2020 External Review of AQA – One-year follow-up report

This report sets out how AQA has addressed or is addressing the recommendations made in the 2020 External Review of AQA.

1. The Panel recommends that the AQA Board consider developing a communications and engagement strategy that supports and recognises the work undertaken by AQA as part of the quality assurance process.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation. A communications and engagement strategy has been included in AQA's draft Strategic Framework 2022-2027. AQA has also developed information resources (posters, flyers and e-tiles) for universities to help raise awareness and improve wider understanding of academic audit.

2. The Panel recommends that the AQA Board develop a strategic direction for future developments in quality assurance across the university sector, including the extent of the support provided to the Executive Director.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation and is addressing it in the redevelopment of AQA's Strategic Framework. Support available to the Executive Director is addressed in the response to Recommendation 11.

The AQA Board also recognises that a quality assurance perspective should be complementary to strategic developments in teaching and learning across the university sector.

3. The Panel recommends that, to improve consistency, AQA works with students' associations to develop a national framework for student voices and good practice guidelines for including student voices.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation. The specifics of a national framework for student voices have been overtaken with the release of Whiria Ngā Rau which was developed by students with the support of the Ministry of Education. However, AQA has released a 'Students in Quality' working paper which draws on Whiria Ngā Rau to provide good practice guidelines for working with and supporting student voices.

4. The Panel recommends that the appointment of auditors mirrors our society and that the training of all auditors provides a comprehensive understanding of the quality assurance processes and procedures within a New Zealand context, including Te Tiriti o Waitangi training.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation. AQA has agreed a nomination process with Te Kāhui Amokura to increase the number of Māori auditors. The AQA Board monitors the diversity of appointees to the Cycle 6 Register of Auditors and Reviewers and a measure to monitor diversity is included in AQA's Statement of Performance.

Te Tiriti o Waitangi training will be included in Auditor training. This part of the response to this recommendation will be extended to include the AQA Board induction programme.

5. The Panel recommends that all AQA auditors receive training on how to effectively work with and support student voices.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation and will incorporate it into auditor training.

6. The Panel recommends that future monitoring of the impact of the Enhancement Theme in audit cycles separates out Māori from Pasifika and is co-led with these respective groups.

This recommendation is supported. The Enhancement Theme Steering Group has finished its role. However, an interim review of the audit phase of Cycle 6 (scheduled for after the audit of Victoria University of Wellington) will assess whether the Guideline Statements developed to assess progress on enhancement theme plans are eliciting the sorts of information that is anticipated. The interim review of Cycle 6 processes and the full reviews of Cycle 6 (in 2025 at the end of the Cycle) will separate impact monitoring for Māori and impact monitoring for Pasifika. This will be incorporated into the Cycle 6 Operational Plan and this approach is also reflected in AQA's draft Strategic Framework 2022-2027.

7. The Panel recommends that, in order to actively 'acknowledge the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi', the AQA Board reflect this in their membership through the appointment of an appropriately qualified Māori member as either the Co-Chair or Deputy Chair.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation. Changes to the AQA Constitution as part of implementation have been made.

8. The Panel recommends that the AQA Board be expanded to include a Māori student representative from Te Mana Ākonga (TMĀ), and for equal representation of Te Mana Ākonga and the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA) on all future ad-hoc AQA committees.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation. Changes to the AQA Constitution as part of implementation have been made..

The AQA Board is conscious of both adding cost through adding a further Board member and in the potential for another member from a further constituency to challenge the focus of AQA. The AQA Board considers that the cost involved is small relative to the benefit that would be gained, that having more than one student member of the Board would be consistent with international good practice and that AQA's Constitution and other accountability documents (Statement of Performance Expectations and Executive Director's Key performance Indicators) are sufficiently directive to maintain focus.

9. The Panel recommends that the term of each student representative on the AQA Board be for one year with TMĀ and NZUSA determining their representatives, and that TMĀ student members are also remunerated for their time and all student members receive appropriate induction.

The AQA Board supports the intent of this recommendation. The AQA Board also notes that the Vice-Chancellors make appointments to the AQA Board. However, an agreement with NZUSA and Te Mana Ākonga that follows the principles agreed for appointing student members of CUAP and CUSPaC may be appropriate. This would mean that NZUSA would consult with NZVCC before making an appointment to its national education position. This option is included in the changes to the AQA Constitution.

The Board would prefer that student members of the Board serve for terms longer than one year. AQA will continue to discuss this matter with NZUSA and Te Mana Ākonga and ensure that good transition and handover practices are in place.

10. The Panel recommends that all AQA Board members receive training on how to effectively work with and support student voices.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation and will extend this work to include audit panels. A Students in Quality working paper has been developed to guide the response to this recommendation.

11. The Panel recommends that the AQA Board prioritises the development of a workforce development plan to address the sustainability of the organisation.

The AQA Board supports this recommendation. AQA has analysed options for responding to this recommendation and assesses that it can utilise retained operating surpluses to support organisational sustainability and resilience by appointing a second professional staff member (at a comparable salary to step 2 on a lecturer scale or entry salary for a senior policy analyst).

This second professional role will provide organisational resilience through the audit phase of Cycle 6 and support AQA's goal to be a good Tiriti o Waitangi partner. However, efforts to recruit a 0.6 FTE role were not successful. AQA will seek to return to the market for a 1.0 FTE position. This will have a minor impact on the financial performance this year. Provided AQA's annual grant is restored to its pre-COVID level for the 2022-23 financial year, this additional professional role is sustainable through to the end of the audit phase of Cycle 6 with support from retained operating surpluses.

AQA and UNZ have undertaken an analysis of policy alignment to inform the redevelopment of the Service Level Agreement through which AQA accesses office space, infrastructure and some administrative support. The redevelopment of the SLA will increase the amount of financial management and financial administrative support provided to AQA. This will increase cost to AQA (slightly) but will improve processes and resilience. Associated with this, UNZ has received advice from the OAG that a separate financial audit is not required for AQA. This should add some further administrative efficiencies.

Sheelagh Matear
Executive Director
December 2021