

# How to Grow a Healthy Building

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## How to grow a **healthy building**

By Susi Hamilton

The first Australasian research centre dedicated to improving the way healthcare facilities are designed, built and used has been established at UNSW.

The Centre for Health Assets Australasia, which was launched by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Robert King, will become the focal point for research into the health assets of Australia and New Zealand.

"The effective planning, procurement and ongoing management of health facilities is becoming an increasingly important factor in the delivery of quality healthcare," said Emeritus Professor Denny McGeorge of the Faculty of the Built Environment, who is Director of the research centre.

"Healthcare facilities, including hospitals, are among the most complex, costly and challenging buildings, but we have only the most basic understanding of the interaction between health capital assets and the delivery of quality healthcare services," Professor McGeorge said. "This centre has a key role to play in addressing this issue."

Initial research priorities include the development of national health facility standards and guidelines, evaluation and benchmarking and industry capability building in health asset and facilities management.



The centre is an initiative of the Health Capital Asset Management Consortium (HCAMC), representing all Australian states and New Zealand, all of which will provide funding for the first three years in order to create a body of research knowledge that can be maintained centrally and accessed from each jurisdiction.

The centre is supported by the University with three-year establishment grants from the Vice-Chancellor and the Faculty of the Built Environment, where the centre is located. It also has cross-faculty support from the Faculties of Medicine, Science and Engineering.

The centre's senior research fellow, Jane Carthey, has already conducted research with NSW Health and the School of Public Health and Community Medicine in developing health facility guidelines that will underpin the centre's initial research program.

Professor McGeorge joined UNSW in 1999 and is also Visiting Professor at the University of Salford (UK) and Professor Emeritus at the University of Newcastle (Australia). He has a range

of research interests centred on the built environment and the building procurement process. He is part of a team that has recently completed an ARC-funded project investigating the relationship between buildings, building users and organisational effectiveness in the hospital sector. ♦

## Quality time

UNSW is due to be audited this year by the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA), a government-funded independent agency that assesses the effectiveness of quality assurance arrangements in universities. The audit process is intended to reveal how well a university's quality system helps the institution achieve its goals.

Institutional self-review is a key feature of the audit process. Broadly, the institution being audited is required to provide a Performance Portfolio based on the outcomes of self-review. The Portfolio is examined by an AUQA panel before visiting the University. This visit typically involves interviews with several hundred staff and students over a period of about a week. The resulting audit report to the University is made public some three months later.

This exercise in public accountability may be seen as an imposition or an opportunity. Fortunately, AUQA minimises prescription in setting out its requirements and this encourages the latter view. UNSW can adopt a self-review process that meshes with the natural development of UNSW's quality system while meeting AUQA's needs. The self-review and creation of the Portfolio can be a means for identifying what works well, what doesn't and what initiatives for improvement are underway. This should focus and accelerate constructive change for UNSW, including staff, students and other stakeholders.

Professor Adrian Lee, Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Quality Improvement) has formed a team of staff from across the University. Under the co-leadership of Professor Lee and Patrick Boyle, Director of the Quality System Development Group, the team has developed a strategy to guide and support UNSW's preparations.

A critical aspect of the team's work has been to manage the pace and obtrusiveness of preparations. The aim is to ensure that UNSW is well prepared to get the most out of the audit, but is not overwhelmed by preparation activities. The immediate objective is to manage the UNSW self-review and Portfolio preparation, so that the Portfolio is ready in July.

Staff will have an opportunity to contribute to the self-review process but the first activity is an institutional self-review by a cross-section of staff and students. This takes as its starting point a 'map' of the UNSW quality system (essentially, how the University operates to

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assure quality) developed by the Quality System Development Group. Students and staff are invited to use the mapping project documentation to assess what works well in our quality system and what needs to be improved.

Following the development of the Portfolio there will be a range of dissemination and preparation initiatives in the run up to the audit panel's visit. For more information on the audit process and UNSW's preparations, select the *AUQA Audit 2005* link on the UNSW website front page. ♦