



**AUDIT REPORT
ON THE
INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION**

Executive Summary

November 2008

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HEQC Audit Report Number 17

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Acronyms

AAC	Academic Advisory Council
ADC	Academic Development Coordinator
ALIAS	ADvTECH Learner Integrated Administration System
AP	Audit Portfolio
CCI	Corporate College International
CHE	Council on Higher Education
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
ETSIP	Education and Training Sector Improvement Plan
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
IIE	The Independent Institute of Education
IMM	The Institute of Marketing Management
IP	Institutional Profile
IT	Information Technology
ITS	Integrated Tertiary Software
MIS	Management Information System
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PAC	Programme Advisory Committee
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
QA	Quality Assurance
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SLB	Student Liaison Body
SLP	Short Learning Programme
SRM	Students Relations Manager
UNISA	University of South Africa

Brief Overview of the Independent Institute of Education

1. The Independent Institute of Education (Pty) Ltd (IIE), a registered company specialising in the provision of education, is a division of the ADvTECH group, a listed company on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. The IIE is responsible for providing general, further and higher education. The IIE is a recently formed organisation, which brought together four providers of further and higher education; Varsity College, College Campus, Rosebank College and Vega, The Brand Communications School (hereinafter referred to as Vega). The IIE also has two groups of schools under its legal auspices. This report is only concerned with the four brands that offer higher education programmes.
2. Although the current dispensation is new, the IIE's four constituent brands have been active in the field of higher education at the undergraduate level for a number of years. Varsity College emerged in the early 1990s, originally supplying tuition to supplement the University of South Africa's distance education programmes (AP: 2:41). College Campus is less than ten years old and concentrates on certificates and diplomas in information technology (AP: 2:44-45). Rosebank College, by contrast, traces its complex origins to 1909 in the provision of applied education, as in secretarial and drafting skills, for example (AP: 2:37). And Vega, with its emphasis on branding, was established in 1999 (AP: 2:32). The IIE operates across nineteen sites in the urban areas of the Eastern and Western Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Gauteng. The headquarters in Sandton is not itself a campus but is where the final responsibility lies for quality assurance within the IIE. Notably, each trading division within the IIE retains its own educational and institutional identity (AP: 2:15). Varsity College has eight campuses (Durban North, Durban Westville, Pietermaritzburg, Sandton, Pretoria, Port Elizabeth, Gardens and Rondebosch); Rosebank College, five (Braamfontein, Cape Town, Durban, Benoni, Pretoria); College Campus, three (Parktown, Pretoria, Randburg); and Vega, the Brand Communications School, three (Sandton, Durban and Cape Town).
3. The IIE has 27 programmes registered on the National Qualifications Framework. These qualifications are mainly diplomas offered at NQF level 5. The exception is Vega, which offers both Bachelor's (NQF 6) and Bachelor (Honours) degrees (NQF 7). In addition, Varsity College provides a supplementary tutorial service for a number of degrees awarded by UNISA as well as for the Institute of Marketing Management. The delivery of programmes at the IIE are organised into four Faculties, namely, Business, Information Technology, Leisure, and Applied Humanities.
4. In March 2007, the IIE had a total enrolment of 17 843 students (all registrations in the four brands, including the tutorial function for other institutions). Varsity College accounts for 59.2% of those registered overall, followed by Rosebank College (26.6%), College Campus (9.2%), and Vega (5%). Most teaching is

carried out by independent contractors acting in a part-time capacity. The total complement of staff is 1353.

Institutional Mission

5. The Audit Portfolio states that graduates of the IIE should be employable; have appropriate skills; be ‘innovative, entrepreneurial and creative’, and have ‘high ethical values’ (AP: 2:2). From a range of interviews with staff the Panel did not find evidence of an understanding of what it means to be ‘innovative, creative and entrepreneurial’ across the brands, with the exception of Vega. Nor was there engagement with the notion of how ‘high ethical values’ could be inculcated into the life of the campuses. The Panel urges the institution to develop a shared understanding of these notions and develop these into plans, which can be implemented and monitored.
6. The Panel heard during interviews with senior staff that the IIE seeks to forge a unified identity for the institution, while retaining a distinguishable identity for each brand. However, the Panel heard in interviews with lecturers and students that many lecturers, and particularly students, associated themselves primarily with their brand; and no more so than Vega. This reflects both the past history and the current structural complexity of the IIE. The Panel found during interviews with many staff and students that the notion of the IIE as an overarching institution only became obvious as a consequence of preparing for the institutional audit. Given the newness of the establishment of the IIE, the Panel is of the opinion that a sustained effort will have to be made by the leadership of the IIE to establish its identity more widely among staff and students. This would allow staff and students to understand the links between the various trading divisions and the IIE itself including the potential academic and educational advantages and strengths of the IIE.

Recommendation 1

The HEQC recommends that the IIE ensure that there is an understanding and acceptance across all brands of the nature and identity of the IIE and that all its constituents have a clear understanding of the values of the institution, such as ‘innovative’, ‘entrepreneurial’, ‘creative’, ‘high ethical’.

