External Review Report

Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities

Te Pokapū Kounga Mātauranga mō ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa

TE PŌKAI TARA
UNIVERSITIES
NEW ZEALAND

External Review Report

Academic Quality Agency
for New Zealand Universities

*Te Pokapū Kounga Mātauranga
mō ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa*

September 2020

Contents

External Review Terms of Reference

The objective of this review is to assess how effectively the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) assists the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) to discharge its responsibilities for quality assurance matters in universities through:

- delivering on its purpose in line with its terms of reference,
- meeting or exceeding the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Guidelines of Good Practice, and
- transacting core business processes efficiently and effectively.

The review will investigate whether AQA:

- demonstrates leadership and advocacy in the development of academic quality,
- undertakes quality assurance processes that assist universities,
- supports quality enhancement processes that assist universities,
- contributes to confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities,
- transacts its core business efficiently and effectively,
- undertakes appropriate international and other activities.

The particular criteria related to each of the external review Terms of Reference above are listed in Appendix 1. Each of these criteria is mapped to the appropriate INQAAHE Guideline of Good Practice (GGP) in Appendix 2. AQA's own terms of reference are described in the Introduction.

Executive Summary

This external review is the fifth since the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) was established in 1993, with the most recent external review being undertaken in 2015. It has been independently commissioned by Universities New Zealand[1] (UNZ) and has been conducted jointly with a representative from the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE).

The review has been informed by AQA's Self-Review Portfolio, interviews with 34 stakeholders and 22 written submissions. The Panel closely followed the External Review Terms of Reference and the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) in their consideration of the evidence presented during the external review process.

The objective of this review is to assess how effectively AQA assists the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee to discharge its responsibilities for quality assurance matters in universities through:

- delivering on its purpose in line with its terms of reference,
- meeting or exceeding INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice, and
- transacting core business processes efficiently and effectively.

The Panel has made its assessment under the following headings taken from the External Review Terms of Reference:

Leadership and Advocacy

AQA demonstrates leadership and advocacy in the development of academic quality

The Panel found that AQA has an important role in ensuring there are excellent standards and good practice in the university sector. AQA and the Executive Director have put considerable effort into the preparation and dissemination of reports and reviews of quality assurance activities. It was evident that these reports, as well as annual fora and symposia and regular newsletters, are valued by the sector.

The Panel found that collaboration with other agencies is another of AQA's strengths. Building on its increasing collaboration with Quality Assurance Bodies in the Pacific, the Panel encourages AQA and NZVCC to reflect upon whether there is an opportunity for New Zealand and AQA to consider a greater coordinating and leadership role in the region.

AQA's ability to influence actual quality within universities and on the national stage is, however, limited by its size. AQA's small size and limited scope restrict its ability and influence as a commentator and as an organisation that can provide proactive national leadership in times of rapid change.

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[1] The New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC) is known as Universities New Zealand *Te Pokai Tara*.

Quality Assurance

AQA undertakes quality assurance processes that assist universities

Quality assurance is the foundation of AQA's work. AQA has undertaken a range of activities to promote and support the development of New Zealand universities' internal quality assurance processes. The Panel found commendable good practice demonstrated in the comprehensive and consultative process and preparatory work in advance of the Cycle 6 audit. The Panel found that the reliability and consistency of this process is supported by the availability of the comprehensive written guides, the training provided to audit panel members, and the moderation of audit reports provided by the Executive Director and the Board.

In acknowledging that AQA has an important role in ensuring there are excellent standards and good practice in the sector, Māori stakeholders laid down a challenge to AQA to continue to facilitate the national and international conversation around how Te Ao Māori can be incorporated into the audit process at a fundamental level.

Quality Enhancement

AQA supports quality enhancement processes that assist universities

Stakeholders have viewed the Enhancement Theme work as worthwhile and of assistance to universities, and hold AQA's communications and events in high regard. Positive feedback in relation to the innovative nature of the enhancement theme activities was received from university and international stakeholders.

AQA does commendable work in supporting the contribution of an effective student voice in quality assurance and enhancement, and has made genuine efforts to acknowledge the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Panel encourages AQA to continue this work, with the longer term ambition of truly reflecting the partnership goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Confidence

AQA contributes to confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities

AQA supports confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities in a number of ways. A range of governance documents outlines its purpose and objectives, and a range of policies and plans guides its operations. The scope of AQA's quality assurance activities is clearly described in its terms of reference. The Panel has made a number of recommendations relating to AQA's governance arrangements to ensure that these reflect its terms of reference and include all relevant stakeholders.

International Activities

AQA undertakes appropriate international and other activities

Universities, auditors and international stakeholders all provided examples of AQA's active and positive engagement in international quality assurance activities. AQA is seen as a credible commentator on international quality assurance matters and has a strong and well-developed perspective on external quality assurance.

It was evident to the Panel, through discussions with universities and international stakeholders, that AQA is an internationally respected organisation that uses its international connections to leverage benefits for New Zealand universities.

Having considered the evidence provided, it is the view of the Panel that AQA delivers on its Purpose in line with its terms of reference.

Efficiency and Effectiveness

AQA transacts its core business efficiently and effectively

The Panel is satisfied that AQA's broad structure of Board, Register of Auditors and Reviewers, and permanent secretariat is an effective approach that enables the Agency to carry out its external review activities. However, the Panel suggests that it would be very timely for the AQA Board to consider whether the Agency's staffing profile is adequate to best support the universities and the sector in the medium and longer term.

The Panel received positive feedback from auditors on the training provided for the Cycle 5 audit cycle. However, the Panel found that auditors did not feel well equipped in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi or in working with, and getting the best from, students contributing to audit.

Notwithstanding the excellent performance of the current Executive Director, the Panel had concerns related to the sustainability of AQA's staffing configuration in the long term. The Panel strongly suggests that it would be prudent of the AQA Board to consider the appointment of additional appropriately qualified staff, while at the same time putting in place a succession plan for the medium and long-term sustainability of the Agency.

It is the view of the Panel that strategic planning, physical resources and mechanisms for internal and external review are all satisfactory.

The Panel suggests that the Board consider whether and how a proportion of its reserves might be used to increase the capacity and capability of the Agency in order to further enhance its Purpose as a leader and advocate in the development of academic quality.

INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice

Having considered the evidence provided, it is the view of the Panel that AQA meets, and in a number of cases exceeds, the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice.

In conclusion, it is the considered view of the Panel that AQA effectively assists the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee to discharge its responsibilities for quality assurance matters in universities.

Summary of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations

COMMENDATIONS

1. The Panel c*ommends* AQA for addressing the thirteen recommendations offered by the External Review Panel from the 2015 Review, including the analysis of the Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations and the highlighting of specific areas for further development.

2. The Panel *commends* the Executive Director for the manner in which she models authentic engagement with all relevant stakeholder groups.

3. The Panel c*ommends* the Executive Director for her active and positive engagement in international quality assurance activities.

4. The Panel *commends* AQA's initiative in developing collaborative partnerships with its national, regional and international peers.

5. The Panel c*ommends* AQA for its comprehensive and consultative process and preparatory work in advance of the Cycle 6 audit, particularly the well-articulated guides and workshops.

6. The Panel *commends* AQA for its post-audit follow-up procedures which are consistent, effective and robust.

7. The Panel *commends* the work of the Executive Director in elevating student voice and partnering with students in meaningful ways.

8. The Panel *commends* the Executive Director for her commitment to the professional development of internal and external stakeholders.

