

## **Rolling audits – a mechanism for self-assurance and ensuring integrity**

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*Annual audits are common place in all organisations. They are a means of matching expectation with reality. In quality operations – the audits are more regular and usually focus on specific issues associated with performance and projection. They are frequently conducted by either external or independent reviewer – attempting to make the process as objective as possible.*

*The ideal approach is a marriage of internal, external and independent review. This provides a degree of context that is often missing in purely independent reports. The balance – in my opinion – is the ideal approach with the best possible outcomes in terms of both self-assurance and integrity.*

*My own institution is committed to a high level of audit (reflection) and self-assurance – consistent with the best practice in the current higher education environment. By maintaining both self-assurance and a high level of transparency – integrity is maintained.*

### **Daily audits**

*Cash flow updates* (cash receipts and balances) are provided each day as a means of understanding the daily shift. This is an excellent device for senior management to monitor spending and prioritise commitments. This has been occurring for a number of years and has had a most positive impact on the organisation. Essentially, we can see where are going – and our spending and commitment is assisted greatly.

A range of *daily updates* is provided by email from the *Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) and Chief Executive Officer (CEO)* – whether it be operational or scholarship related – in an attempt to keep core staff up to date and informed on a daily basis. This is quite an achievement – and considerably more impressive than most providers. The added value is reinforcing the work being done by individuals within the organisation and formally acknowledging it.

### **Weekly audits**

These same daily updates – operational and scholarship – are amalgamated each week into a *Weekly Bulletin* for all UBSS staff and is published each Monday morning as a means of keeping staff up to date and informed. It is a valuable weekly commitment that provides considerable detail for all staff – highlighting operational matters that need to be addressed and of course acknowledging scholarly work on a regular basis.

## Fortnightly audits

These weekly updates are further amalgamated into a *Message from the DVC and CEO* that is provided to each UBSS and GCA staff member (and other stakeholders) every second Friday. This ensures greater transparency and keeps *everyone* informed. It is a means of further reinforcement – and of equal importance, acknowledging the work of staff on a larger stage – and also providing an all-essential long-term record. Currently these fortnightly records are not published on the external website – perhaps this would be a further improvement process for consideration.

## Monthly audits

Each month the *Executive Management Team* (including the three Campus Directors – Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide) – meets (usually in hybrid mode – made popular as a consequence of COVID-19) and provides *Business Units Reports* (BURs) that provide detail on a range of key issues (associated with the current Strategic Plan) and provide senior staff with a most useful oversight of the business at large. The exercise is overseen by the DVC and CEO highlighting the importance of both the reports and the meetings.

These same reports are provided to the quarterly *GCA Board of Directors meetings* as a means of keeping Directors up to date and informed. It has been noted that this effort is appreciated. The reports often trigger a request for a presentation on a specific item/issue – adding to the currency of the efforts. The detail and insight is exemplary – and the corporate knowledge recorded is vital.

*Monthly financial updates* are provided against the agreed budget – these of course are extremely useful for monitoring progress and adjusting accordingly. Again, this regularity of reporting is essential to the spending and priority processes. There are overview elements mixed with campus specific breakdowns – all extremely useful and valuable.

Monthly Reports are provided by the *Centre for Scholarship and Research* as a means of monitoring scholarly activity across the school. Once gain these documents – available to the public – are important reinforcement of the excellent work being done by staff and stakeholders.

A sample audit is available (January 2024) at - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/5107/csr-update-january-2024.pdf>

An *Academic Integrity Committee* (AIC) meets (often more than monthly) ensuring that processes, policies and practices around this important area are maintained and monitored appropriately. A senior staffer chairs this audit highlighting the importance and priority. As with all standing committees – agenda and minutes are created and stored for future reference.

The UBSS *Academic Senate* (AS) meets six times a year and overviews academic activities in the school. As a standing committee of the GCA Board of Directors the minutes of these meetings are shared and help guide decision making. The minutes also serve as formal evidence (and self-assurance) of continuous improvement that is overseen accordingly. An independent chair oversees this particular initiative.