7. The Audit Portfolio states that on all campuses there is a commitment to ‘equity of academic provision which translates into a student experience that is seamless, integrated, and holistic from application to graduation. This equity includes all aspects of academic quality including – small class sizes, assessment, qualified lecturers, libraries, laboratories, quality of material’ (AP: 2:15). After reviewing the documentation and conducting interviews with staff and students, the Panel noted that ensuring student equity across the campuses is a major challenge for the IIE. Each trading division appeals to a distinct, different market and has a unique socioeconomic profile, with fees being levied accordingly. From site visits the Panel observed that the campuses or learning sites themselves vary between relatively cramped, modest office blocks in inner urban areas to the more spacious and comparatively well-resourced and tailored suburban layouts. There is a wide variation across campuses in terms of teaching and learning facilities and

resources. Given such differentiation, the Panel is of the opinion that this alone militates against perceptions of equity, thus compromising equal higher education quality for students within the IIE. As this constitutes a risk, the Panel urges the IIE to address such imbalances and to ensure equivalence of quality provision for all its students and staff.

Recommendation 2

The HEQC recommends that the IIE urgently address the quality imbalances between trading divisions, as well as between campuses, so that equity will be achieved in the provision of facilities in order to ensure the quality of educational provision for students and staff across the entire institution.

8. The Panel found in a range of interviews with staff that the management of four brands under the IIE presents a number of governance, administrative and quality challenges for the institution. At the governance level the challenges include: aligning the identities of the four brands with the IIE's mission and vision; establishing communication arrangements across the institution; developing decision-making processes across the sites, trading divisions, the IIE and the Tertiary Management Committee; and the need for clear and effective role definition at a range of levels. At the administrative level, the challenges include ensuring and monitoring the consistent implementation of policy across divisions of the institution. Besides the richness of the contributions from the four brands, the difficulties of bringing together institutions with unequal resources, different histories, modes of operation, and academic culture, is impacting on the length of time needed to consolidate the institution. Inevitably under these circumstances, the management of the operational aspects of the new institution would seem to take priority over academic issues. In this regard, the institution seems to have finalised recently, or is still finalising, a range of institutional systems, policies, processes and procedures.

Transformation

9. The Panel found that there is not a robust strategy in place to change the racial composition of the IIE's employees, and especially those in senior academic roles, and in management and leadership. Furthermore, while the IIE has a policy on equity and redress, it makes no mention of staffing at all (AP: IIE 003). The Panel believes that in the context of the IIE, which is inclined towards formal policy pronouncements, the institution should consider introducing a policy and a subsequent strategy to deal with transformation in relation to all employees. A bolder stance on transformation, in policy, and especially in practice, would be more in keeping with the IIE's own understanding of quality as fitness for purpose for the institution.

Recommendation 3

The HEQC recommends that the IIE adopt a formal policy and subsequent strategy, which includes implementation plans with timeframes and allocation of responsibilities, to deal with transformation in relation to all its employees.

10. While black students comprise 67% of total enrolments at the IIE, College Campus and Rosebank College are populated almost entirely by black students, 98 and 99% respectively. This taken together with these brands geographical location and the quality of their facilities, especially in contrast to Vega and Varsity College, is a matter of serious concern to the Panel. This is even more so given the IIE's own ambition to advance quality in conjunction with equity in higher education. The Panel urges the institution to ensure that there is equity of facilities and resources across all 19 campuses of the IIE.

Institutional Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management

11. There are two recently appointed deputy directors, who report to the Director of the IIE; one for 'Quality Assurance and Development', and the other characterised as 'Academic'. Both oversee Heads of Faculties and Heads of Programmes. It was not clear to the Panel, both from documentation and from interviews conducted with senior staff at the IIE, of the precise articulation of these academic bodies, which are related to one another in an ambiguous fashion, blending hierarchy and matrix in an uneasy mix. While all the trading divisions are represented on Senate, the Panel heard with concern that academic staff have little role to play in Senate and found its nature and purpose to be ambiguous. The role of Senate seemed to the Panel to need reconceptualising in order to capture, in practice, where the IIE believes Senate belongs in its institutional organogram as the custodian of academic authority and accountability. Failure to do constitutes serious academic risk for the IIE. The Panel concluded that without such clarity the precise locus of responsibility in the final analysis for assuring the quality of the IIE's entire academic commitment and performance remains uncertain.

Recommendation 4

The HEQC recommends that the IIE review the role of Senate, its membership, its terms of reference and its line of academic authority and accountability in relation to other academic committees and institutional structures.

