomes achieved. Information gained in the AQTF audit of the four programs was used as supplementary information provided to the AUQA Panel.

While reviewing the four qualifications, the VRQA AQTF audit researcher focused on the following AQTF standards: 1.1 (as it informed 1.2), 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 2.2, 2.3 (as it pertained to traineeship and apprenticeship programs), 3.2 and 3.3.

As a result of the audit of the four qualifications, the University was provided with individual qualification reports as well as a report that summarised systemic issues.

The summary of findings in this appendix relate to the key findings of the AUQA AQTF Panel member arising from the portfolio review and Audit Visit as well as from the sampling undertaken by the VRQA AQTF audit researcher.

C: AQTF Review

C.1 Management systems and continuous improvement (AQTF Standards 1.1, 2.1, 2.4, 2.5, 3.1, 3.3, Condition 6)

The Alignment with AQTF document (p2) noted that as RMIT has adopted an integrated approach there is only one Strategic Plan, one Business Plan and one Academic Plan. The University’s strategic plan is the principal document from which cascades business plans, academic plans, as well as learning and teaching strategy, international offshore strategy and industry engagement strategy.

The Alignment with AQTF document also noted that ‘as a dual sector institution, RMIT’s systems and processes are designed to support VET and higher education activities wherever possible. The Academic Board governs both higher education and VET policy decisions and has a standing committee devoted to academic matters relating to TAFE’ (p41). Many of RMIT’s schools are dual sector and deliver both higher education and VET programs. Only in situations where circumstances require it are there separate structures and processes established for VET.

A range of processes are in place that relate to the University’s approach to continuous improvement. Reference to these processes is made in the Report in section 2.3 and relate to quality assurance and systems processes.

The Alignment with AQTF document aligns key University strategies to the AQTF and continuous improvement, such as:
- TAFE Business Process Improvement Group
- Student feedback, including surveys, consultative committees, consultation on policies, exit surveys, formal consultation, complaints and appeals
• Employer and external stakeholder feedback, including advisory committees
• Annual profile planning
• Annual program reviews
• Policy development and review
• AQTF Implementation Plan, including AQTF self review
• Supporting improvement through Academic Standards Framework, Learning and Teaching Investment Fund.

Reviews:
The Performance Portfolio (pp36–37) indicated that since the last AUQA audit:
• Cyclical organisational reviews were introduced in 2004 and are essential to quality assurance and continuous improvement
• Various reviews have taken place, targeted at continuous improvement across all of its operations.

Especially relevant to the AQTF audit were:
• Program annual reviews
• AQTF self reviews.

During the audit process evidence indicated that these key processes have been implemented and reported to relevant committees and used as the basis for continuous improvement.

The Performance Portfolio indicated that RMIT’s program annual review (PAR) process is based on data related to program quality, viability and relevance (PF p40). The PAR process is a key mechanism for reflecting and acting on student feedback for each program and contributes to alignment with AQTF Essential Standards 1.1 and 2.1. Each program review addresses program quality, program relevance, program viability, Work Integrated Learning (WIL), online learning, industry/professional accreditation and offshore operation review/audit, and also takes into account outcomes measures such as module load completion rates.

In terms of module load completion rates, RMIT has undertaken a project to investigate the decline of 6% in Module Load Completion Rate (MLCR) outcomes across VET from 2005 to 2007. A benchmarking study was undertaken and exit interviews with non-completing TAFE students were conducted. The benchmarking study resulted in the inclusion of a MLCR target in the RMIT Business Plan, and in targets within work plans at all levels from the PVC through to teaching staff.

In addition to annual reviews of programs, the audit team noted that an AQTF self review process was implemented during 2008. All VET programs were included in this process which involved a self review conducted by program teams, a desk-top evaluation of the completed template and feedback to program teams, production of a revised self-review template, a validation meeting conducted by a member of the university validation team attended by the program coordinator, college teaching and learning staff and Quality Consultancy Unit. Based on this process, each program team produced an action plan identifying strategies and timelines for program improvement. These action plans were to be logged with the Quality Consultancy Unit and built into work plans for implementation during 2009.

The Alignment with AQTF document notes that the RMIT Training Excellence Self-Review Tool was developed ‘to identify strengths and improvements to training and assessment processes at the program level. Action plans have been developed for each cluster or group of programs...to identify ongoing improvement strategies’ (pp5-6).

The audit revealed that for the AQTF self reviews, the RMIT self-assessment process is based on a tool which groups elements of the AQTF standards into themes. Each area has a series of questions to be
answered, pertaining to processes, evidence and outcomes, including review of MLCR and other data. Interviewees in the AUQA Panel process attested to the worth of this review. However, the AQTF audit team noted that in a number of theme sub-sections questions focused on processes rather than focusing the delivery teams’ and internal reviewer’s attention on the outcomes derived from the strategies employed. The audit team provided a suggestion that this self assessment tool be revised to further strengthen the focus of the review process.

