

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities

Submission and Response to Questions raised by the Productivity Commissions' Issues Paper on New Models for Tertiary Education

Summary

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission on the Productivity Commission's February 2016 Issues paper on New Models for Tertiary Education.

The reports of academic audit conducted by AQA provide a body of evidence from which to consider questions raised by the Productivity Commission. There would be merit in utilising these reports to undertake more in-depth analyses.

The enhancement ethos of academic audits captures innovation in teaching, learning and student experience across New Zealand universities.

The academic quality system for New Zealand universities is mature, coherent and of international standing.

The Executive Director and Board of the AQA would be happy to provide further comment and meet with the Productivity Commission to discuss any aspect of AQA activities and how they inform the Productivity Commission's questions.

Introduction

This submission outlines the role of the AQA, provides comment on its current activities and outlines the level of commonality between the coverage of the cycle 5 academic audit and the questions posed by the Productivity Commission. It makes the point that academic audit reports for New Zealand universities provide a body of evidence from which to respond to the questions raised. As the AQA academic audit reports of New Zealand universities are publicly available, this submission attaches or provides links to existing materials.

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) was established by New Zealand universities in 1994, as the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit. It is an independent body whose purpose is to contribute to the advancement of university education by:

- Engaging as a leader and advocate in the development of academic quality;

- Applying quality assurance and quality enhancement processes that assist universities in improving student engagement, academic experience and learning outcomes.

Since its creation, the AQA has conducted 4 cycles of academic audit of New Zealand universities., with a fifth cycle in progress. The frameworks for each of the cycles of academic audit have drawn on international best practice and the requirements of the New Zealand universities. Academic audits for an individual university occur every five years and universities are required to provide follow up reports on progress on recommendations made in audit reports.

Further information about academic audit and others functions of AQA can be found at www.aqa.ac.nz.

Role and standing of the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities

Together with the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP), AQA provides the external quality assurance function for New Zealand Universities. That this quality function itself is of international standing is evidenced by AQA being reviewed on a regular cycle. The reviews of AQA include international panel members and AQA is a full member of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), and of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). AQA has been assessed as adhering to the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance. AQA was last reviewed in 2015 and the report of the review panel is available at <http://www.aqa.ac.nz/2015externalreview>.

The academic quality system for New Zealand universities is thus mature, coherent and of international standing.

AQA conducts academic audits of university teaching and learning and student experience activities. The key principles underpinning academic audits carried out by AQA are:

- peer review
- evidence-based
- externally benchmarked
- enhancement-led

Adherence to these principles supports New Zealand Universities in maintaining and improving their international standing and recognition.

The enhancement led ethos of academic audits means that academic audits capture and critique the innovation that New Zealand universities are undertaking with respect to teaching, learning and student experience. While all academic audit reports of New Zealand universities are publicly available, AQA is optimally positioned to comment on innovation in teaching, learning and student experience. The body of evidence on innovation, change and enhancement contained in academic audit reports challenges the proposition in the terms of reference for the Productivity Commission “that there is considerable inertia in the New Zealand system and an unwillingness to try new things” (p17).

A review of Cycle 4 Academic Audit findings (Kirkwood, 2013) identified that over the period between cycle 3 and cycle 4 audits, universities had made significant changes and improvements in their library and information services, student support services and campus life. Postgraduate student enrolment and support, including supervision, was a further area where universities demonstrated significant improvements. Universities also received

commendations for improvements and innovations in their commitments to Māori advancement. These and other systemic changes (innovations) in New Zealand universities are set out in the Universities NZ submission and are not repeated here.

The enhancement ethos of academic audits captures innovation in teaching, learning and student experience across New Zealand universities.

Cycle 5 Academic Audit

AQA is currently conducting its fifth cycle of academic audits for New Zealand universities. The Cycle 5 academic audit is framed around academic activities related to teaching and learning and student support. The key academic activity themes which form the framework for the academic audit are:

1. Leadership and management of teaching and learning
2. Student profile: access, transition and admission processes
3. Curriculum and assessment
4. Student engagement and achievement
5. Student feedback and support
6. Teaching quality
7. Supervision of research students.