12. Several of the senior academic positions, especially those of Heads of Faculty, were vacant at the time of the audit. Others had been very recently filled. The Panel noted that the IIE is taking steps to augment its academic leadership. It is, however, concerned that these crucial roles must be held by appropriately qualified and experienced academics, not just for administrative purposes, but to ensure that they provide the requisite intellectual vision, imagination and depth into the IIE as a higher education institution. This would assist in strengthening the IIE's academic culture; go some way in assuring the quality of its core functions; and build its reputation in the higher education sector. The Panel's view is that, were such suitable appointments not to be made, the academic integrity and reputation of the IIE could be under serious threat.

Recommendation 5

The HEQC recommends that the IIE augment its academic leadership at national and campus levels as soon as possible in order to build and

strengthen its higher education intellectual ethos, capacity and credibility to ensure quality provision.

13. At campus level, activities are managed by Campus Principals, who mainly look after operational matters. Vice Principals are responsible for the administration of academic matters. The Panel noted with some concern from the range of site visits and from interviews with staff that many of these positions were occupied by individuals of modest academic stature who have relatively little pertinent higher education management and academic experience. Moreover, there appeared to be a high turnover of personnel in such posts, with a number being served by managers in an acting capacity. The Panel encourages the IIE to stabilise and strengthen this level of management throughout its system as soon as possible in order to ensure academic continuity at the various sites and to underpin more securely the academic quality of its core educational functions.
14. Rather than be guided by a specific strategic plan, the IIE prefers to look ahead and orient its procedures and practices according to an evolving set of formal policies that fall within the framework of the IIE's vision, mission and strategic direction, relative to its higher education activities. While this style of shaping organisational change has merit, the Panel had misgivings about the tendency to treat merely adopting a policy as the solution to a problem, or the guarantee that the chosen procedures and processes are being carried out – and are successful. This cautionary remark is made on the basis of hearing in a range of interviews how management, and staff generally, at the IIE placed undue reliance on policy pronouncements. Moreover, the Panel noted that the IIE faces challenges concerning the consistent implementation of policies across the four trading divisions and the various sites of delivery. The Panel urges the IIE to develop and implement a system to monitor the implementation of its policies, since practice is the proper measure of the quality of the IIE's planning processes and procedures.
15. Planning cycles at the IIE vary and were unclear to the Panel. Interviewees explained to the Panel various planning processes and the planning documents that materialised from their discussions. These served different purposes: the Panel heard from the Campus Principals of a three year planning strategy for sites. The Tertiary Management and Group Executive Committee members alluded to a five-year planning cycle, as well as a three-year plan presented to the Board of Directors for final approval. In additional information requested from the IIE, the Panel read that 'the four brands of the IIE do not have short- to medium-term plans for the three core functions' Elsewhere, the IIE remarked, in relation to planning, that 'revised goals' were discussed at Senate, and that 'this project will be taken further with the view to developing appropriate goals and performance indicators for the IIE for the next few years'. The Panel encourages the IIE to establish consistent planning cycles, and to refine and render more coherent its planning instruments.
16. Scope for planning, or room for manoeuvre in budgeting, depends on the parameters of resources available. The Panel was unable to ascertain from the documentation provided the resource allocation parameters as the IIE, and more

particularly ADvTECH, regards this as proprietary information not to be divulged for fear of compromising its competitive advantage. In replying to the Panel's request for information on principles for budgetary allocation, the IIE stated that 'information on budget allocation by brand and how funds were spent within each brand is the responsibility of the Tertiary Division. This information is not made available for various reasons'. The Panel viewed this stance as unfortunate and unhelpful given the circumstances of the institutional audit.

17. Budgets, the Panel learned in the course of interviews with those responsible are, in essence, dictated at the IIE by demonstrating needs. In the Panel's judgement, those submitting budgets seemed to have little sense of how much latitude to anticipate when planning. This could jeopardise the conceptualisation of initiatives or measures for educational advancement and supporting quality provision. The Panel urges the IIE to give such matters serious consideration, since a more candid style of planning generally permits all concerned to gain a fuller sense of what measures can be taken to assure the quality of the institution's core academic functions. The Panel was unable to reach a conclusion about the links between planning and resource allocation and thereby their efficacy in assuring the quality in the three core functions of the institution.
18. The Panel notes the IIE's intention to develop an integrated management information system (MIS) which will provide reliable and accurate data for planning purposes and could constitute the basis for improvement interventions in the area of teaching and learning. The Panel is of the view that greater efforts must be made to finalise as a matter of urgency its MIS and the utilisation of institutional information for planning and quality purposes. Such a system has the potential to assist the IIE in managing and monitoring all aspects of its core activities.

Recommendation 6

The HEQC recommends that the IIE finalise its management information system and make greater use of institutional data for planning and quality purposes.

19. The Panel expressed its disquiet about the relative deficiency of intellectual and academic higher education leadership and management experience within the IIE. This coupled with the unequal conditions and provision of services of the trading divisions and campuses, suggests to the Panel that the IIE would be wise to consolidate first its present higher education organisational configuration and academic leadership and management. This would allow the IIE to achieve a greater continuity of relevant higher education and senior academic discipline expertise, before embarking on further expansion.

