

Report of the 2014 Academic Audit of the University of Canterbury

Executive Summary

The University of Canterbury was New Zealand's second university to be established, in 1873. Since 1975 it has been located at Ilam, from where almost all programmes are currently delivered. In 2007 the Christchurch College of Education was incorporated into the University and the University now also delivers teacher education courses outside Christchurch at centres in Nelson, New Plymouth and Rotorua. The University has no overseas campuses.

The University was audited by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) in 2014. The AQA audit methodology incorporates a framework of 40 Guideline Statements which articulate the qualities or standards which a contemporary university of good standing internationally might be expected to demonstrate. Prior to the 2014 audit, the University of Canterbury was most recently audited by AQA (as the then New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit) in 2010. In 2014 the University provided an update against the findings of the 2010 audit and the Panel is satisfied that appropriate action has been taken to address most of the 2010 recommendations. The Panel has reiterated the views of the Cycle 4 Panel that the University should extend and systematise its institutional benchmarking activity; the Cycle 5 Panel identified a number of areas where it believes the University would benefit from accessing the experience of other similar institutions as it seeks to consolidate a reputation as an internationally-recognised university.

Since the last academic audit in 2010 the University has been severely affected by the two Christchurch earthquakes in September 2010 and February 2011 and the thousands of subsequent aftershocks. In addition to major impacts on infrastructure and the associated remediation cost, student enrolments and academic staff numbers have decreased. At the time of the audit the ongoing issues related to personal dislocation and the stress associated with domestic rebuilding, remediation and insurance continued to impact on a number of staff and students. The Panel was impressed by the resilience shown by staff and students, by the commitment and their determination to meet the challenges being experienced as the University recovers from the impact of the earthquakes. The Panel commends the University on developing, implementing and evaluating risk management and business continuity procedures; on the effectiveness of these in the circumstances resulting from the earthquakes; on the commitment and fortitude demonstrated by staff and students to pursuing their teaching, learning and research; and on the leadership regionally and nationally in sharing good practice and lessons learned from their experiences.

The University of Canterbury is strongly devolved with many responsibilities residing with its Colleges and their Pro-Vice-Chancellors and Heads of School. While the Panel considers that apparent reliance on trust is admirable, it also identified a number of instances where devolution as practised at Canterbury compromises the University's ability to assure itself of the quality of academic and related processes at an institutional level.

Alongside the activities arising from the University's Investment Plan framework the University is planning its work for the UC Futures recovery plan agreed to with government in 2012. The UC Futures project includes articulation of a University graduate profile which will apply to all

undergraduates. The Panel considers the academic initiatives proposed within the University's UC Futures business case are ambitious, but achievable. Several of the Panel's recommendations are intended to assist the University towards these goals by providing an external perspective on the activities proposed.

The Panel was impressed by the pervasive involvement of students in University activities and the commitment the University has to listening to the student voice. The University and the University of Canterbury Students' Association are commended on the wide-ranging and effective contribution made by students to the University's planning, reviews, academic activity and service and to the joint University and UCSA provision of services intended to enhance student well-being on campus.

The Panel considers that the University shows good commitment to student learning support and its resourcing. The work of the University's Pacific team, disability support services, the attention paid to personal safety on campus, and the University's approach to seeking postgraduate feedback are all areas where the Panel identified excellent practice.

The Panel has made several recommendations intended to assist the University to further develop good practice in teaching, curriculum development and assessment. In particular, it recommends that the University develops and implements its e-learning strategy, including benchmarking against relevant good practices in comparable universities in New Zealand and elsewhere. Other recommendations refer to assessment moderation, course and teaching surveys and evaluation of teaching quality. The Panel recognised the increasing emphasis placed on teaching, and considered the teaching qualifications, awards and the Teaching Week to be good initiatives, but it also identified a need to address institution-wide professional teaching development and opportunities for pedagogical research.

Overall, the Panel was satisfied that in almost all cases the expectations articulated in the Guideline Statements were met. Where audit recommendations suggest improvements are necessary or desirable, the Panel is also mindful that the University has faced major challenges over the last four years and that its current priority is to bridge the gap from the 2010 pre-earthquake learning and teaching achievements to those now befitting a university of 2015 and beyond. The Panel hopes that its recommendations might assist in providing some guidance towards this objective.

The Panel has made six commendations, five affirmations and fourteen recommendations. The University is expected to report on its response to the recommendations made by the Panel in twelve months' time (early in 2016) and again at the time of the next academic audit.



The full report is available from the AQA website: www.aqa.ac.nz/canterburycycle5.

Contact: director@aqa.ac.nz or phone (04) 801 7925

Website: www.aqa.ac.nz

Date of release: 24 March 2015