9. The Panel c*ommends* AQA for incorporating the Enhancement Theme initiative as part of the frame of reference for the Cycle 6 Audit, thereby enabling universities to focus on Māori and Pasifika students' access, outcomes and opportunities.

AFFIRMATIONS

1. The Panel *affirms* that AQA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. The process is consistent with international standards.

2. The Panel *affirms* that AQA provides an opportunity for audited organisations to correct any factual errors in the audit report before the report is published. This process aligns with international standard practice and procedure.

3. The Panel *affirms* that AQA has a transparent, well-documented and well-articulated policy for appeals on its review and decision-making process. The appeal processes and procedures in place are examples of good practice.

4. The Panel *affirms* the work of the Executive Director in adopting good practice in AQA operations and putting in place self-review mechanisms for monitoring its own activities and progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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.

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.

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.

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.

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

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

Audit Process

The Terms of Reference for the review were approved by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee in October 2019. The Panel Chair was appointed in December 2019 and three other panel members in early 2020. The panel members included an international panel member nominated by INQAAHE, a recent graduate and a senior academic who could bring a Māori perspective (see Appendix 3).

On 25 March 2020, shortly before the Self-Review Portfolio was to be submitted, New Zealand entered a nationwide Level 4 lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that all travel outside a person's immediate neighbourhood ceased and non-essential work stopped or had to be conducted from home. As a consequence, this review has been conducted within the constraints of the national COVID-19 lockdown.

Despite the Level 4 lockdown, the Self-Review Portfolio was submitted electronically as planned on 1 April 2020. As well as the Self-review Report (SRR), the Portfolio comprised 10 Key and 52 Supporting Documents and links to a further 39 additional documents and websites. The portfolio was thus extremely comprehensive.

As is illustrated below in Figure 1, AQA has structured the Cycle 6 Academic Audit over an eight-year cycle and has introduced an Enhancement Theme. The period covered by this review is July 2015 – March 2020 which encompasses four audits in Cycle 5 (2015 – 2016) and the Enhancement Theme phase of Cycle 6 (2017 – 2019). As a result the Panel has placed particular emphasis in this review on the Enhancement Theme phase of the audit cycle. It must also be noted that as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic and its roll-on effects on universities, the beginning of the audit phase of Cycle 6 has been extended to 2021. The emphasis on the enhancement phase of Cycle 6 has been reflected in the mix of stakeholders whose views have been sought by the Panel.

Yr 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Enhancement Theme			Thematic emphasis				Review of cycle
		Self-Review	Audit Framework (guideline statements)				
Mid-cycle report			Includes report on any outstanding recommendations from Cycle 5				
Provision for early audit							
2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024

Figure 1: Cycle 6 Audit Cycle

Due to the uncertainty surrounding the COVID-19 restrictions, the Panel Chair and Secretary met with the AQA Executive Director and Board Chair via Zoom on 23 April 2020 to discuss whether the external review should be postponed. It was agreed that confirmation to proceed would be sought from the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, as the review commissioning body, before further work on the review was undertaken. This confirmation

was received on 29 April 2020. The decision to undertake a remote site visit was taken by the Panel on 20 May 2020.

As one of the objectives of this review is to assess the extent to which AQA meets or exceeds the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice, the INQAAHE representative on the Panel undertook an extensive desktop assessment of the documentation provided by AQA. The resulting *Preliminary Assessment of Self-Evaluation Report (SER) for INQAAHE GGP Certification* was presented to the rest of the Panel on 15 May 2020 with an update on 10 June 2020, following the provision by AQA of further evidence in several areas received on 5 June 2020.

Sixty-one New Zealand and international stakeholders were invited to contribute to the review through a written submission and/or a Zoom interview. Twenty-two written submissions were received from universities, AQA Board members, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA), Ako Aotearoa, Tauira Pasifika (The Voice of Pasifika Learners in Tertiary Education), both international and New Zealand Cycle 5 auditors, the former AQA Director, international and Pacific experts, and Enhancement Theme Steering Group members.

The Panel and Secretary met three times via Zoom before the remote site visit which took place from 15 – 18 June 2020. This enabled panel members to familiarise themselves with the arrangements for a virtual review and to discuss emerging themes and questions, in addition to ongoing email discussions throughout April 2020 and May 2020.

During the virtual site visit the Panel spoke via Zoom to the following interviewees throughout New Zealand and Australia (see also Appendix 4):

- Executive Director, AQA
- Board Chair and Deputy Chair, AQA
- Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Māori) or equivalent
- Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Pasifika) or equivalent
- Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic) or equivalent and Quality Managers or equivalent at all universities
- Vice-President, New Zealand Union of Students' Association (NZUSA)
- President, New Zealand International Students' Association (NZISA)
- President, Te Mana Ākonga - National Māori Tertiary Students' Association
- Cycle 5 Auditors and those on the Cycle 6 Register of Auditors
- Deputy Chair, Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP)
- Chief Executive Officer, Universities New Zealand (UNZ)

The Panel reported back to the AQA Board Chair and Executive Director at the end of the remote site visit. A verbal summary of commendations, affirmations and recommendations was provided.

This review report was drafted in the period after the remote site visit and has been sent to the AQA Board Chair and Executive Director for fact checking before submission of the final report to Universities New Zealand, the AQA Board Chair and AQA Director. It represents the findings of the Panel, based on the evidence provided through the AQA Self-Review Portfolio, written submissions, interviews with stakeholders and the Panel's own reflections.

Introduction

This external review has been independently commissioned by Universities New Zealand and has been conducted jointly with a representative from the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education. The purpose of this review is:

1. To assess how effectively AQA assists the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee to discharge its responsibilities for quality assurance matters in universities through:

   - delivering on its purpose in line with its terms of reference, and
   - transacting core business processes efficiently and effectively.

2. To review AQA's compliance with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) certification.

AQA and the Quality Assurance of New Zealand Universities

AQA is a quality assurance body that was established in 1993 by the Vice-Chancellors of New Zealand's universities to give effect to their responsibilities for university quality assurance matters under the New Zealand Education Act (1989). This is the fifth review of the agency, the previous reviews having taken place in 1997, 2001, 2009[2] and 2015.

AQA comprises a Board, a Register of Auditors and a Secretariat, headed by a Director. The AQA Board is appointed by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, however AQA is operationally independent of NZVCC and the universities.

According to AQA's Constitution, all New Zealand universities have undertaken to participate in supporting the existence of the Agency and to participate in its academic quality assurance activities. The scope of AQA's operation may not be extended without the consent of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

AQA is one of two quality assurance bodies established by NZVCC to oversee the academic quality assurance of New Zealand universities. The other is the Committee on University Academic Programmes. This sub-committee of NZVCC has delegated responsibility for the approval and accreditation of university qualifications.

AQA Purpose and Terms of Reference

AQA's purpose is to contribute to the advancement of New Zealand 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, and
- supporting confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities.

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[2] The Agency's name prior to 2012 was the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit.