Recommendation 7

The HEQC recommends that the IIE consolidate its current organisational configuration, strengthen its academic leadership and management which will achieve a greater continuity of relevant higher education and senior academic discipline expertise, before embarking on further expansion.

20. The Panel concurs with the IIE that one of its greatest challenges in terms of both academic governance and quality of provision is the difficulty experienced by the institution in recruiting and retaining senior academics to provide depth to the IIE programme offerings. This is compounded by the large numbers of very new staff who have little or no institutional memory. It is clear to the Panel that the high turnover of staff or key positions not filled presents a potential risk for the academic reputation of the institution and could have a negative impact on the quality of teaching and learning. In this context, it is all the more urgent that the institution builds a strong sustainable core academic team with responsibility for providing academic direction, intellectual leadership in order to enhance the IIE's credibility and reputation.
21. The Panel is concerned about the IIE's conceptualisation of quality. During interviews with a range of staff it was clear that quality is defined mainly as consistency of implementation across campuses and employability of graduates. There appears to be no common notion of 'quality' across the institution, nor any clear link to the interpretations and provisions contained in the IIE's Quality Assurance Policy. Such ambiguity may constitute a risk to the IIE translating its understanding of quality into a coherent quality management system.
22. The Panel's conclusions about the quality assurance arrangements at the IIE are threefold. First, the Panel recommends that the IIE needs to move beyond its embedded notion of quality assurance to develop a shared institutional understanding of what constitutes quality, examining the role of quality assurance in relation to accountability, quality support and improvement and monitoring, and how this is given effect in the core academic functions. Second, this entails conceptualising quality assurance less as a mechanism of control and compliance and more as a catalyst for deepening the IIE's intellectual and academic ethos and furthering its advance as an institution of higher learning. Third, the Panel recommends that the IIE develops an appropriate distinctive, dedicated and integrated Quality Management System. The development of an institutional model and framework, including discernible lines of accountability, could help the IIE to combine satisfactorily the concept of quality as an individual responsibility with quality as an institutional goal for which academics and support staff members are accountable.

Recommendation 8

The HEQC recommends that the IIE develop a shared institutional understanding of what constitutes quality for itself and of the role of quality assurance in relation to accountability and improvement; and, consequently, to articulate and implement a distinctive, dedicated and integrated Quality Management System.

23. The transitional context has challenged the IIE's ability to engage with the implications of creating a new higher education institution in terms of defining a single academic identity and purpose, and of embedding quality management across the institution's processes and structures; both of which are still at an early stage of development. The Panel understands that as a private provider which is also part of the ADvTECH Group, issues of corporate culture and profit are of

great importance for the IIE and the brands. However, the Panel is concerned that IIE's attempts at growing an emerging collegial academic culture rooted in a quality management system may be jeopardised by an over-emphasis on a corporate compliance model.

Teaching and Learning

24. The IIE seeks to admit as many students as possible, within the bounds of possibility dictated by teaching resources and physical facilities. Thus 'entry levels are kept at the lowest level possible to enable wider access for students' (AP: 5:9). The Panel learned from its site visit that admission to the degree programmes at Vega is more stringent and there is a particular selection process. The Portfolio notes that the IIE also gives attention to the demographics of its student population, as reflected in its policy on redress (AP: IIE 003 Redress and Enrolment Policy). More than 1 000 students annually receive bursaries from the IIE (AP: 5:13). One key consideration of quality is how well the students admitted fare in the IIE system. The Panel heard that student intake at the IIE includes a large proportion of students who are not fully prepared to enter higher education and the IIE programmes. It was reported that this has impacted negatively on the success rates of students and the performance of the institution as a whole. The IIE has introduced student support systems and mechanisms, such as Mathematics, English and IT literacy programmes.
25. While the Panel acknowledges the student success rates achieved by Vega, it was concerned about the academic performance of other trading divisions as this is a major area of academic risk. During interviews, senior managers were of the opinion that their results were comparable, if not better, than other institutions offering similar qualifications. While this may be the case in some instances, given the claims made by the IIE about the quality of its academic provision and support for students, the Panel remains concerned about student academic performance disparities and the generally low success rates in some of the brands. Since providing access includes putting mechanisms in place to ensure a reasonable chance of success for students, the IIE should continue to strengthen this area and review the effectiveness and impact of its strategies.
26. The Panel was of the view that a more sophisticated institutional means of tracking the performance of students is required. The IIE acknowledges this gap and is currently developing the AdvTech's Learner Integration Administration System or ALIAS (AP: 5:17). The Panel urges the IIE to finalise the development of ALIAS so that data can be interrogated fully and be available for academic staff across campuses as a diagnostic tool for improving teaching and learning throughout the institution. This would include the comparison of student performance across brands, campuses and courses as well as be used for academic planning purposes.
27. A further measure of quality for the IIE is comparing student performance according to demographic profiles of race and gender. Unfortunately too little is known about any possible differences in success rates and whether or not these

are organised racially. Trading Division comparisons of data submitted to the Department of Education would not suggest a significant problem' (AP: 5:10). The Panel regards this as too dismissive a view and out of keeping with the IIE's own commitment to transformation as an imperative in higher education. From the Panel's observations and from interviews conducted throughout the audit, these are matters that weigh on the minds of lecturers and students alike. The Panel urges the institution to give serious consideration to this matter.

