CONTENTS

**Higher Education Review**
IRCU has been dissecting what the HE reform package “Backing Australia’s Future” means to RMIT and the sector in general.

**Industry Reviews**
Broad environmental scanning of trends and emerging issues in industry is currently centred on the development of seven industry dossiers.

**Environmental Scanning Guide**
This planning tool will be of particular use to those involved in strategic planning and the development of business cases throughout the university.

**VTAC Admissions Data – Interactive Tools**
IRCU has developed tools to analyse VTAC admissions data via the web.

**Stakeholder Communication**
IRCU has developed a stakeholder communication framework aligning communications activity with organisational strategy.

**Student Outcomes**
IRCU has produced a number of reports and papers drawing on the GDS, CEQ and SOS.

**Reports, briefs and alerts**
IRCU has prepared a number of papers contributing to RMIT’s positioning.

**Pilot Course Evaluation Project**
A number of projects are being undertaken to assist in understanding best practice in student course feedback at RMIT, and in the resources required to enable this.

**TAFE Retention Project**
IRCU will conduct a survey of TAFE students who left the university in 2002 without completing their qualification.

**Review of Industry Advisory Structures**
The review will report on optimising RMIT’s Industry Advisory Structures by December 2003.

**Review of Adjunct Professors**
The review will report on maximising opportunities for engagement with Adjunct Professors by December 2003.

**Planning Group Portal**
The Planning Group Portal contains a wide range of institutional information in both static and dynamic pages.

**Knowledge Management**
IRCU provides various reports, papers and tools that enhance knowledge management within RMIT.
About the Institutional Research Consultancy Unit

The main function of IRCU is to coordinate the collection, organization and analysis of institutional data and other quantitative and qualitative information to support institutional management, operations, decision-making and planning functions of RMIT University.

IRCU is also engaged in applied educational research, performance measurement, evaluation and assessment; and is proactive in the study and advancement of higher education. For more information see:

http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/ircu/docs/ir_intro.ppt

Higher Education Review

Since May 2003, when the Federal Education Minister released “Backing Australia’s Future”, IRCU has been dissecting what the higher education reform package means to RMIT and to the sector in general. IRCU has also undertaken analyses of the impact of the package and the challenges it represents to the sector.

IRCU in conjunction with the Chancellery have been monitoring developments of the reform process with regular updates posted in the Planning Group’s web portal. IRCU also organised two university forums – one in the city campus and another in Bundoora, which combined drew more than 250 participants.

IRCU has contributed, with other areas of the University, in working through the depth and breadth of change required if the Senate passes the reform package legislation. The critical measures of the reform package are planned to be effective from 2005.

Further information: Angel Calderon (9925 9708) or Julie Wells (9925 2980).

http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/ircu/hereview.php

Industry Dossiers

The Vice-Chancellor’s Executive endorsed development of seven dossiers in the following industries:

- Power and Water
- Transport and Logistics, including Supply Chain Management
- Health, focusing on Wellness

The industry dossiers form part of the broader environmental scan industry activity undertaken by IRCU to gauge trends and emerging issues in industry.

The preparation of industry dossiers is a key component of the implementation of the strategic plan; it also fulfils an important role within the profile planning process. Industry dossiers will be utilised as one method of obtaining information for determining relevance, based on sound analysis of the industry and its trends and an understanding of RMIT’s capabilities.

The industry dossier development for 2003/04 has the following specific purposes:

- To enable consideration of relevance of current programs in profile
- To enable identification of new programs in profile
- To identify new and emerging industry trends
- To enable publication of fact sheets or other promotional materials
- To link to and support other strategic documents

The intent is to utilise the next set of industry dossiers as key decision making tools in the 2005-2007 profile planning process.

Further information: David Garner (9925-9706) or Katrina Woodland (9925-9707).

Environmental Scanning Guide

IRCU has released a ‘how to’ guide for undertaking environmental scanning. The guide describes a method and approach for the practice of environmental scanning (ES) at RMIT.

It sets out the aims, methodology and application of ES and provides definitions of key concepts.