As described in its Terms of Reference, AQA will:

- acknowledge the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi,
- maintain consistency with international expectations, standards and developments in external quality assurance,
- advise the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee and Universities New Zealand on quality assurance matters,
- reflect areas of importance to universities with respect to their teaching, learning, student experience and student outcomes activities,
- undertake quality assurance reviews (currently in the form of an academic audit) that are robust, fair and perceptive and that assist universities and their students,
- acknowledge and respect the individual contexts of universities in undertaking quality assurance reviews,
- make provision for appeals regarding the content of a quality assurance review,
- publish quality assurance reviews of universities,
- identify and promote good practice in quality assurance and enhancement,
- support the contribution of an effective student voice in quality assurance and enhancement,
- recognise other accountabilities and responsibilities of universities,
- maintain a constructive relationship with the Committee on University Academic Programmes that recognises the responsibilities of CUAP and AQA,
- contribute to the development of quality assurance in New Zealand and internationally,
- undertake contract work as is compatible with its purpose and terms of reference.

Since the 2015 AQA External Review there have been a number of changes that now underpin and influence AQA's activities. These include:

- the conclusion of Cycle 5 Academic Audit in 2016 and commencement of Cycle 6,
- AQA signing a Memorandum of Understanding with NZUSA in 2017,
- increased emphasis on acknowledging Te Tiriti o Waitangi,
- explicit attention paid to Pasifika,
- a change in staffing,
- New Zealand Government education reforms.

This report reflects these developments.

INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice

The INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice originated as a tool to support the systems safeguarding standards of higher education quality assurance. The GGP are part of INQAAHE's mission and are intended to promote high standards of professional practice by quality assurance agencies. A primary purpose of the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice is to provide criteria for use in the self- and external- evaluation of external quality assurance agencies (EQAAs)[3]. The Panel has made an assessment against each of the GGP in order to review AQA's compliance with the Guidelines (see Appendix 2).

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[3] INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice Procedures Manual 2018.

Section A: Response to Recommendations in 2015 External Review

The Panel has considered AQA's responses to the recommendations made in the 2015 External Review and gained further information on these recommendations through discussions with interviewees. The Panel has formed the following conclusions.

A1. The Panel *recommends* that the AQA Board explore ways to enhance the effectiveness of student representation on the Board.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation continues to be addressed. Further discussion of student voices within AQA governance follows in Section E5.

A2. The Panel *recommends* that the AQA Board explore ways to incorporate international representation on the Board.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation has been addressed. It is noted that the Board considers the costs of having a dedicated international Board member are not currently justified and that a number of the current Board members have international experience and perspectives. The Panel suggests that the Board consider how developments in technology (e.g., Zoom) might contribute to the further inclusion of international perspectives at Board level.

A3. The Panel *recommends* that the AQA Board explore the scope for enhanced induction for new AQA Board members.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation has been addressed. Further comments on this recommendation, particularly in relation to student voices, are provided in Section E5.

A4. The Panel *recommends* that the AQA Board clarify its process in relation to the receipt and approval of audit reports to ensure that the Board's intention is reflected in the process.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation has been addressed.

A5. The Panel *recommends* that there be a debriefing report compiled after each audit site visit, based on the feedback from universities and audit panel members, for discussion by the AQA Board.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation has been addressed.

A6. The Panel *recommends* that AQA encourage universities to make a public statement available within three years after their audit report is released in regard to the actions they have taken as a result of the quality audit.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation has been addressed.

A7.   The Panel *recommends* that AQA and the AQA Board actively consider and consult on ways to enhance the student voice and the engagement of students with the audit process.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation continues to be addressed. Further discussion of student voices within audit, quality assurance and quality enhancement follows in Sections C, D and E5.

A8.   The Panel *recommends* that AQA and the AQA Board consider, in consultation with the universities and other stakeholders, how Cycle 6 might be more focused. This is to ensure that universities can derive the most benefit from the audit process and ensure alignment with each university's strategic goals, including what it means to be a university, and an academic, in the 21st century.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation has been addressed. The introduction of an enhancement theme to the Cycle 6 audit cycle has allowed universities to focus on a particular issue of relevance.

A9.   The Panel *recommends* that AQA ensures that international auditors, and New Zealand based auditors, can be enabled to bring international best practice to the audit process, and quality assurance and quality enhancement activities. Conversely, AQA needs to ensure that international auditors are aware of the New Zealand tertiary education context and any current local issues before their service on an audit panel.

See A11 below.

A10. Recognising that it is crucial that all auditors are well prepared in a timely way, the Panel *recommends* that systems be put in place to ensure that all auditors have received sufficient training before they attend an audit site visit. This should occur relatively close to an audit visit and might make use of on-line training materials.

See A11 below.

A11. The Panel *recommends* that AQA ensures that there is an appropriate diversity in the skills and experience of audit panel members, and that audit panel members be recruited and chosen carefully to match the distinctive nature of individual institutions.

The Panel has referred to the Auditor Recruitment and Training Plan that directly addresses recommendations A9, A10 and A11 and is satisfied that these recommendations continue to be addressed. Further discussion of international perspectives, auditor training and audit panel diversity follows throughout this report (Sections B2, B3, C12, C13, G1).

A12. The Panel *recommends* that AQA emphasise the importance of the Self-Review Report and associated documentation to universities and to the audit panels, and work to enable the sharing of exemplars and best practice between universities.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation has been addressed. The Panel was impressed with the documentation addressing preparation of the Self-review Reports for the Cycle 6 academic audit. The 2019/2020 Cycle 6 Self-Review Workshops held in advance of the preparation of self-reviews are an example of good practice, as is the inclusion of the development of Cycle 6 in a 2019 compilation of "Good Practices of External Quality Assurance Agencies across the Globe" published by the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India and the Asia Pacific Quality Network (APQN) (SRR, p.9).

A13. The Panel *recommends* that the possible remedies in an appeal be more clearly articulated.

The Panel is satisfied that this recommendation has been addressed.

Commendation 1

The Panel c*ommends* AQA for addressing the thirteen recommendations offered by the External Review Panel from the 2015 Review, including the analysis of the Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations and the highlighting of specific areas for further development.

Section B: Leadership and Advocacy

AQA DEMONSTRATES LEADERSHIP AND ADVOCACY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ACADEMIC QUALITY

The exploration of this term of reference with stakeholders has found that AQA has an important role in ensuring there are excellent standards and good practice in the university sector. AQA is an important part of the structural quality assurance arrangements at national level and facilitates national quality assurance conversations. As described by one interviewee, AQA is the 'connective tissue' that enables discussion of quality matters. Other stakeholders describe AQA's leadership role in a similar fashion:

> *The development, sector acceptance, and successful implementation of the model of Cycle 6 Academic Audit clearly demonstrates AQA's leadership.*

> *Internationally there is undeniably a much greater recognition of the value of institutions working in partnership with their primary constituents, their students. AQA has shown strong leadership in New Zealand in this regard.*

> *AQA demonstrates its effective leadership in academic quality matters not by dictating the quality agenda but through listening to what Universities are wanting to work on, identifying trends both within New Zealand and internationally and providing helpful resources, information and support to help universities work to develop robust and effective quality assurance processes.*

B1.   AQA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards. (2.1.1)[4]

In considering this criterion, the Panel consulted with each university, members of the Enhancement Theme Steering Group, international stakeholders and auditors. Without exception, they were complimentary of the transparency, integrity and professionalism of AQA. Comments received by the Panel included:

- *AQA is a trusted friend and critical advisor. Its role is to enhance best practice, to encourage and challenge us to think about the ways we enact our business.*
- *Appreciate being listened to, demanded of and have good engagement.*
- *The audit cycle and visits are well set up and well run, organisation is consultative with universities in a substantive way which makes the audit work better. Audit is significant in terms of resources and effort and AQA leadership makes this worthwhile and worth the effort.*
- *Collegial, approachable, one stop QA shop, highly reliable source on quality assurance matters in conjunction with CUAP.*
- *AQA serves the sector well. Their independence, focus and expertise are important.*
- *The Executive Director is outstanding in the role, especially to new university quality assurance staff.*
- *Audits – clear communications, good communications, very professional, high trust.*
- *AQA provides momentum, impetus, encouragement and opportunities to reflect.*

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[4] Numbers in parentheses refer to INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) criteria.