Recommendation 9

The HEQC recommends that the IIE develop for itself a conception of what constitutes success in student performance; and that it generate systemic data to measure and monitor such performance in order to further the quality of teaching and learning throughout the institution.

28. Most of the lecturers at the IIE are independent contractors; 90% of the teaching staff as at April, 2007 (AP: 4:73). The trading division of Vega is the exception in that the vast majority of its lecturers are full-time employees. The Panel heard reports from students of a number of lecturers who are not prepared for their lectures and heard from a number of academics that many lecturers are not aware of the institution's Teaching and Learning Strategy. This has a negative impact on teaching and learning as well as the alignment to the mission of the institution. Furthermore, the Panel was concerned to find that in many instances the Campus Vice Principals were themselves either unaware of policies or had little understanding of them.
29. The Panel was concerned about how the IIE ensures a composition of lecturing staff which is adequate for the academic programme purposes, and how the IIE manages and assures that its use of independent contractors does not compromise the quality of provision. It was not clear to the Panel how the IIE ensures that such arrangements sustain academic continuity at programme level, as well as what criteria are used to determine the appropriate balance between full-time academic staff and independent contractors, to ensure the quality of teaching and learning. The Panel urges the institution to put measures in place to monitor the effectiveness of its academic staffing arrangements, particularly bearing in mind the significantly low student success rates at the IIE.

Recommendation 10

The HEQC recommends that the IIE increase the number of full-time academic staff in order to sustain academic continuity at programme level and create a more supportive learning environment for students.

30. Apart from the low numbers of a core of full-time lecturers at Varsity College, Rosebank College and College Campus, there is the issue of academic seniority, and more particularly, intellectual leadership. There are some academic figures who occupy positions of academic management at the national level within the IIE and ably qualified and highly motivated lecturing staff at Vega but there remains a gap of intellectual leadership and high level discipline expertise at the helm of most programmes. The Panel urges the institution to recruit and retain senior academics. Not doing so represents an academic risk in terms of the learning experience of students and a potential risk for the academic reputation of

the institution. In this context, it is all the more urgent that the IIE builds a strong, sustainable core academic team with responsibility for providing intellectual leadership and academic direction in order to enhance the institution's credibility and reputation.

Recommendation 11

The HEQC recommends that the IIE strengthen the intellectual leadership and discipline expertise in its programme offering. Furthermore, the IIE should develop criteria in order to ensure an appropriate balance between full-time lecturers and independent contractors at all its campuses, and put measures in place to monitor the effectiveness of its academic staffing arrangements.

31. The IIE lays great store by two defining characteristics in its actual processes of teaching and learning – namely, students learning in small classes, and providing study material. The Panel is concerned that the size of class in itself is not a sufficient measure to guarantee the quality of tuition. While as part of 'equity of provision', the use of small classes could be one of the elements to be considered in offering quality education, the IIE is encouraged to consider other elements, including the use of Academic Development Coordinators in structured academic support, and put mechanisms in place to ensure that these are integrated across all learning sites.
32. The Panel heard during interviews with academics of concerns about the use of study material for courses. Some lecturers indicated that they did not always receive the study material prior to courses beginning. Some students spoke of not being given study material at all. The IIE needs to determine how widespread these shortcomings are, and put in place mechanisms to ensure that this matter is addressed.
33. The Panel noted with appreciation the enthusiasm, dedication and commitment of many academics to support the quality of student learning at the institution but was concerned that at the IIE excellence in teaching does not appear to be identified, recognised, or rewarded. The Panel suggests that the IIE should consider identifying and then celebrating regularly instances of excellent teaching practice, in order to signal its commitment to quality teaching.

Management of Quality in Academic Support Services

34. **Academic Development.** The primary sources of academic support at the IIE are the lecturers themselves, librarians for education in information literacy and, since 2006, the advent of Academic Development Co-ordinators (ADCs). 'The ADC is responsible for the development and quality assurance of teaching and learning on the campus' (AP: 4:31). One or two such appointments have now been made for most sites, except Vega, where the need for academic development is dealt with differently by full time lecturers, Relationship Navigators and campus leadership. The Panel heard from a range of interviewees that the ADCs are contributing to improving success rates, but the initiative is still in its infancy and has not been formally monitored. The Panel encourages the IIE to undertake regular, systematic evaluation of the role of ADCs to enhance their impact.

35. It became apparent to the Panel in interviews with lecturers and students that the ADCs shoulder an onerous burden, especially when one considers the large numbers of students – and staff – involved. Moreover, the Panel heard of the complexity of dealing with many students who lack adequate proficiency in English, IT literacy as well as in numeracy and Mathematics. The Panel urges the institution to pay more attention to, and devote more resources, to systems of academic support beyond the present commitment to ADCs in order to enhance the quality of student support.