The Guide is a planning tool for use at all levels of RMIT but particularly by Schools/Groups in strategic planning and development of business cases. It also aims to facilitate organisational learning about RMIT’s capabilities and its external environment through enhanced communication and knowledge capture mechanisms.

The Guide is organised into three sections, which address the following key questions:
What is Environmental Scanning? - provides a broad outline of the theoretical basis of ES and defines some of the key concepts within the generic framework.

Why Do We Need To Do It? - identifies general and specific objectives of ES. It provides a brief explanation of how ES relates to RMIT, pointing to specific examples of how it may be applied, both in strategic planning and more generally. The Guide emphasises the role of ES in organisational learning and development of communities of practice.

How Do We Do It? - describes in detail the process of environmental scanning, breaking it down to seven sequential, but iterative steps. Each of the steps is explained and further elucidated by the use of specific examples.

The guide includes a list of resources (internet links), which should be seen as a starting point for undertaking environmental scanning. These links do not represent a comprehensive list of information sources. Further assistance in identifying suitable sources of information may be gained from the RMIT Library and/or IRCU.

Further Information: Jim Tangas (9925 9704).
http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/escan.php

VTAC Admissions Data - Interactive Tools
Which Program? Which School?
IRCU has developed a number of tools that enable analysis of admissions data from the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC).

These tools use the web (after RMIT login) to access VTAC data, which has been aggregated and stored in databases generated by IRCU. The tools dynamically produce reports in multiple formats.

VTAC data can be of considerable use in understanding the types of student in particular programs as well as providing some idea of demand and popularity. This sort of information together with other student and program data can contribute significantly towards planning for the future.

The types of analyses that are possible include but are not limited to:
- Secondary school last attended
- Preference of enrolled program
- Fee type of enrolled program
- Gender ratio of enrolled program
- VTAC category
- ENTER scores grouped in ten categories

One of the tools allows access to a subset of the VTAC database, which only contains information on VTAC applicants enrolled at RMIT.

Another tool accesses a more complete database, which contains information on all VTAC applicants. It also includes some additional information such as a TAFE/higher education flag and institution name. This is particularly useful for competitive institutional comparison purposes.

IRCU is committed to enhance these tools and to continue in building knowledge and contributing to effective decision-making.

Further Information: Neil Wentworth (9925-9709).

Stakeholder Communication
Based on IRCU’s ongoing research into student life and student expectations, IRCU has developed a framework for stakeholder communication. The guiding principle of the framework is that communications activity within any organisation must be aligned with and complement organisational strategy if it is to have maximum effect in the pursuit of organisational objectives.

This research also contributed to a stakeholder communication project for RMIT Union. The project identified some key research-based themes and solutions, which provide the foundation for a communication stakeholder strategy. Some of the research findings suggest that the sophistication of communication activities appears to vary quite dramatically across student organizations, and institutional approaches are of varying quality.

This is, in general terms, an area of emerging institutional interest both domestically and internationally.

Further information: Angel Calderon (9925-9708)

Student Outcomes
Throughout the year IRCU has prepared a number of reports and papers drawing on the key national surveys of students:
- Graduate Destination Survey (GDS)
- Course Experience Survey (CEQ)
- Student Outcomes Survey (SOS)

Some of the more generic reports can be located on IRCU’s web portal at:

There are also papers describing the CEQ and SOS on the IRCU web portal at:
http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/outcomes.php
IRCU has developed three software tools to assist with the analysis of the GDS, CEQ and SOS. Specifically:

- The 'Item-by-Item' tool analyses CEQ and SOS data. This tool accesses several CEQ and SOS annual databases interactively via the web, and dynamically generates output tables in multiple formats.
- The ‘CEQ-XAnalyser’ tool analyses CEQ data. This tool accesses several aggregated national data sets via an Excel spreadsheet and produces an assortment of graphical and tabular output.
- The ‘IRCU-Tabs’ tool analyses GDS and SOS data. It is currently a pilot tool. It permits limited cross-tabulation of data from the GDS (1996-2002) and the SOS (2002 only).

IRCU will continue to develop these student outcomes tools in order to enhance RMIT’s knowledge management.