- *AQA is relevant, useful, collegial, approachable, reliable, respected, proactive, consultative, flexible, responsive, supportive, inclusive, enthusiastic, committed, consistent, credible.*
- *The professionalism demonstrated by the agency staff and also the collegial and respectful approach adopted during interactions with university management and staff contribute to this confidence.*

The Panel has no hesitation in confirming that AQA meets this term of reference[5].

Commendation 2
The Panel *commends* the Executive Director for the manner in which she models authentic engagement with all relevant stakeholder groups.

B2. AQA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field. (2.2.1)

The Panel found considerable evidence to validate this criterion. In addition to the information provided in the Self-review Report, universities, auditors and international stakeholders all provided examples of AQA's active and positive engagement in international quality assurance activities.

AQA has invested considerable time and effort to embrace and maintain currency with international developments in quality assurance. In its written submission, one university summarised how AQA integrates these activities to benefit the sector:

> *The Director regularly attends the principal quality assurance conferences in Australia, Asia and further afield. The Agency's adoption of the Scottish Enhancement Theme framework within Cycle 6 necessitated collaboration with key figures in the UK sector. The AQA liaised with TEQSA (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency of Australia) to host several workshops on academic integrity for the New Zealand tertiary sector in 2020. The substantive outcomes from these conferences and international networks are integrated into the quality assurance and enhancement work the Agency undertakes, and are shared through the AQA newsletter and in ongoing work with university quality managers.*

Invitations to undertake international quality assurance review work, presentations at international quality assurance conferences, INQAAHE membership, relationship building with international EQAA peers and appointment of international auditors and national auditors with international experience all contribute to the outward-facing focus of the Agency. In addition, AQA's engagement with student voice in other jurisdictions, notably Scotland and Australia, and the reciprocal contributions between New Zealand and Australia in this area are noted.

The process of development for the Cycle 6 Audit, including the introduction of an enhancement theme and interactions with Scottish peers, provides further evidence of

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[5] Whether or not AQA meets or exceeds the INQAAHE GGP is not described in the body of this Report for each Term of Reference, unless it is mentioned to highlight areas of good practice or should further development be required. AQA's compliance, or otherwise, with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice (GGP) certification is summarised in Appendix 2.

the application of international initiatives to benefit New Zealand universities. As an auditor describes, *adopting this model demonstrates AQA's ability to analyse other quality assurance developments and adapt and incorporate these into the New Zealand context.*

Commendation 3
The Panel c*ommends* the Executive Director for her active and positive engagement in international quality assurance activities.

In its written submission a university suggested that producing and disseminating regular analyses on international quality assurance developments could help inform institutional quality assurance strategy and policy. Another university suggested that AQA invites global experts to share international good practice and an auditor highlighted the opportunities of such initiatives in ensuring New Zealand universities continue to be connected internationally on quality assurance issues.

Suggestion 1[6]
AQA may wish to consider creating an online knowledge-sharing hub/depository for the collection and free download of quality assurance good practice.

The Panel endorses such developments which would also enhance AQA's role and visibility as a leader in academic quality matters. The Panel is aware, however, that such opportunities will be limited by funding and resourcing constraints. The Panel therefore encourages Universities New Zealand to consider how such useful expansions of scope might be more appropriately funded.

B3. AQA collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges. (2.2.2)

The Panel found that collaboration with other agencies is another of AQA's strengths. AQA provided ample evidence in its Self-review Portfolio of other quality assurance agencies with which it works. This evidence was supported in the written submissions of national, regional and international stakeholders. Several examples provided by submitters serve to illustrate this theme.

Exchange of Good Practices: Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
A recent example where AQA provided timely leadership to universities and wider tertiary education organisations was through arranging for TEQSA to provide their workshop on academic integrity. This was done in partnership with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority as an AQA led initiative.

Capacity Building: NZUSA and Student Voice Australia
AQA *has formed strong working relationships with national student organisations, particularly NZUSA, the Māori and Pasifika and international student [associations], and their equivalents within institutions. It has worked with these student groups to*

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organise very successful Student Summits. AQA has also worked with Student Voice Australia to support student voice projects across the two countries.

Joint Projects: New Zealand Qualifications Authority
AQA is an active participant in NZQA's review of the New Zealand Qualifications Framework. It has ensured representation on the Advisory Group and the expert technical group requiring a substantial commitment. AQA's participation has been proactive, constructive and appreciated.

AQA has also established formal relationships with a number of its international peers through the signing of Memoranda of Understanding. During the period covered by this external review, AQA has been invited to undertake international audit and review work for the National University of Samoa, Macao Polytechnic Institute and Fiji National University. Several Pasifika stakeholders have indicated the importance and value of this work and the high regard in which AQA is held by South Pacific universities and academic quality assurance agencies.

> **Suggestion 2**
> Building on its increasing collaboration with Quality Assurance Bodies in the Pacific, the Panel encourages AQA and NZVCC to reflect upon whether there is an opportunity for New Zealand and AQA to consider a greater coordinating and leadership role in the region.

These undertakings have been underpinned by AQA's International Framework 2019 - 2022 and its objectives to ensure that:

- AQA's good international reputation is maintained.
- AQA remains fully apprised of international trends and developments in quality assurance.
- AQA reflects international best practice and international perspectives in its activities.

> **Suggestion 3**
> To further support and enhance the visibility of its international activities the Panel suggests that AQA publicise its International Framework (or a summary thereof) in the same manner as it does its Strategic Framework.

Information on the AQA website related to the Memoranda of Understanding and the purpose of these agreements, including the shared objectives of the parties, would be beneficial and would raise the Agency's profile and mana across the sector.

It is clear to the Panel that these relationships and activities are used, in the first instance, to benefit New Zealand universities by disseminating information on emerging trends, issues and good practices. Similar opportunities could also serve a broader purpose of raising AQA's profile within New Zealand and Australia and across the Pacific.

Commendation 4
The Panel *commends* AQA's initiative in developing collaborative partnerships with its national, regional and international peers.

B4. AQA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance. (4.2.1)

As mentioned in its Self-review Report (p.20), AQA publishes its five-yearly external reviews, annual reports and the one-year follow-up report to the external review on its website. The Panel noted that these reports are easily accessible to the public. AQA is also clear about the target audience for such publications, these being:

- university staff, particularly Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic), or equivalent, and Quality Managers,
- current and potential members of Registers of auditors and reviewers,
- national students' associations and international student voice organisations,
- NZVCC and individual Vice-Chancellors,
- other quality bodies and those with an interest in the academic quality of New Zealand universities, both nationally and internationally.

B5. AQA prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities. (4.2.2)

AQA and the Executive Director have put considerable effort into the preparation and dissemination of reports and reviews of quality assurance activities. These reports have been wide-ranging and comprehensive, and an auditor describes them as helping universities to maintain standards that are internationally respected. In discussions with university staff it was evident that these reports, as well as annual fora and symposia and regular newsletters, are valued and that they facilitate the national conversation on quality assurance.