The audit framework covers activities and quality assurance processes which might be expected as fundamental in a contemporary university of good standing. The framework articulates these expectations in a series of 40 Guideline Statements (see <http://www.aqa.ac.nz/sites/all/files/AQA%20Cycle%205%20Framework%20Jan2013.pdf>). Six of out the eight universities have completed their cycle 5 academic audits (the remaining two – Otago and Lincoln will be completed in 2016). The completed cycle 5 academic audit reports are publically available at <http://www.aqa.ac.nz/reports-and-papers> and constitute a body of evidence of how New Zealand universities are performing, innovating and contributing across many of the questions raised by the Productivity Commission.

Contribution of AQA Cycle 5 Academic Audits to Questions raised by the Productivity Commission

There is a high degree of correspondence between the 40 guideline statements (GS) that are addressed in the Cycle 5 academic audit and the questions raised by the Productivity Commission. The analysis below is very much a preliminary analysis of how the body of evidence contained in academic audit reports can inform the questions raised by the Productivity Commission. It demonstrates however the coverage, depth and wealth of evidence that is available for a more detailed analysis.

The analysis below utilizes the academic audit terminology of commendations, affirmations and recommendations to identify where panels have made particular comment on university activities:

Commendations refer to examples of exceptionally good practice, or to examples of effective innovative practice, in areas which have or should result in enhancements to academic quality or to processes underpinning

academic quality and which should produce positive impacts on teaching, learning and student experience.

Affirmations refer to areas which the University has already identified for itself in its self-review Report or during the site visit as requiring attention, and about which the University has already taken action but does not yet have sufficient outcome to evaluate impact. Affirmations are in effect a validation by the audit Panel that something needs to be done and that the approach taken is likely to be effective.

Recommendations refer to areas where the audit Panel believes the University would benefit from making some improvements or changes. Recommendations alert the University to what the Panel believes needs to be addressed, not to how this is done. The Panel may indicate some priority for recommendations by noting a need for action as urgent.

The preliminary analysis below identifies Guideline Statements (GS) in the cycle 5 academic audit framework that provide particular insight into universities activities in the area raised by the question. It focuses on commendations and affirmations as these demonstrate where universities are exhibiting good practice. It is not and does not purport to be a complete analysis of all universities' activities relevant to a particular question or issue.

Q2: Do prospective students have good enough information to enable them to make informed choices about providers and courses? What additional information should be provided? Who should provide it?

GS 2.1 assesses the extent to which Universities admission and selection policies and practices are clear and publicly available to students. In the cycle 5 academic audits to date, the audit panel affirmed a university's initiative to develop consistent formats for the presentation of regulations on the web, and noted the intention to extend this to qualification regulations through use of a common template. No recommendations with respect to this guideline statement have been made in cycle 5, indicating that the view of the audit panels is that universities' admission and selection processes are indeed clear and easily available.

Q10: What are the implications of the multiple activities of tertiary education for its delivery? What outputs are best produced together? What outputs are best produced separately?

Q11: What are the benefits and disadvantages, in terms of students' learning outcomes, of bundling together research and teaching at universities in New Zealand?

Among others, GS 6.2 and section 7 consider how universities integrate their research and teaching activities. GS 6.2 is concerned with universities having processes which ensure that degree-level students are taught mainly by staff who are research-active (as required under the Education Act, 1989) and the guideline statements in section 7 consider supervision of research students. Universities have been commended in cycle 5 for success in raising the profile and valuing of excellence in teaching during a period of significant focus on improving institutional research output.

All universities audited so far in cycle 5 received either commendations or affirmations of practices associated with supervision of research students. While this might be expected to be

an area of strength for universities, these commendations and affirmations demonstrate that universities are continually improving their practices and processes in this area. Specific commendations included:

- the extensive range of resources and support services available for doctoral students,
- thoroughness of procedures associated with admission, enrolment, supervision, progression through study and examination for postgraduate students,
- provisions made for training, supporting, mentoring and monitoring supervisors and for guidelines regarding workload management of supervisors,
- overall management of postgraduate research study and in particular the various efforts made to encourage postgraduate research students to be active members of the university research community, and
- having a comprehensive suite of postgraduate surveys, on the extensive use of the data, responsiveness to the analyses and on the communication back to students of actions taken.