Recommendation 12

The HEQC recommends that the IIE review and enhance its system of academic support for student success, deploy the necessary resources and regularly monitor their effectiveness.

36. **Library.** Libraries are situated on each of the nineteen learning sites. Each is headed by a Campus Librarian under the direction of a National Librarian. The Panel heard in interviews with students and staff that the study areas in a number of campus libraries are insufficient, and that the libraries are generally cramped and under-resourced. While the Panel appreciated the necessity for security, it is of the view that open access to library materials is restrictive. Students are unable to peruse the stacks, except in the case of Vega. The Panel encourages the IIE to explore ways to facilitate student use of the libraries, where they can familiarise themselves with the library stock, rather than only requesting books over the counter from the librarian.

37. Apart from the instance of Vega, the Panel was concerned about the very limited range of the physical book collections held on library shelves across campuses. This was confirmed by a range of student interviews. Lecturers also spoke of the lack of library resources for their use. This undermines their lecturing preparation and so impacts on the provision of high quality education. In order to inculcate a heightened intellectual ethos for students and lecturers in the institution as well as to raise the quality of learning, all students need to be exposed to a wider choice of challenging general reading sources that would augment the current collection, which consists mainly of prescribed and recommended material for courses. The Panel noted the possible use of partnerships with neighbouring libraries as a further means of extending services but found that students are not in agreement that this is a feasible solution, mainly because of difficulties of transport and time constraints. Moreover, the Panel found that there is an undue reliance on electronic sources like EBSCOHost, given that the vast majority of programmes are offered at the undergraduate level. Furthermore the Panel is of the view that the perceived utilisation and assumed benefit for teaching and learning of such sources, is not an adequate substitute for providing printed sources appropriate to the undergraduate studies.

Recommendation 13

The HEQC recommends that the IIE, to inculcate an adequate institutional intellectual ethos, take a determined approach to stocking its libraries with general printed material and make more readily available its holdings in an accommodating learning environment.

38. **Information and Communication Technology.** An integrated information technology network serves the entire IIE system. This is separated into a network for administration and one for students, thus protecting the integrity of each. From interviews with IT personnel and from visits to computer facilities on several sites, the Panel noted the expertise and technology available to students for administrative purposes. The Panel found the system appears to be ably administered, and underpinned by sound financial planning. However, the Panel found that there is (i) a lack of e-mail facilities and addresses for students and (ii) that access to computers is insufficient. While the provision of bandwidth is generally a challenge for higher education institutions, the Panel encourages the IIE to ensure that there is sufficient internet time for students to be able to access electronic information, particularly in view of the institution's reliance on such resources.
39. **Student Services.** The focal point of student services is a Students Relations Manager (SRM) appointed on each campus. The Panel confirmed in interviews with IIE management, staff and students the structure and extent of services provided for students. The institution's empathy for students is evident; and is much appreciated by all concerned. The Panel, however, is concerned how SRMs are able to cope properly with their extensive brief. It also appeared to the Panel that the overlap of functions performed by the ADCs and SRMs could be pronounced. The Panel recognises the value in having both ADCs and SRMs, but it is of the opinion that their respective roles need further clarification. The IIE is urged to devote more personnel and resources to the functions associated with SRMs. The Panel concludes that these matters might be best explored by devising an overarching policy on academic development *per se*, which includes the means of assuring the quality of the respective roles and their performance.

Recommendation 14

The HEQC recommends that the IIE further clarify the role of Students Relations Managers in relation to Academic Development Co-ordinators in the course of devising an overarching policy on Academic Development; and that serious consideration be given to allocating additional personnel and resources to the functions associated with Students Relations Managers.

40. **Certification.** The Panel is largely satisfied with the certification process. However, one concern identified by the Panel is that a final intervening link in the chain needs to be inserted: i.e. completed certificates should be returned first to the IIE's head office for checking before being forwarded to the relevant campuses, in order to assure fully the quality of the certification process. As an important security mechanism, the IIE is also urged to ensure that not all signatures on certificates are electronically generated, but that one of the signatories conducts the final check of the certificate against the necessary documentation and personally signs the certificate.

Recommendation 15

The HEQC recommends that certificates, once printed in full, should first be returned to the IIE's head office for a final check before being forwarded to

campuses for purposes of graduation and should include one signature by hand.

41. A further concern of the Panel is the role of Senate in the certification process. The role of Senate in the approval of graduation lists remained unclear. Since Senate is the ultimate academic authority of the IIE, the Panel urges that it assume such a role in the certification of academic results, rather than this being left to a National Head of Department and the Registrar.

Recommendation 16

The HEQC recommends that the IIE ensure the appropriate role of the Senate as its ultimate academic authority in the actual process of certifying academic results and awarding qualifications.