It was the view of a number of stakeholders that even more could be done in this area to facilitate learning at local, national and international levels. Suggestions on how such activities could be resourced are provided in Section F below.

In its Self-review Report (p.21), AQA proposes an Enhancement Initiative related to its publications:

Enhancement Initiative 1
Review publication formats and channels.

The Panel supports this initiative and suggests that AQA enhances existing and utilises new communication channels to position itself as a source of good practice and quality enhancement information, for example, by commissioning and releasing 'Good Practice' notes.

In support of AQA's Enhancement Initiative, the Panel makes the following recommendation:

Recommendation 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.

B6.   AQA is sought as credible commentator on matters of academic quality.

A range of thoughtful observations were provided to the Panel to assist their consideration of this term of reference. AQA is certainly seen as a credible commentator on international quality assurance matters and has a strong and well-developed perspective on external quality assurance. However its ability to influence actual quality within universities and on the national stage is limited by its size.

AQA is currently staffed for a mature cycle of academic audits. However a number of stakeholders were of the view that the current structure is not necessarily well placed to respond to unforeseen issues and external events, e.g., the COVID-19 pandemic, pastoral care legislation, the quality assurance of transnational education.

The speed of change externally and in the sector is also an issue, and consideration needs to be given to whether the current structure and approach will continue to be effective. It is vital that AQA, if it is to continue in a leadership role, has enough independence and capability to conduct work that it decides is of sector-wide importance for teaching and learning.

Suggestion 4

The Panel endorses a suggestion from a stakeholder that AQA and Universities New Zealand consider whether there is a case for joint statements on issues which are, or have been, under audit scrutiny, e.g., academic integrity, student support, graduate outcomes.

In this way the public would be alerted to AQA's role in ensuring such matters receive evidence-based critique, thereby contributing to confidence in the academic quality of universities. The Agency's leadership and advocacy role could be further enhanced by publicising its involvement in national learning and teaching and quality assurance issues. For example, as one university suggests, it would be useful to understand the Agency's view when the education sector is invited to make submissions on Government initiatives or where the Agency is contacted by the media.

The Panel considers the scope approved by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee in the AQA Constitution as a potential area of weakness. Although one of AQA's roles is as a leader within the university sector and to an extent with NZQA, it is acknowledged that AQA has no direct interaction with government, the Tertiary Education Commission or the Ministry of Education.

Suggestion 5

The Panel suggests that the universities might consider whether AQA could add more value if it had a greater ability to respond proactively to external events and rapid changes in the sector.

Based on the evidence provided during the interview and submission process, the Panel has come to the view that AQA's small size and limited scope restrict its ability as a commentator and as an organisation that can provide proactive national leadership in times of rapid change. With greater size would come greater capability, greater mana and greater benefit to the sector.

Recommendation 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.

Section C: Quality Assurance

AQA UNDERTAKES QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCESSES THAT ASSIST UNIVERSITIES

AQA notes in its Self-review Report that quality assurance is the "most substantial and significant part of AQA's work" (p.23). Consequently, this section addresses eighteen terms of reference that include many aspects of AQA's quality assurance activities. AQA clearly describes these activities and their overarching principles and frameworks in the introduction to this section of its Self-review Report. Befitting the importance of quality assurance to the work of the Agency, the Panel sought comment from all internal and external stakeholders.

C1. AQA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programmes. (3.1.1)

AQA is explicit in the Principles underpinning its quality assurance activities that academic quality is ultimately the responsibility of each university (Principle 4). Further, its governance documents make clear that the role of AQA is to assist universities in their own quality assurance activities:

Purpose Statement: applying quality assurance and quality enhancement processes that assist universities in improving student engagement, academic experience and learning outcomes.

Terms of Reference: undertake quality assurance reviews that are robust, fair and perceptive and that assist universities and their students.

Universities have an opportunity to highlight their own identity, context and strategic priorities as part of their Self-review Report and this is encouraged in the Guide to Cycle 6. Furthermore, as described in the AQA Self-review Report (p.25), "audit panels make recommendations, they do not set requirements. In making recommendations, audit panels will identify an issue that should be addressed but will not tell a university how to address it".

Stakeholders were in agreement that AQA respects the autonomy and identity of universities:

In determining the wording of the new Academic Audit guidelines in relation to the Enhancement Theme, the AQA were careful to ensure that the autonomy of the various universities was maintained, and their diversity was acknowledged.

The self-review process, along with its requirements for evidence, is extremely helpful within universities, and the audit process itself allows examination of the weight and credibility of the evidence. Over time universities have become adept at presenting achievements and evidence of achievement in easily accessed ways, and this has helped staff and students understand both the strengths and weaknesses of a university's systems. It is this improvement of systems that I think has been the major impact of the AQA processes.

Audit does reflect the particular university. AQA is sensitive of the eight universities, but is also at pains to join the dots so we all rise together.

Context matters, AQA is mindful of this.

C2. AQA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of internal quality assurance processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institution and its programmes. (3.1.2)

In its Self-review Report, AQA describes a quality assurance and accountability framework for New Zealand universities that places AQA within the national structure (p.26). While acknowledging that academic audit is the only mechanism that takes a holistic view of academic quality, AQA is clear that universities through their own programme and other reviews, their obligations to professional accreditation bodies and the CUAP programme approval process are primarily responsible for their own quality assurance.

With this understanding in mind AQA has, however, undertaken a range of activities to promote and support the development of New Zealand universities' internal quality assurance processes as part of the Cycle 6 audit cycle. These include:

- Student Voice Summits that support nationwide student capability building and knowledge transfer, and foster relationships among student representatives and between student representatives and quality assurance staff at universities.
- Academic Integrity Workshops hosted in conjunction with TEQSA and NZQA.
- Enhancement Theme Symposia.
- Cycle 6 Self-review Workshops to enable networking and sharing of good practice.

Feedback from participants (SRR, p.61) has shown that these opportunities, facilitated by AQA, are valued and useful.

C3. AQA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and, strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible. (3.1.3)

Consideration of this criterion necessitates recognition of the balance between cost and benefit. AQA notes in its Self-review Report that "The extension of the cycle to seven to eight years and reconfiguration of the site visit component were due in part to a desire to reduce the time and cost of academic audit to universities" (p.27).

The Panel discussed this criterion with universities and sought the views of other stakeholders through the written submission process. Feedback from stakeholders provided evidence that AQA took workload and cost into account when reviewing audit Cycle 5 and preparing for Cycle 6:

In consultation about the shape of Cycle 6 Academic Audit, the Agency took account of feedback from the universities about the value and burden of audit, and the perceived maturity of the audit cycle. The Director was extremely responsive to criticisms of the Cycle 5 framework and worked extensively and

conscientiously with the universities to address these criticisms and enhance the guideline statements that form the framework for Cycle 6.

The Director responded to sector views about the length of the audit cycle and worked collaboratively with universities to agree a longer cycle and adopt an 'enhancement theme' component.

One stakeholder took a broader view of the national and international context:

There is a sense that the overall process is somewhat tortuous and cumbersome compared to current practice in other jurisdictions. There is a sense that all the New Zealand universities have matured to such a degree in the manner in which they meet quality assurance requirements that the current process is more detailed than currently required. That said, there is evidence that individual universities can partially lose a strong quality assurance position between cycles and therefore require a process that identifies such changes.