Other benefits of bundling research and teaching include the ability to provide clear pathways to postgraduate study and thus develop next generations of researchers and ensuring that all degree-level students in universities study in a research-led environment and develop a research base for their studies contributing to them becoming life-long learners and critically constructive members of a civic society.

Q12: What value is attached to excellence in teaching compared to excellence in research when universities recruit or promote staff?

Section 6 in the Cycle 5 Academic Audit Framework is concerned with teaching quality and GS 6.1, 6.3 and 6.6 explicitly address recognition of teaching quality (and excellence) in recruitment and promotion of academic staff in universities. Again, all universities audited so far have received commendations and affirmations for their practices and processes to ensure teaching is of high quality. Staff recruitment and induction processes to ensure that teaching staff are appropriately qualified are an area of strength with 4 universities receiving affirmations for enhancements that they are pursuing. These include:

- an academic standards policy as a defining document to clarify performance and responsibility expectations of academic staff at all levels and for appointment, performance evaluation, continuation and promotion purposes.
- an initiative in implementing the RedCarpet online portal for new staff, whereby they may engage with University induction experiences from the time of confirmation of appointment
- the introduction of the Leadership and Management Development Programme.
- an approach to staff induction, including pre-arrival advice and online modules and use of evidence-based resources for new academic staff.

Two universities received commendations for their practices in recognising and rewarding teaching quality, particularly:

- a teaching advocate programme and the inclusive nature of a suite of awards which recognise teaching.

- a teaching awards framework which includes systematic stair-cased processes for recognizing and rewarding excellent teachers.

No university has so far received a recommendation with respect to this guideline statement, indicating that universities do value excellence in teaching. It should be noted that teaching and research are complementary activities in universities and promotion criteria reflect this inter-dependence, with teaching evaluations being a required in applications for promotion. The dichotomy suggested by Q12 is unlikely to provide a great deal of insight into the ways in which teaching quality is valued and recognised in universities.

Q14: What other evidence is there about what makes for effective teaching in a tertiary environment? Is it different for different types of learning or student? How can teaching effectiveness be best measured and improved?

A number of guideline statements in the Cycle 5 Academic Audit Framework provide evidence for effective teaching. GS 3.3 (Graduate outcomes), 5.5 (Feedback from students), 5.6 (Feedback from graduates) and 6.6 (Teaching recognition) provide particular insight. Good practices commended in cycle 5 audits so far include:

- determination to ensure a high proportion of students have the opportunity for work-integrated learning, on the commitment of staff to this and on the strong endorsement by students of its value to their learning.
- work in developing a new Graduate Profile, consultation with both staff and students which underpins the development, the manner in which the connections between the Profile, graduate attributes and graduate outcomes are being mapped from course level to institutional level and the opportunities which are being provided to enable students to acquire co-curricular attributes.
- a Graduate Destination Survey and use of resultant analyses.

Q15: How do tertiary providers assess, recognise and reward teaching quality in recruitment and career progression? To what extent do tertiary providers support the professional learning of teachers?

University practices with respect to recognition and reward of teaching quality are addressed in the response to Q12. The response to this question focuses on how universities support professional learning of teachers. GS 6.4 and 6.5 in the Cycle 5 Academic Audit Framework are concerned with how universities provide opportunities for staff to develop their teaching practice, including application of contemporary pedagogical research, use of learning management systems and use of new technologies; and how universities ensure support for these (and other activities) is made available to staff who teach on other campuses.

All audits conducted so far in cycle 5 have received commendations, affirmations or recommendations for this guideline statement, suggesting that it is an area of particular activity in universities and focus for audit panels. Four of the six universities audited so far in cycle 5 have received commendations for teaching development including:

- the wide range of services offered to staff and postgraduate students and the research ethos underpinning work in developing teaching and learning.

- a clear statement of an expectation of staff professional development and an entitlement to time to carry this out.
- a strong commitment to the development of teaching excellence and for support of projects to embed new technologies for teaching and learning and to communicate good teaching practice, including support of projects to develop teaching capability.
- increased support for staff to undertake the Postgraduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching.