42. **Short Courses.** The Panel gleaned from documentation and heard during interviews with staff that an improvement plan is being developed to render the Short Learning Programmes more transferable, by aligning these programmes with unit standards, as well as by bearing credits towards other qualifications. The Panel cautions the IIE to ensure that such a course of action does not compromise the integrity of programmes and the inter-relatedness of the outcomes of programmes as structured learning experiences.
43. **Programme Development and Review.** In interviews with the leadership of the IIE, the Panel heard about the experience of the institution having recently undergone processes of programme accreditation. This has led to the IIE amending its own procedures of developing programmes and becoming open to possibilities of how to shape future programmes by broadening the scope for participation when planning. The Panel was encouraged by such an approach.
44. The Panel notes the IIE's commitment to sound principles of programme review, and urges it to bring its nascent system of review to completion in the near future, most especially as the IIE itself admits that 'it is difficult to assess whether the current review system achieves all that it seeks to' (AP: 6:26). The Panel further encourages the IIE to ensure that the formal monitoring and review system for programmes goes well beyond considerations of compliance, and instead place more emphasis on academic worth and intellectual development, with reviews then serving as the basis for effecting improvements.
45. **Distance Education.** The IIE is involved indirectly in providing distance education in that it offers supplementary tuition to students registered for qualifications with the Institute of Marketing Management and the University of South Africa. From 2007 a 'Course Leader' has been appointed in order to support those teaching the course in question, as well as to liaise with the department concerned at the University of South Africa (UNISA) (AP: 8:35). The Panel is appreciative of the IIE's commitment to its UNISA students, and recognises their relatively better performance. However, the IIE has itself seen the need to strengthen the mechanisms implied by these partnerships and the Panel supports this intention. The Panel heard from a range of lecturing staff that the mechanisms have yet to be developed fully or consistently. While the Panel

concur that the final responsibility for quality rests with the awarding institutions as students pay for tuition at the IIE, the IIE needs to have its own measures of quality accountability, and needs to protect its own reputation. The Panel considers that it would best serve the interests of students, lecturing staff, the IIE, UNISA and the IMM if the IIE pursues vigorously with its partners an appropriate and effective means of quality assurance.

Recommendation 17

The HEQC recommends that the IIE pursue vigorously, in collaboration with its partners for whom it provides tuition, more appropriate and effective means of quality assurance of teaching and learning to be carried out in terms of such arrangements.

46. **Staffing and Staff Development.** From the IIE's portfolio, the Panel got an impression of a model and structure of staffing evolving to suit the recently articulated institution while, at the same time, attempting to strengthen its staffing portfolio both for the sake of enhancing quality, as well as allowing for growth in the organisation. To attract the appropriate calibre of leadership as well as stability of leadership, the IIE is well aware of the necessity to offer attractive terms and academic conditions of service (AP: 4:72). The Panel encourages the institution to develop and implement appropriate terms and conditions of service for academics.

47. From more detailed scrutiny of material supplied at the main site visit, and from a range of interviews with individuals scattered throughout the IIE, the Panel confirmed that the full portrait of human resource matters, including conditions of employment and service, as well as staff development, has been realised in practice. Indeed, the IIE presented the issues frankly by pondering difficulties it has encountered in this regard. Given the rapidly changing articulation of the IIE since its inception, and taking cognisance of its ambitions as an organisation, the Panel recommends that it would be timely for the IIE, in buttressing the quality of its core functions, to arrive at an all-encompassing and integrated human resources policy. This policy should address in depth the elements that are presently scattered in a variety of policies. This would go some way to ensure academic quality provision of the IIE.

Recommendation 18

The HEQC recommends that the IIE give urgent consideration to developing and adopting a fully articulated and integrated formal policy covering all aspects of human resources.

48. **Assessment.** Assessment of work-based learning is incorporated in the IIE's Assessment Policy (AP: IIE 009: Assessment Policy: 11). But many students interviewed by the Panel indicated that the continuous assessment of experiential learning was haphazard, a matter that lecturers confirmed. Students have to find their own places and there is little in the way of communication between the campus and the work place learning organisation. As a result the student experience has limited value and does not adequately prepare the student for the world of work. The Panel notes that the IIE is cognisant of the weaknesses in its

exercise of experiential learning and is taking steps to overcome them (see AP: 8: 19-22). The Panel urges the IIE to give this matter immediate attention.

49. The Panel noted that a new process for moderation is being developed (AP: IIE 009: Assessment Policy: 29). At present, moderators are contracted on an annual basis, but with no limits to renewal. Consequently, some have been fulfilling this role for over five consecutive years. The Panel suggests that the IIE should consider the desirability of this, by reflecting instead on the merits of fresh insight brought to courses by a regular turnover of moderators, both internal and external. The Panel heard in interviews with moderators of their frustration about not knowing whether or not their recommendations had been acted upon, or taken seriously. This lack of communication needs to be addressed in order to capitalise on the potential value of moderators in advancing the quality of teaching and learning at the IIE.