The ongoing whole of institution audit methodology has not been maintained in a number of countries with equivalent university systems to New Zealand. My view is that while regular cycles of academic audits, using the Cycle 5 methodology, is somewhat outdated compared to changes in other jurisdictions, its retention and refinement should be viewed as critical if quality assurance of New Zealand universities is to remain at some distance from government agencies.

The Panel supports continued reflection throughout Cycle 6 to ensure that the costs and benefits of the audit process remain in balance. It also acknowledges that there remains a tension between whole of institution audits and those directed at specific areas thought to require investigation. The latter has been addressed to some extent with the Cycle 6 enhancement theme, however the Panel would like AQA and the universities to continue to reflect on the alternatives as they look ahead to Cycle 7.

C4. AQA recognises and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions. (3.2.1)

This criterion was explored in some depth by the Panel. AQA's Terms of Reference state that it will "acknowledge and respect the individual contexts of universities in undertaking quality assurance reviews". In its Self-review Report AQA recognises institutional diversity by commenting that "in many respects New Zealand universities may appear to be relatively homogenous. Nevertheless, they do differ from one another in terms of:

- size (range),
- proportion of distance or on-line students,
- proportions of Māori, Pasifika, first-in-family and low socio-economic status students,
- academic portfolios (particularly professional degree ranges such as medicine, engineering, dentistry, architecture)."

The Guide to Cycle 6 explains that guideline statements are to be seen as a framework that:

> *provide a structure for universities to self- evaluate and audit panels to evaluate the academic quality of a university. They are intended to be a guide and not to act as a constraint. … Universities should place emphasis on statements that are of greater importance in their context (p.12).*

The encouragement in the Guide to Cycle 6 to include an Introduction in a university's self-review report also provides an opportunity for universities to contextualise their institution and emphasise its priorities and objectives. In discussing this criterion with stakeholders the following comments were made:

> *One of the successes of the current process has been the apparent ease with which it has recognised the individual characteristics of institutions, rather than taking a single formulaic approach, that characterises some international practices. The current guidance to institutions on a particular audit cycle is clear and focused but sufficiently broad and flexible to meet overall sector requirements and those of individual institutions.*

> *AQA recognises and acknowledges that all the universities have differences and similarities in their structures, processes and strategies and works with that to ensure no University is disadvantaged.*

> *In developing and managing the Agency's quality assurance processes the Director is consistently respectful of institutional differences.*

Universities appreciated that the framework for Cycle 6 audit is not prescriptive, that it is sensitive to a university's own strategic directions and priorities, and there is considerable flexibility to address a university's particular context. The Panel acknowledges this positive feedback.

C5. The standards or criteria developed by AQA have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system. (3.2.2)

AQA undertook a substantial consultation process in the development of the Cycle 6 audit cycle, processes and framework to ensure that it is relevant and meets the needs of the sector. In coming to this conclusion, the Panel consulted widely with stakeholders and found evidence in the Summary of Key Steps in the Development of Cycle 6. This document outlines the extent and nature of the consultation undertaken over a period of more than three years and illustrates the development of both the quality enhancement and quality assurance aspects of the audit cycle. All university stakeholders spoke highly of the consultation process:

- *The Executive Director came to [our university] to do a workshop to get ready for Cycle 6. It was incredibly well attended by a cross section from the university. It was a really good workshop.*
- *In the lead up to Cycle 6 there have been opportunities to discuss themes and Guideline Statements – which were amended based on feedback*
- *Consultation was really good regarding Cycle 6.*

In addition, a university informed the Panel that AQA has created a network of quality managers through which some of this consultation is channelled. The quality managers were all involved from the outset in the discussions around the guideline statements for the Cycle 6 academic audit. There were numerous meetings and these also included analysis of the Cycle 5 academic audit recommendations, commendations and affirmations.

> ### Commendation 5
> **The Panel c*ommends* AQA for its comprehensive and consultative process and preparatory work in advance of the Cycle 6 audit, particularly the well-articulated guides and workshops.**

As described in AQA's Self-review Report and throughout the supporting documentation, Audit Cycle 5 was reflected upon through the Process Review and the Analysis of CARs in advance of the consultation and revision process for Cycle 6. The Panel supports AQA's suggestion that the next external review of AQA coincide with the review of Cycle 6.

C6.   Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programmes or other non-traditional approaches to Higher Education as relevant to the context in which they operate. (3.2.3)

The Guide to Cycle 6 explicitly states that:

> *In addressing the guideline statements, universities will be expected to consider* ***all students, all delivery*** *and* ***all staff***. *… Therefore, the scope of Cycle 6 academic audit extends to:*
>
> - *all students, reflecting diversity and inclusivity*
> - *all modes and forms of delivery, including flexible, blended, online, distance, offshore, other campuses, with partner universities or other providers*
> - *all staff who teach or supervise or support teaching or supervision.*

The Panel supports the autonomy and flexibility this gives to universities to address the guideline statements within their own context. The Panel also notes that responsibility for the accreditation of transnational education falls within CUAP's remit.

C7.   Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the AQA's scope, and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources). (3.2.4)

AQA's Constitution describes AQA's scope within its Terms of Reference as being to:

- reflect areas of importance to universities with respect to their teaching, learning, student experience and student outcomes activities; and to
- contribute to the development of quality assurance in New Zealand and internationally.

As outlined in the Guide to Cycle 6 (p.10) the over-arching objectives of the Cycle 6 audit framework are:

1. To provide a set of guideline statements that a university will gain value from evaluating itself against and from the assessment made by the audit panel, leading to enhancement.
2. To provide assurance of the quality of New Zealand universities.

The guideline statements (criteria) set out expectations of outcomes and standards that a university of good international standing would be expected to demonstrate. These are organised into five areas:

1. Leadership and management of teaching and learning and academic quality
2. Student profile, life-cycle, support and wellbeing
3. Curriculum, assessment and delivery
4. Teaching quality
5. Postgraduate research students

The Panel noted the alignment of AQA's scope, as described in its Constitution, with the objectives of the Cycle 6 audit framework and the areas of activity to be addressed during external review.

University finances, staff and learning resources do not fall within AQA's scope and are therefore not directly addressed as part of the audit process, except as a reflection of the adequacy of teaching and learning environments and infrastructure (SRR, p.30).

C8. Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and, provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews. (3.2.5)

Although AQA does not assess the mechanisms that universities put in place to address audit recommendations (SRR, p.31), AQA does require reports on progress on the outcomes of the external reviews. The timelines and requirements for these are set out in the Guide to Cycle 6 (p.25, 35-6). In considering these procedures the Panel found commendable good practice in place.

> **Commendation 6**
> **The Panel *commends* AQA for its post-audit follow-up procedures which are consistent, effective and robust.**

C9. AQA procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met. (3.2.6)

The Panel found that guidelines for evidence are highlighted in the Cycle 6 Audit Guide (p.12) with criteria provided to assist in presenting and considering 'good' evidence. Each Guideline Statement is then expanded upon with comments and expectations related to what audit panels could expect to see as evidence. This narrative is also summarised in tabular form in an appendix (pp.71-77). Evidence criteria and expectations were also addressed in the Self-Review Workshops in diagrammatic form and through 'hands-on' exercises with participants.

C10. AQA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent, and, includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review. (3.3.1)

The external review process described in the Guide to Cycle 6 (p.25) includes the following steps:

- preparation and submission of the self-review report and portfolio by the university;
- planning meetings,
- review and assessment of the self-review by the audit panel,
- site visit(s),
- report by the audit panel,
- follow-up reporting by the university.