Action plans emanating from the AQTF reviews for the sampled qualifications were on file; and the AQTF audit team provided a suggestion for improvement to further strengthen the specificity of documented actions to ensure appropriate on-going monitoring and closure.

The Performance Portfolio (p61) noted that the action plans developed from the self-review exercise will continue to be implemented and monitored at college level, and that full implementation of the University-level AQTF Improvement Plan is ongoing; and will be regularly monitored by the VET Committee.

**Feedback and student support:**
The Alignment with AQTF document stated that the University provides a range of support services to accommodate learners with special needs, and other support services including pastoral care, learning support, mentoring and peer tutoring programs and web assistance (p36). The main Report in section 3.6 provides additional information pertaining to student support, especially as it relates to international students.

The University’s Student Feedback Policy outlines the approach to seeking feedback from students. In place are:

- **Internal surveys:**
  - Course experience surveys which have a course focus
  - Student experience surveys which aim to capture feedback about the student’s total experience at RMIT including identifying priorities for improvements to students’ programs and to the overall services and educational offerings such as access to the library, online resources, computers and enrolment and support services.
- **External surveys:**
  - Student outcomes surveys are Victorian Government surveys designed to gather information from TAFE graduates and unit/module completers – it focuses on satisfaction with and opinions about their course of study.

The data presented in the Performance Portfolio indicated that VET course experience on the overall satisfaction index (p24) has improved annually since 2004 and was relatively high at 82%, although still below the state average.

The student experience survey measures student satisfaction across the range of support services, including study support and language support (PF p107). Although the onshore international student response is rising, satisfaction was at 54% and 55% for study support and language support respectively. There was no similar applicable data for offshore international students presented, although at program level feedback was sought from offshore international students but with few responses.

The Performance Portfolio indicated that the course experience and student experience surveys are not yet systematically applied to offshore programs, and that RMIT has developed a planned schedule to implement the course experience survey at all partner sites (PF p94 & 117).
**Records Management:**
The Alignment with AQTF document notes that RMIT demonstrates continuous improvement through its improved management of TAFE student records and administrative arrangements, through review and documentation of processes and development and implementation of relevant policy (p44). Changes and improvements have been made to:

- Student Records via implementation of a Course Guides System, Student Attendance Tracking System and Enrolment Online
- Process improvement including review of documentation of DELTA processes, guidelines for managing apprentices and trainees, and various academic polices and procedures to ensure relevancy for TAFE students
- Policies and procedures in relation to academic student files, guidelines for course and program management, records and document management framework.

The AQTF audit revealed that RMIT has an extensive range of documents within their quality management system. However in some instances references are made to the previous version of the AQTF. The audit team acknowledge that reviews of policies and procedures are cyclical in nature and that these inaccuracies will be corrected over time. However the AQTF audit team suggests that if policies and procedures are not reviewed when major changes, such as the review of the AQTF have occurred, references to outdated national standards could lead to inconsistency of approaches.

The AQTF audit revealed that there were no issues noted with student records. The Alignment with AQTF document stated that:

- Students have access to such information via requesting free of charge Statements of Attainment, as well as provision of Completion Statements upon graduation.
- RMIT has in place systems to ensure the accuracy of student records including Results Processing Online and Student Attendance Tracking System (p38).

However, it was noted that the qualifications and statement of attainment awards sampled at audit required revision to ensure:

- Qualification testamur includes qualification code and Employability Skills statement (a recently introduced requirement) where it is required; and a statement that the qualification was provided through government funding in traineeships/apprenticeship programs where relevant.
- Academic transcript includes NTIS codes for Units of Competency and the National Quality Council statement of attainment explanatory statement.

RMIT provided evidence of a project (Production of Statements of Attainment/Qualification Statements), which started in 2008, to design, develop, test and implement a new system to produce statements of attainments and qualification statements. The project aims to ensure accuracy in the production of the required type of statement for each qualification/skill set.

**C.2 Student information (AQTF Standards 2.2, 2.6)**
The Alignment with AQTF document stated that key information is provided to prospective students through such activities as RMIT Annual Open Day and RMIT’s Future Students website. This website included ‘program guides and handbooks which detail study pathways, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) applications, equity admission schemes, fees, complaints and appeals processes, student support services, scholarships and contact details of relevant personnel’ (p32).

The Alignment with AQTF document also stated that information provided to applicants for onshore programs included:

- Application Procedures Website
- Direct Application Form and attached information sheet