Q16: How do New Zealand tertiary providers use student evaluations? How does this influence provider behaviour?

GS 5.5 is concerned with universities' processes for gaining feedback on student satisfaction with teaching courses and student services and demonstrating that feedback is used to inform improvements initiatives. GS 5.6 considers universities' processes for gaining feedback from graduates regarding their satisfaction with their university experience and learning outcomes and again demonstrating that this feedback is used. In cycle 5 so far, only one university has received an affirmation for their graduate survey and use of resulting analyses.

Q17: In what ways and to what extent do employers interact with tertiary providers in New Zealand? Are there practical ways to encourage employers to have greater or more productive involvement in the tertiary education system?

GS 3.1 and 3.4 consider university processes for programme approval and review, respectively. Input from stakeholders, including employers, is expected to be part of these processes. No university has so far in cycle 5 received a recommendation for programme approval processes, suggesting that universities processes are in line that would be expected of an internationally well performing university. One university received a commendation for its clear, comprehensive and systematic programme approval process which ensures appropriate stakeholder input and external academic scrutiny as well as facilitating benchmarking and ensuring strategic alignment of new developments. Programme approval processes are overseen by CUAP and the Universities NZ submission provides further comment on how universities interact with employers.

Programme review processes are another area where universities interact with employers. Thus far in cycle 5, only one recommendation for enhancement has been made, again suggesting that NZ universities are performing well with respect to this aspect of their activities.

Q26: What are the pros and cons of different quality assurance arrangements for universities to those for ITPs, wānanga, and PTEs?

The pros and cons of having different quality assurance arrangements for universities and other parts of the sector is not directly assessed in the cycle 5 academic audit framework. However, the external review of AQA commended the Agency for operating a system of quality audit of New Zealand universities which meets the highest standards of independence and integrity and on the robust processes that AQA applies to the audit of quality in universities.

Q32: To what extent are graduates meeting employers' expectations with respect to hard or technical skills? What about soft skills and capabilities?

Q34: What is being done to develop, assess and certify non-cognitive skills in tertiary education in New Zealand? Do approaches vary across provider types, or between higher, vocational, and foundation education?

GS 3.2 and 3.3 consider graduate attributes and graduate outcomes. As part of approval processes, all qualifications are required to have a graduate profile and the expectation is that these profiles will have been developed with input from stakeholders, including employers. Further, a number of universities have developed a university graduate profile and there is a high degree of correspondence between the attributes in university level graduate profiles and attributes of graduates desired by employers. Two universities so far in cycle 5 have received affirmations of their development of an institutional Graduate Profile.

With respect to Q34, a number of universities provide work-integrated learning, service learning and volunteering opportunities to support development of "non-cognitive" skills. Universities have been commended for their determination to ensure a high proportion of students have the opportunity for work-integrated learning, on the commitment of staff to this and on the strong endorsement by students of its value to their learning and for mapping graduate outcomes from course level to institutional level and the opportunities which are being provided to enable students to acquire co-curricular attributes.

Q 35: What are the implications of new technologies that are predicted to make many currently valuable skills obsolete? Will this change the role of the tertiary education system?

While technology will undoubtedly continue to change skills and roles required in the workplace and society, universities are conscious of this and consider these implications in the development of graduate profiles and qualifications (see responses to Q17 and Q34 above). Attributes such as ethical judgement and decision-making and the ability to critique the implications of decisions will remain important in technologically dominant futures. The critical thinking capabilities developed from research-led teaching will remain relevant.

Q36: What challenges and opportunities do demographic changes present for the tertiary education system?

GS 2.2 considers how universities use policies and/or procedures designed to assist the access and transition of equity or other priority groups. This guideline statement therefore provides insight into how universities have responded to demographic changes (as well as the Tertiary Education Strategy). Three universities in Cycle 5 have received commendations for:

- long-standing comprehensive, systematic and informed approach to encouraging the access and transition of Māori and Pacific students to University, including the UTAS provision, clear communication of admission requirements and wide range of activities to support transition at both institutional and faculty level.
- A South Auckland campus initiative and success in recruiting and supporting Pacific students and endeavouring to ensure that the opportunities available for Māori and Pacific students are not unfairly constrained by location, affordability or educational inexperience
- translation of a University's commitment to its Treaty obligations into actions which support its equity objectives with respect to Māori, and on the embeddedness of

mechanisms and activities to support Māori student recruitment, retention and achievement.