The Panel found that the reliability and consistency of this process is supported by the availability of the comprehensive written guides, the training provided to audit panel members, and the moderation of audit reports provided by the Executive Director and the Board.

> **Affirmation 1**
> **The Panel *affirms* that AQA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. The process is consistent with international standards.**

C11. AQA has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from higher education institutions, in the form of quality criteria, or standards and procedures, for self-assessment and external review. (3.3.2)

The AQA Cycle 6 audit guides and handbooks are comprehensive and well-articulated. Although yet to be tested until the audit phase of Cycle 6 is underway, the Panel is confident they will assist the universities in preparing the required qualitative and quantitative evidence in support of their claims. The Panel received comments from universities that having the audit preparation material online and available electronically is particularly helpful.

Having considered the material in the Guide to Cycle 6 Academic Audit and the associated Auditor Supplement and discussed the audit process with universities, the Panel is satisfied that this criterion has been met. These Cycle 6 audit documents, as well as the Cycle 6 Academic Audit Framework pocket guide, are excellent examples of good practice, which is reflected in Commendation 5 above.

C12. The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/programme being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners. (3.3.3)

The Panel spent considerable time exploring this criterion with all stakeholders. AQA's Capability Strategy provides overarching guidance in this area when it states that AQA "will recruit, develop and support high calibre auditors to undertake academic audits of New Zealand universities." As described in AQA's Self-review Report, "external

reviews are carried out by audit panels comprised of national and international peers. For Cycle 6, audit panels will also include a student or recent graduate" (SRR, p.35). As part of the appointment process, the AQA Board … will ensure that panels contain appropriate diversity in the skills and experience of audit panel members and match the distinctive nature of individual institutions.

AQA's Auditor Recruitment and Training Plan explains that "audit panels will normally consist of a Panel Convenor and four further auditors, including at least one international panel member and a student, or recent graduate, panel member. Audit panels should also include Māori panel members and Pasifika panel members." The Panel Chair will normally be a senior New Zealand academic or academic manager (SRR, p.35). The Panel received feedback that was appreciative of the calibre of Panel Chairs:

> *Chairs are outstanding in their ability to hear all voices and to draw together panel conclusions and findings.*

The Panel sets out below its findings in relation to the inclusion of experts from various perspectives on audit panels.

Diverse Voices: Students
The Panel was impressed to learn of the emphasis that AQA has placed on the inclusion of student voice in quality assurance activities. AQA describes the significance of the Memorandum of Understanding with the NZUSA in its Self-review Report and the many and substantial student-focused activities that this has enabled (p.9). The Panel notes that, to date, five students or recent graduates have been appointed to the Cycle 6 Register of Auditors and Reviewers. This is a substantial proportion of the 31 auditors appointed to the Cycle 6 Register to date. Comments from universities were very positive on the impact and leadership role that AQA's focus on student voice has had across the sector:

- *AQA provides a role model for the inclusion of student voice.*
- *AQA has set the tone with its student voice work – it puts students at the centre.*
- *The Student Voice Summit was a brilliant way to share practice. It closes loops with other student groups at [our university]. We have a better relationship with [all our student organisations] as a result of going to AQA student voice events.*
- *Student voice is vital, leadership from AQA on this is good.*
- *Our current student exec has been influenced by the Student Voice Symposium – [such that we may well see some] potential C6 auditors.*
- *The Student Voice Symposium was a terrific initiative which has raised the student voice in universities as a whole. There has been a direct impact on [our university] of AQA student voice work.*

AQA's inclusion of the student voice was seen as genuine, robust and authentic.

> **Commendation 7**
> **The Panel *commends* the work of the Executive Director in elevating student voice and partnering with students in meaningful ways.**

Universities also made a number of observations and suggestions to further support the inclusion of the student voice in quality assurance activities:

- *The big issue is how do you hear from students who are struggling? 20% of all students and 25% of Māori/Pasifika students do not progress beyond first year. Are these voices heard? What about the regulations from a student perspective?*
- *Could the student voice be greater on the AQA Board? It's hard for one person to represent everyone. For Cycle 6, the inclusion of student auditors is a good development. Different students bring different perspectives – undergraduate, postgraduate. Wider representation is very useful.*
- *We had a student on our audit self-review group. The biggest problem is getting students, as they have so much on. How to involve them while knowing that their primary focus is study and then often work? We pay students who speak to audit panels.*
- *Students want to contribute meaningfully. One student and lots of staff on a committee – is this the best way to do things?*

The Panel also heard from auditors and students themselves in relation to this criterion:

- *The timing of audits may create difficulties for the panel to meet a large and representative group of students, and it might be better for AQA to be more assertive in setting out its expectations for information about the place and effectiveness of student voice in a university.*
- *There are barriers to student contributions around turnover in associations plus study and work commitments.*
- *International students are not engaged, not aware, not involved in governance. There is space to include international students in AQA – as auditors or on the Board so international students can contribute.*
- *Students need the competence and confidence to navigate governance activities. They need training prior to being on a committee or panel so they can be effective and empowered. An induction handbook, including governance structures and how universities are run, would be helpful.*
- *Build trust and relationships with students through social engagement.*
- *[We] recommend that AQA continue encouraging and advocating for academic quality processes to be inclusive of the learner voice at all levels, including learners with disabilities and those from refugee backgrounds.*
- *Students are the experts in student experience.*

The Panel supports these suggestions and observations.

> ### Suggestion 6
> While noting that the provision for a student submission has been removed from the Cycle 6 audit process (SRR p.39), the Panel is of the view that AQA, in collaboration with students and universities, continue to explore ways to include the student voice in quality assurance activities.

The Panel makes the following recommendation in relation to the inclusion of student voices.

Recommendation 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.

Diverse Voices: Māori

The Panel agrees with AQA's assessment that auditor recruitment is critical to the success of academic audit, as breadth and depth in this area provides the means to appoint appropriately experienced and diverse audit panels (SRR p.35). AQA recognises that ongoing efforts are required to recruit Māori auditors and advises in its Self-review Report that only one Māori Cycle 6 auditor has been appointed to date (p.35).

The Panel discussed participation and partnership in academic quality assurance with senior Māori university staff and students. The Panel found that, although genuine progress has been made as part of the Enhancement Theme work introduced in Cycle 6, AQA has struggled in this area.

> *Representation by ethnicity is not enough. We need competency in the domain of alternative learners and alternative knowledge. Audit panels need to be steeped in the New Zealand context. Universities need to be able to forward their concerns here and then have someone on the panel to hear their concerns. At present there is not enough training or capacity to be able to provide that. The onus is on universities to recommend Māori to go on panels, we need two or three Māori staff and students per panel.*
>
> *I'm not sure how to manage representation on audit panels. We need to have auditors who understand the work of the Enhancement Theme. One representative is too little for what is needed for institutional change.*

In acknowledging that AQA has an important role in ensuring there are excellent standards and good practice in the sector, Māori stakeholders laid down a challenge to AQA to continue to facilitate the national and international conversation around how Te Ao Māori (the Māori world view) can be incorporated into the audit process at a fundamental level.

Suggestion 7

The Panel suggests that AQA work in partnership with Māori on ways to increase the number of Māori auditors and the number of auditors who can bring a Māori perspective to the audit process.

Recommendation 4 below speaks to the work required in this area.