Further Information: Andrew Brion (9925-2713).

Reports, briefs and alerts

IRCU has prepared a number of papers in recent months to contribute to RMIT’s positioning; some examples include

- A comprehensive scan on the Australian and International Industry and Research Priorities (July 2003) – utilised to determine industries for dossier development;
- An overarching scan of RMIT’s relative performance for domestic students (July 2003) – utilised as background material for the University Business Plan;
- Reports on the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) and tertiary education – which provide background on the trends and emerging issues on the internationalisation of education. Volume 3 in the IRCU series of GATS will be available soon.
- Scans on issues such as unmet demand in tertiary education in Victoria and the brain drain.

Readers may like to read RMIT’s submission to the Inquiry into Future Opportunities for Australia’s Film, Animation, Special Effects and Electronic Games Industries, conducted by the House of Representative Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Click in the link below to access the paper:

http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/docs/industry/subsenatefilmspecialgames.pdf

Pilot Course Evaluation Project

IRCU is undertaking a VCEM endorsed project piloting student feedback at the course level. The project has three broad aims:

- developing agreed principles in relation to the nature of student feedback (at the course level) to be captured and how that information will be used;
- developing a support framework that comprises procedures and agreed methods (and tools) for implementing these principles;
- working with Faculties to pilot various approaches within an agreed implementation and support framework.

To date this has involved a number of projects across several faculties and schools. For example, projects have been, and are being, undertaken involving:

- Semi-structured feedback from first-year HE Accounting students
- A survey of all HE courses in the School of Economics & Finance
- A survey of a selection of HE courses in all schools in the Faculty of Engineering
- A pilot online survey amongst TAFE students in the Faculty of Business
- An evaluation of the existing Life Sciences online survey

Further information: Josie Palermo (9225-9762) or Andrew Brion (9925-2713).

http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/feedback.php

TAFE Retention Project

IRCU is to conduct a survey amongst TAFE AQF 5 and 6 students who left the university in 2002 without completing their qualification.

University statistics show that retention rates for TAFE students enrolled in programs classified as AQF 5 or 6 have been around 50% in each of the past three years. Various theories have been proposed for this low retention rate including students articulating to HE programs prior to completion, students only ever planning to undertake certain modules, students commencing programs which either fail to match expectations or do not match their educational background, students leaving to take up full-time jobs, and even students being incorrectly enrolled. While these, and other theories, probably all have some validity; there is no understanding of the magnitude of each.
The project therefore intends to:
- Establish the reasons why TAFE students do not complete AQF 5 and 6 qualifications,
- Obtain quantitative estimates of the sizes of cohorts of students, who do not complete programs for different reasons,
- Better understand how RMIT could retain such students

Further information: Andrew Brion (9925-2713).

Review of Industry Advisory Structures

The purpose of the review, managed by IRCU, is to make recommendations on the following, for implementation in 2004:
- The industry advisory structures required to enable RMIT to gain knowledge of industry developments at the broadest level, and how coverage of existing and emerging industries is maintained;
- The most appropriate composition for RMIT's industry advisory groups, so that they can address their purposes;
- To consider work undertaken by the former Education and Training Executive Committee (ETEC) in relation to reviewing Industry structures; to identify process issues within RMIT that impeded the implementation of this work; and to identify issues that this raises about RMIT's processes in relation to its external advisory structures.

This review commenced in late September. It has a reference group and will report by December 2003.

Further Information: David Garner (9925-9706).

Review of Adjunct Professors

The purpose of this review, managed by IRCU, is to identify and make recommendations on the following, for implementation in 2004:
- The level of engagement that Adjunct Professors have with RMIT's key activities of teaching and learning and research and development, and how this engagement may be further leveraged;
- Development of processes and opportunities for Adjunct Professors to further engage with RMIT's key activities.

This review commenced in late September. It has a reference group and will report by December 2003.

Further Information: David Garner (9925-9706).

Planning Group Portal

During 2003, IRCU has developed the Planning Group portal. The portal contains a wide range of institutional information in both static and dynamic pages. The portal is a sophisticated web environment providing multiple layers of secure access. It will continue to be developed and enhanced. Feedback is welcomed from users throughout the university.