- commitment to Pasifika student recruitment, retention and achievement, and in particular on the Wainuiomata Pasifika Education Success Initiative and the introduction of distinctive spaces, services and programmes to support Pasifika students once enrolled.

Q42: What specific technologies should the inquiry investigate? Why?

Q43: What parts of the tertiary education system are challenged by ongoing technological change? What parts can exploit the opportunities created?

GS 1.4, 1.5 and 6.4 consider strategies for ensuring that teaching and learning spaces (including digital spaces) are appropriate, that information resources are appropriate and sufficient and that staff have opportunities to use new technologies. Three universities have so far received commendations or affirmations for their processes related to teaching and learning infrastructure, 3 for processes related to information resources and (as noted above) 4 universities have received commendations or affirmations for development of teaching practice including use of new technologies. Commendations and affirmations related to teaching and learning space development and teaching include:

- a systematic, evidence-based, internationally benchmarked approach to learning space design, consultative processes, identification and replication of effective space utilisation and design principles and initiatives to assist students with technological needs.
- processes for planning development of teaching and learning spaces, in particular efforts to ensure that spaces are aligned with pedagogical developments which reflect the University's distinctive character as well as with capital planning and financial allocation.
- development of e-portfolios as a tool for students to record and evaluate their own progress towards acquiring graduate attributes, and the University's efforts to encourage academic staff to incorporate use of e-portfolios into their teaching and learning approaches.

Q44: How has internationalisation affected New Zealand's tertiary education system? What are the ongoing challenges and opportunities from internationalisation of the tertiary education system?

As indicated above, a number of universities identify international activities and internationalisation among their strategic priorities and also identify international students as a priority group. It should be noted that academic staff profiles of universities reflect a high level of internationalisation.

GS 4.3 considers retention, academic success and completion rates for particular groups of students including international students. Cycle 5 academic audit panels have made relatively few comments on this guideline statement so far, indicating that university processes are working well in this area.

Q46: What other trends provide challenges and opportunities for the tertiary education system?

Q47: What trends are likely to be most influential for the tertiary education system over the next 20 years?

Not specifically analysed in this submission, but GS 1.2 provides insight into university strategic and operational planning and therefore the trends and priorities that universities are considering in their strategic planning activities.

Q49: What new models of tertiary education are being implemented in universities, ITPs, PTEs and wānanga? How successful have they been?

The issue of new models in tertiary education is not captured by a single guideline statement in the Cycle 5 Academic Audit Framework. However, new models and initiatives have been developed across the range of university teaching and learning and student support activities. Examples that have received commendations in cycle 5 so far include:

- development of consolidated student support services,
- development of tailored support services including pre-reading services,
- development of mobile and other channels for service delivery (e.g. face-to-face, online and virtual),
- development of campuses and other services and facilities to enhance access,
- learning partnership initiatives, including wide-ranging and comprehensive plans, guidelines, resources and activities which support the philosophy of learner-centred academic processes within a coordinated framework, and
- development of student mentoring frameworks.

Q53: What measures have been successful in improving access, participation, achievement and outcomes for Māori? What measures have been less successful? Why?

Q54: What measures have been successful in improving access, participation, achievement and outcomes for Pasifika? What measures have been less successful? Why?

Noting the distinctive requirements and priorities for each of these groups, GS 2.2 and 4.3 (as noted above) consider access and transition and retention and completion for equity and other priority groups. University good practices which has been commended in cycle 5 audits so far has been commented on in the response to Q36 above.

Q55: What measures have been successful in improving access, participation, achievement and outcomes for at-risk youth? What measures have been less successful? Why?

In addition to the comments on access and transition above, GS 4.4 considers how universities use processes for identifying and assisting students at risk of under-achieving. Again, little comment has been made by audit panels so far with one university receiving a recommendation. This again indicates that universities are considered to have effective processes for students at risk of under-achieving.

