



Australian Government

AFTRS

Australian Film Television and Radio School

Submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education 2008

24 July 2008

The Australian Film Television Radio School (AFTRS) welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the Review of Australian Higher Education. This submission responds to issues in the discussion paper in regard to the skills needs of industry and to issues of the Quality Assurance Framework.

AFTRS is one of the three self accrediting higher education institutions in the higher education sector. As an arts training body, AFTRS sits within the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (DEWHA) and receives an annual appropriation of \$23 million. It has a staff of 175 (full-time and part-time). Its short course program has a participant level of over 3,000 students nationwide. In 2009 the student intake target for AFTRS award courses is 300 students. As a registered higher education provider AFTRS is eligible to offer FEE-Help to its students and is obliged to meet the relevant compliance requirements of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR).

AFTRS is mandated through its establishing legislation to deliver advanced education to the screen and broadcast industries. This mandate has enabled AFTRS to develop as an integral participant in the screen and broadcast industries. Its position within the industry ensures the School has a unique perspective on responding to the skills needs of industry.

Meeting Industry Needs

AFTRS considers its enabling legislation *The Australian Film, Television and Radio School Act (1973)* as the foundation framework for its success in the delivery of its industry-focused education. AFTRS was established by the Australian government in 1973 in response to a need to revitalise the Australian film industry.

Section 5 of the AFTRS' enabling legislation lists the nine functions that define the School's mission and its relationship with industry (Appendix 1). These functions provide the framework for the School's relationship with industry through the delivery of advanced education to the industry; the conduct of research; the encouragement of collaboration and the provision of professional development training; the provision of access to the School's facilities; assuring the quality of its advanced education through the award of qualifications; and undertaking any such activities that encourage a high degree of creativeness and high technical and artistic standards.

Since the time AFTRS was established in the 1970s the film industry has undergone profound change and evolved into a wider industry that is today identified as the Screen and Broadcast industries. Rapid technological change has a significant impact on every element of communication and the creation of content and the screen and broadcast industries must now also accommodate the exponential growth in the games sector and the importance of interactivity. A key challenge for the School is maintaining the currency of the definition of the industry it leads and services.

Simultaneously, AFTRS has seen the emergence of a highly competitive higher education environment. The Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) reports in *Undergraduate Applications, Offers and Acceptances* that the field of education with the highest number of first preferences for university applicants was society, culture and creative arts with 25.4 % of eligible applicants choosing to submit a first preference in this areas¹. While these figures represent a broad number of subjects across related fields, they also indicate the strength of competition and demand for education in the screen and related creative industries.

AFTRS is a progressive and successful competitor in this environment. Its self accrediting status and its small size provides it with a competitive advantage in responding to the current and emerging skill needs of industry compared to the scale of universities, their complex processes and procedures and their extensive compliance requirements.

AFTRS is able to meet and anticipate the skill needs of industry through the clarity, focus and flexibility of its mission; through its connections with industry via the professional experience and networks of its academic staff and its guest lecturers (all of whom are required to be high-level practitioners); through the practical orientation and applied learning of its courses which makes available to students opportunities to work with the most creative current practitioners in the industry through mentoring, attachments on productions, networking forums, and hands-on workshops. These opportunities to work directly with industry enhance and strengthen the employability of AFTRS' students upon graduation.

¹ <http://www.dest.gov.au/NR/rdonlyres/0FD26402-8036-4F2E-ABF4-B48A385CD233/21546/UndergraduateApplicationsOffersandAcceptances2008.pdf>, p21 downloaded 26 June 2008

AFTRS also consults on a formal basis with industry organisations (eg Foxtel), guilds (eg Australian Writers' Guild) and associations (eg Australian Interactive Multimedia Industry Association) to ensure its short course program is meeting the needs of targeted sectors of the screen and broadcast industries. AFTRS has established an Industry Advisory Group which meets three times a year. The purpose of the IAG is to provide independent advice to the School on the training and creative priorities of industry and to promote educational initiatives in the relevant industry sectors. The IAG is comprised of representatives from the key industry sectors of digital media, post-production, production, broadcasting, exhibition, online platforms, and international distribution and completion guarantors. The School is in the process of establishing equivalent industry consultative groups at a State level.

AFTRS' positioning in regard to servicing industry's needs has been further strengthened by the relocation of the School's national headquarters in Sydney from North Ryde to the Entertainment Quarter, Moore Park. Located four kilometres from Sydney's CBD, the new location has placed the School physically closer to the hub of the screen and related creative industries. AFTRS' neighbours at the Entertainment Quarter include leading industry players such as Fox Studios, Animal Logic, Trackdown, Granada, Showtime, TV1, iSound and Film Finances Inc. This creates multiple opportunities for interaction in the form of seminars, conferences, workshops, fora, presentations and networking events with the diverse range of organisations, association, guilds and individuals that comprise the industry.

Quality Assurance

As a self accrediting institution AFTRS is responsible for its own academic standards and quality assurance processes. It works within the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF), has been reviewed by the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) and it has an Academic Board which is responsible for the quality assurance of its award course offerings.

AFTRS is currently reviewing the structure and function of the Academic Board. The review aims to achieve outcomes that will improve its governance and procedural guidelines with reference in particular to 'best practice' guidelines as delineated by Universities Australia and to be more robust in its strategic and policy making initiatives in the education and research domains.

AFTRS' accredited courses are aimed at providing talented students with the practical skills and the conceptual framework to meet their creative and developmental needs through the various stages of their careers. A new curriculum, to be introduced in 2009, has been designed to extend AFTRS education training to a broader cohort of students from early career applicants, possibly even school leavers, to highly experienced professionals who wish to undertake high risk projects that have clear educational objectives. Flexibly delivered courses continue to be offered. These courses enable students to continue working while studying. The courses are designed to develop and/or maintain students' connection with industry as appropriate to their level of experience and the specialisation undertaken. AFTRS' Master of Arts Honours program aims to produce research projects that will bring a specific benefit to the industry.

AFTRS also provides non-award vocationally oriented courses, nationally and locally. These courses are provided as a resource to industry and are offered at the basic, intermediate and advanced level. They may be structured as seminars, workshops, or short courses of varying durations. This Industry Training program is reviewed through a three year cycle by AFTRS' internal auditors, Deloitte who is also responsible for auditing AFTRS' risk management. AFTRS reports on its overall financial viability and its expenditure of funds through its Annual Report to DEWHA.

AFTRS was audited by the Australia University Quality Agency (AUQA) in 2007 and received a very positive outcome that was reflected in the number of affirmations and commendations it received. However the School found the framework of the audit maintained a university bias that was inappropriate to the School's legislated function. This was particularly evident in the review of AFTRS research activities. AFTRS does not have the infrastructure and resources of research-intensive universities. AFTRS research is a niche activity of the School that must demonstrate a direct benefit to the School and industry. AFTRS found however that its research efforts were audited on the basis of a research-intensive university model rather than on a model that took into account the School's predominant industry-focused framework.

AFTRS believes that the "one-size fits all" approach of the AUQA audit cannot effectively assure the quality of self-accrediting institutions that have a distinctive

mission and require flexibility to meet the education and skills training demands of the 21st century. AFTRS' welcomes the increased focus on outcomes and comparison of its standards with comparable institutions, national and international. It has prioritised the need to benchmark its activities in its Corporate Plan for the period 2008-2011.