## Quarterly audits

*Risk* and *Workplace Health and Safety* are audited/investigated quarterly under the scrutiny of a Member of the GCA Board of Directors. The audits are a standing item on all GCA Board of Directors' agenda. Both issues are vitally important and the formal audits are essential to ensure coverage and context is secure.

Significant detail is provided and working documents – that have been updated or upgraded are ratified by the GCA Board of Directors before external publication.

## Trimester audits

Each trimester several audits are conducted in the form of either surveys or a committee approach.

*Student Surveys* (SFUs) provide evidence of the satisfaction with the teaching and learning at UBSS. These surveys commenced in T2, 2016 and have been maintained since providing an exceptionally useful longitudinal study that in turn assists with guiding the teaching and learning strategy. This process was put in place in T2, 2016 and provides a longitudinal overview of student satisfaction. The surveys also form the basis of trimester staff awards for teaching and learning.

*Staff Satisfaction* surveys are also conducted each trimester. These are a critical barometer for maintaining quality staff. Wherever possible suggestions are actioned. This process, has also been in place since T2, 2016 and again the longitudinal data is extremely important – not to mention useful.

GCA has in place a formal *Threshold Standards Audit Committee* (TSAC) that meets each trimester (usually multiple sessions) to carefully consider coverage of the HE Threshold Standards Audit. These standards are critical to maintaining both registration and accreditation in the sector. The quarterly reports are significant and shared with the larger/extended community to ensure compliance.

The most recent (February 2024) audit can be viewed at -

<https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/5123/threshold-standards-audit-february-2024.pdf>

A *Grades Review Committee* (GRC) is active each trimester overseeing grade distribution and ensuring the normalisation process is put in place – and that a comprehensive report is provided to both the UBSS Academic Senate and GCA Board of Directors. This same report is made available publicly – quite unique in the sector.

The most recent (T2, 2023) report can be viewed at -

<https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/5098/t3-2023-grade-distributions.pdf>

A *Course Advisory Committee* (CAC) meets formally each trimester to consider new innovations and any changes to programmes needed – and essential element of both self-assurance and continuous improvement. The independent/external influence here is critical to the quality of product and delivery. Expertise (including and independent chair) again assists with integrity.

## **Annual audits**

*Finance audits* (external) are conducted by a reputable authority. These are critical for reporting to regulators and shareholders. These audits are usually conducted over a three-to-six-month period with independent auditors examining, at close range, the financial activity and conduct of the organisation.

A *UBSS Annual Report* is provided each year (usually early in the following year) that overviews performance against the UBSS Strategic Plan. Embedded projections also serve as a means of providing the necessary focus for the year ahead.

The most recent (2023, published in early 2024) can be viewed at – <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/5111/ubss-annual-report-2023.pdf>

## **Ad hoc audits**

*Wellness* is formally audited twice a year – but the context is open for ad hoc access as required. The trimester student and staff surveys feed into this mechanism quite effectively as does monitoring of sexual assault and sexual harassment.

The *UBSS Strategic Plan* is reviewed regularly and is adjusted accordingly in an essentially ad hoc manner. My long held views is that a strategic plan that is not regularly reviewed is likely plan for extinction.

The most recent version (2024-2027) can be viewed at - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/4979/ubss-strategic-plan-2024-2027.pdf>

## **A rolling audit scheme for 2024 using independent, external and internal staffers**

A high end (7 person) compliance team has been put in place to commence (March 2024) a set of monthly audits/investigations into ALL elements of the operation to further enhance self-assurance and prepare for the 2025 re-registration and re-accreditation process with the National Regulator.

*It is essentially the commitment to this level of information and reflection that, in my opinion, is solid evidence of my own institution's commitment to quality and compliance – and in turns understands the true meaning of self-assurance. Transparency is vital in these circumstances – and this is achieved by these rolling (ongoing) audits and reports.*

*Well worth reading in relation to this approach to self-assurance and integrity –*

Corporate Governance at GCA - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/4978/corporate-governance-at-gca.pdf>

Academic Governance at UBSS - <https://www.ubss.edu.au/media/4988/academic-governance-at-ubss.pdf>

## About the author

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