Currently IRCU and Planning Group web pages look somewhat different to the rest of RMIT's web pages. This is primarily in order to incorporate a greater level of sophistication than is currently available from the RMIT SIM system that controls the RMIT website. In particular:

Security

The Planning Group Portal supports multiple layers of security, while the SIM system currently provides secure access to just three categories (staff, students or everyone). Our own security layers, for example, permit only users for a particular school to access specific information. However staff authentication still occurs via the normal RMIT web login. There is also a need to occasionally produce some pages, which can be accessed by RMIT staff, and also need to be accessed by a limited number of specified people outside RMIT (e.g. Other University staff, ATN staff and representatives from various industries).

Interactive Tools

In order to optimise access to information and optimise knowledge management across the university, IRCU have developed a number of interactive tools that allow users to interactively inspect key institutional databases (e.g. VTAC admissions data, CEQ). IRCU will continue to develop such products and enhance existing ones. These products require both a web server capable of running these scripts, and a database server that can be accessed by the scripts in order to perform the various requests for data analyses. At present this functionality is not available within the SIM system.

We hope that as more features are added to the SIM system, and as our knowledge of how to interact with it improves, the Planning Group Portal and other RMIT pages will grow more and more similar until eventually they are all part of the same process.

Further information: Neil Wentworth (9925-9709).
**Knowledge Management**

IRCU has as one of its core activities: “To facilitate a process of integration, organization and dissemination of information in a systematic and functional manner.”

The objectives of knowledge management can be simply stated as: (1) to make the enterprise act as intelligently as possible to secure its viability and overall success; (2) to otherwise realize the best value of its knowledge assets.

Knowledge management can be viewed as a continual value added process. For example this process occurs when raw data is compiled into reports. This information can then be tied together with other information for purposes of benchmarking, longitudinal studies or trend analyses. Each step here has added value and sees the transformation of raw data to knowledge. For more information on the core activities of IRCU see the PowerPoint presentation on our website - Introducing Institutional Research:

http://www2.rmit.edu.au/departments/planning/ircu/docs/ir_intro.ppt

As part of its approach to knowledge management, IRCU has been proactive in providing a number of online interactive tools e.g. Item-by-Item analysis of the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) and the Student Outcomes Survey (SOS) data, VTAC Pivot Tables. These tools should be seen as part of an ongoing process empowering RMIT staff who are regularly confronted with a mass of raw data. Tools such as these allow selective data mining of complex information in a simple and understandable manner.

Because of its commitment to building knowledge and innovation as well as adding value to traditional processes, IRCU will continue to enhance existing tools and develop new tools based on the feedback and requirements of RMIT staff.

**Events and Training Sessions**

IRCU periodically organises events such as forums and ‘brainstorming sessions’ on topical and emerging issues such as the implications of GATS for Tertiary Education.

IRCU has conducted a number of training and briefing sessions in using and interpreting data from the Course Experience Questionnaire, Graduate Destination Survey and the Student Outcomes Survey. Training sessions have also been organised in the use of student outcomes tools. More recently training sessions were held in the use and interpretation of admissions data from VTAC.

Forthcoming events:

- briefing sessions on the ‘how to’ guide for undertaking environmental scanning;
- forum on the 2003/04 industry dossier development.

IRCU advertises events and training sessions via the weekly global email - ‘RMIT Update’. Should you wish more information on forthcoming events, please contact us:

Telephone: 9925-9705
Email: ircu@rmit.edu.au

**IRCU Staff are:**

- Angel Calderon: Head
- Andrew Brion: Business Analyst
- David Garner: Strategic Advisor - Industry
- Ann Hornsby: Executive Assistant
- Josie Palermo: Institutional Research Advisor (on secondment to Quality Consultancy Unit)
- David Rutherford: Strategic Economist (on secondment to Fin. and Bus. Services to December, 2003)
- Jim Tangas: Research Advisor
- Neil Wentworth: Institutional Research Systems Coordinator
- Katrina Woodland: Research Analyst

This report was formatted by Wendie McLaughlin.

---