Recommendation 19

The HEQC recommends that the IIE revise its current practices regarding moderation, specifically the period of appointment; and that mechanisms be instituted so as to enhance the effectiveness of moderators in the assessment process, and in teaching and learning more generally.

50. The Panel gained the impression from interviews with lecturing staff and administrators that they are conversant with the IIE's policies and procedures pertaining to assessment. The students whom the Panel encountered were far less familiar with these matters. They thought that assessment procedures and processes were applied inconsistently from course to course. They experienced delays not only in receiving feedback on assessment, but also variations in the quality of the feedback, with many receiving assignments back that had merely been awarded a mark with no indication about how this mark was decided upon. Furthermore, students alluded to some inordinate delays in the publication of examination results. In general, it was reported to the Panel that students were unaware of the processes of appeal. In the Panel's view, these issues need to be investigated by the IIE in order to discover how widespread they are since this constitutes a possible hazard to the quality of teaching and learning at the IIE.

Recommendation 20

The HEQC recommends that the IIE investigate student familiarity with procedures, processes and results of assessment; and to remedy any shortcomings that might be discovered, including the timely publication of examination results.

Research

51. The Panel noted that the IIE published an overall research policy in February 2006 and was encouraged to learn how it has not only codified existing practices but is also acting as a catalyst for further initiatives. The IIE's submission identifies several categories of research activity; namely, support for staff augmenting their professional qualifications; making time and resources available for staff to participate in conferences and exhibitions; and fostering publications. The IIE, conscious of its particular role in private higher education, has recently launched *The Journal of Independent Teaching and Learning*.

52. While the Panel recognises that a broader conception of responsibility for research is still nascent and very modest at the IIE, it did find, in the course of interviews with management and lecturers, that the research that does take place occurs at Vega (AP: 8:29-31). The Panel encourages the IIE to establish among staff a stronger research ethos in all the other brands in order to enhance the intellectual development of the organisation as a whole. Furthermore, to this end, the Panel supports the IIE's own view that teaching and learning should become an even more substantial thrust of investigative research. To facilitate such a perspective, the Panel suggests that the IIE should incorporate a holistic understanding of the core functions of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement, more fully in its academic planning and administration, resource allocation and quality management in order to give better effect to the institution's vision and mission.

Recommendation 21

The HEQC recommends that the IIE inculcate a stronger research ethos among all lecturing staff in all four of its constituent brands, with considerable weight lent to teaching and learning as a prime focus of investigative research. The HEQC urges the IIE to incorporate a broader understanding of, and more emphasis on, research in its academic planning and administration, resource allocation and quality management.

Community Engagement

53. The IIE found that community engagement within its organisation is 'diverse – voluntary and structured, decentralised and centralised in outreach' (AP: 8:8). An example is that of the Imagination Labs, initiated by Vega in 2003, aimed at unearthing talent among black youth who might prove to have an aptitude and an interest in creative arts and related industries. The Panel had the opportunity to view some work at Vega in Durban Westville which has one such Lab linked to it; and was very impressed by this programme. The Panel heard in interviews of other examples, which while different in emphasis, fall within the IIE's ambit of community engagement, e.g. 'Reach for a Dream' involving Varsity College, and College Campus in Randburg adopting a children's home, where they teach the children computer skills.

Commendation 1

The HEQC commends the IIE on its Vega-linked Imagination Labs for its innovative and socially valuable contribution to community engagement.

54. From the IIE's policy document on community engagement, it appears to the Panel as if responsibility for planning and overseeing such activities depends on the nature of the projects. The IIE acknowledges that community engagement exercises might well need to become more structured and coherent across the institution (AP: 8:10). This is even more so of experiential learning in particular, where the IIE recommends that central leadership and management need to be introduced, not least to bring about consistency across the organisation (AP: 8:15 & 8:18). Additional documentation read at the site visit and comments from staff made during interviews endorse such sentiments. Accordingly, the Panel encourages the IIE to improve the quality of its community engagement by

enhancing its leadership and structure, and thereby strengthening its integration into the curriculum and strategic framework of the IIE. The IIE is also encouraged to manage closely the quality of its community engagement activities.

Recommendation 22

The HEQC recommends that the IIE enhance the leadership of and structures related the quality management of its community engagement activities, thereby continuing with its plan to formalise, co-ordinate, integrate further community engagement into the strategic framework of the institution.

Conclusion

55. As a new institution, the IIE has yet to establish its academic identity within the contemporary South African higher education system. The main challenge for the institution is to manage the tension between the demands of the corporate culture and establishing an academic culture. This includes: providing the necessary leadership to nurture the academic pedigree of the institution; strengthening significantly the quality of academic provision across all campuses; and investing in a much larger core of full-time academic staff. Planning needs to be carried out in a much more systematic manner and which ensures the links between planning and resource allocation so that the quality of the three core functions is assured. If these challenges are addressed, the IIE will be geared to achieve its mission and objectives.