Q56: What measures have been successful in improving access, participation, achievement and outcomes for those with limited access to traditional campus-based provision? What measures have been less successful? Why?

As indicated above, GS 2.2 is concerned with access and transition processes designed to assist access and transition of equity or other priority groups. GS 3.7, 5.4 and 6.5 are

concerned with equivalence and support on other campuses. Other campuses are one way in which universities have addressed the issue of improving access.

Q57: What measures have been successful in improving access, participation, achievement and outcomes for people with disabilities? What measures have been less successful? Why?

That cycle 5 is concerned with issues related to access and transition (GS 2.2) has been discussed above. GS 4.2 and 5.2 are concerned with retention and completion and learning support, including for particular groups or students with particular needs. Three universities have received commendations for their activities related to retention and completion and 3 universities have also received commendations for learning support opportunities and access. A number of universities specifically identify students with a disability as a priority group and commendations of good practice and affirmations capture university initiatives with respect to these students. For example, universities have been commended for the development of an overarching Student Retention Plan and Student Retention Implementation Plan, and on the systematic reporting of achievements related to equity groups targeted by the Plans.

Q58: What measures have been successful in improving access, participation, achievement and outcomes for adults with low levels of literacy or numeracy? What measures have been less successful? Why?

As noted above, GS 5.2 is concerned with learning support at universities. For most universities, these activities are likely to occur in conjunction with schools or other education providers. Lincoln University has yet to be audited in cycle 5, but given its vertically integrated portfolio of provision is more likely to undertake initiatives in the area.

Q59: What measures have been successful in improving access, participation, achievement and outcomes for adults with low levels of literacy or numeracy? What measures have been less successful? Why?

Q60: What are the factors associated with successful innovation in the tertiary education system?

Q63: How well do innovations spread in the tertiary education system? What helps or hinders their diffusion?

As set out in the introduction to this submission, the amount of innovation and enhancement led change captured by academic audit provides strong evidence for an innovative and flexible university system that does not experience “considerable inertia”. The enhancement-led principle of academic audit that supports continuous improvement in universities is a contributor to innovation. This submission is not a full assessment of all innovation in the university system. There would however be merit in conducting a complete analysis using an innovation framework of the cycle 5 academic audits released to date. The same argument could be made for other publicly available university documents such as strategic plans or teaching and learning plans.

In addition to conducting academic audits, AQA is also engaged with sharing of best practice across the university (and wider tertiary) system. Dissemination channels include the Support for Quality conferences organized by AQA, workshops on focus topics (for example, programme review) and the AQA Newsletter. This aspect of AQA activities was also commended in the 2015 External review of AQA. Further AQA also undertakes thematic analysis of academic audit cycles.

Q73: How do intellectual property protections in tertiary education foster or hinder innovation? Are the effects different in different parts of the system or for different kinds of provider?

As noted above, postgraduate supervision is an area of strength for universities. Commendations of good practice in this area include reference to management of intellectual property for and by postgraduate students.

Preliminary analysis of Cycle 5 Academic Audits

The cycle 5 academic audit reports thus provide a body of evidence from which to consider questions raised by the Productivity Commission. There would be merit in utilising these reports to undertake more in-depth analyses.

Conclusion

This initial submission has demonstrated that:

- *The academic quality system for New Zealand universities is mature, coherent and of international standing.*
- *The enhancement ethos of academic audits captures innovation in teaching, learning and student experience across New Zealand universities.*
- *The cycle 5 academic audit reports provide a body of evidence from which to consider questions raised by the Productivity Commission. There would be merit in utilising these reports to undertake more in-depth analyses.*

AQA would be happy to provide further evidence or discuss any aspect of this submission or the functions and activities of AQA. The ED and the Board would be happy to meet with the Productivity Commission to assist in their deliberations.

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Supporting Documents and Links

AQA (2016), Report of the 2015 Academic Audit of The Auckland University of Technology – Te Wānanga Aronui o Tāmaki Makau Rau. Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities April 2016. Available at <http://www.aqa.ac.nz/sites/all/files/AUT%20Report%20Cycle%205.pdf>

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