Diverse Voices: Pasifika

AQA also recognises that ongoing efforts are required to recruit Pasifika auditors, with two Pasifika auditors appointed to date to the Cycle 6 Register of Auditors. The Panel

consulted senior Pasifika university staff and students in relation to this area. These stakeholders appreciated AQA taking a lead role through the introduction of the Enhancement Theme and also the mentoring provided to Pasifika students by the Executive Director. They made a number of observations and suggestions:

- *[There needs to be] more Pasifika representation on audit panels - having someone on the panel who can understand the Pasifika perspective would be very helpful.*
- *Many academic quality procedures of the past have failed to appropriately engage with Pasifika learners in culturally centred ways. Since the inception of the Enhancement Theme AQA have consistently supported Tauira Pasifika and many Pasifika learner representatives to better understand the role of academic quality assurance and what it means for our journey at university.*

> **Suggestion 8**
> The Panel endorses these themes and suggests that AQA work in partnership with Pasifika on ways to increase the number of Pasifika auditors and the number of auditors who can bring a Pasifika perspective to the audit process.

In its discussions on the contributions of student and Māori and Pasifika auditors, the Panel was aware that it was raising issues around the size of audit panels and whether they will have to be enlarged. It did not take this conversation any further, but it will be a matter for AQA and the AQA Board to consider.

C13. AQA has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals. (3.3.4)

The two-step process for the selection of external reviewers to an audit panel is described in the Self-review Report (p.36-7), with the characteristics (criteria) and appointment process publicly available on the AQA website and in the Guide to Cycle 6. A new Register of Auditors and Reviewers is established for each audit cycle. The appointment process is underpinned by the Auditor Recruitment and Training Plan.

Before undertaking an audit, an auditor must have participated in the training for that audit cycle. The training undertaken is through scheduled auditor training workshops and is supported by a detailed auditor handbook in addition to the Guide to Cycle 6 Audit. The Auditor Supplement is a very comprehensive handbook covering all aspects of the Cycle 6 audit process. The Panel was also impressed with the thoroughness and quality of several AQA PowerPoint presentations that provide information relevant to auditors[7].

As advised by the Executive Director, the training workshops for Cycle 6 are currently under development. They will first be developed for online, asynchronous delivery, and later for face-to-face delivery. The content of the workshops will include:

- the role of AQA and quality assurance for New Zealand universities,

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[7] Introduction to Cycle 6 Academic Audit and Self-review Workshop (sd-A11) and Cycle 6 Quality Managers' Workshop (sd-B2).

- Cycle 6 components and approach to evidence,
- the Cycle 6 audit framework,
- role play and/or case studies,
- audit processes.

The Panel received positive feedback from auditors on the training provided for the Cycle 5 audit cycle:

- *Communications, policies and guidelines to auditors are good, clear, professional.*
- *The Auditor training role plays were excellent.*
- *AQA delivers and communicates well. It is not only professional in its approach but also genuinely welcoming and helpful to Pacific representatives.*

Commendation 8
The Panel *commends* the Executive Director for her commitment to the professional development of internal and external stakeholders.

In considering the auditor selection process and auditor training in advance of the audit phase of Cycle 6, the Panel received feedback from a range of auditors including Māori, Pasifika and international auditors. With a view to continuous process improvement, a number of suggestions and observations were made:

- *Training in consistency in interpreting evidence would be useful for auditors.*
- *The context of Te Tiriti o Waitangi is missing in auditor training – this is especially necessary for international panellists.*
- *I found the advice and guidance clear enough for decision making but as an external expert, one can have shallow contextual knowledge.*
- *Auditors need to be trained on how to work with students, to build trust and relationship with students.*
- *The agency could consider using technology to provide more inclusive training to International Reviewers when local reviewers are trained. The current pandemic demonstrates that this technology can be effectively used when travel is costly or restricted.*

The Panel found that auditors did not feel well equipped in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi or in working with, and getting the best from, students contributing to audit. The Panel endorses the views of the auditors and makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 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.

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

C14. External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and, ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria. (3.3.5)

The Panel discussed this criterion with auditors and universities. Additional comments on conflicts of interest are provided in Section E3 below. Obligations and procedures related to preventing conflicts of interest in the case of external reviewers are clearly set out in the Guide to Cycle 6 Academic Audit Auditor Supplement Section 2.5 (p.5). Auditors also referred to the process for audit panel member selection which includes a step whereby the university being audited may object to the inclusion of a panel member on the grounds of conflict of interest.

The Auditor Supplement is a very helpful resource for auditors that also outlines how panel members are to assess a university's self-review report and associated documentation. As described in the Auditor Supplement (p.9),

> *the key task of the panel is to assess whether the university meets the outcomes and standards a university of good international standing would be expected to achieve.*

The audit framework comprises a set of published Guideline Statements against which a university is assessed. The assessment is to be based on evidence and it is the task of external reviewers to assess whether sufficient evidence has been provided to support the guideline statement being met. The audit panel's findings comment on the guideline statements and may take the form of commendations, affirmations and recommendations. The criteria for these are clearly described in the Guide to Cycle 6 Academic Audit (p.34).

C15. AQA's system ensures that each institution or programme will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external Panels, teams, or committees are different. (3.3.6)

The Panel referred to the processes outlined in the Cycle 6 audit guides and handbooks and noted comments from universities quoted in Section E11 below in considering this criterion (see also Sections C10 and C13 in relation to the selection and training of auditors). As well as the consistency provided by the use of the Guideline Statements, the Panel noted the consistency provided through the moderation of audit reports by the Executive Director and AQA Board.

C16. AQA carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated. (3.3.7)

The Panel appreciates that this criterion will not be fully tested until after the Cycle 6 academic audits have taken place and supports AQA's Enhancement Initiative to review audit processes after the second university audit in the Cycle.

> **Enhancement Initiative 2**
> **Undertake an interim review of Cycle 6 audit processes to confirm they are functioning as planned.**

It is the view of the Panel that the allocated and scheduled timelines are reasonable, well-thought out and very well organised.

The Panel received a number of more general comments about the timing of quality assurance activities and includes these to assist AQA in its longer term planning for Cycle 6. One university commented that, given the rapidly changing nature of education and the increase in the speed of that change, they worried about the length of time between audits. They asked whether this could lead to complacency in relation to good practice. In their view, "if a university wants impact quicker, they need accountability quicker". Although the Panel notes the introduction of the mid-cycle report, this university suggested that "it would be better to circle back earlier, as it is easy to put things aside with a long time frame".

Another stakeholder commented that in the current environment much can change between the site visit and the follow up reports. Consequently, recommendations made by the audit panel might no longer be relevant or useful having been overtaken by subsequent changes and events.

Suggestion 9
The Panel suggests that universities be made aware that they have an opportunity in their follow up reports to comment on any external changes or events that have had an impact on their consideration of audit recommendations.

C17. AQA provides higher education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report. (3.3.8)

The Panel saw evidence in the Reporting Section (4.7) of the Guide to Cycle 6 Academic Audit that an opportunity to correct factual errors in a confidential draft of the audit report is provided to universities.

Affirmation 2
The Panel *affirms* that AQA provides an opportunity for audited organisations to correct any factual errors in the audit report before the report is published. This process aligns with international standard practice and procedure.

C18. AQA provides clear guidance to the institution or programme in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate. (3.4.1)

The Panel found evidence of extensive preparation by AQA and clear guidance to universities in advance of their preparation for Cycle 6. The guidance provided is in the form of written handbooks, information provided through the AQA website and in-person workshops offered in key cities throughout New Zealand. The workshops were developed in response to feedback following the conclusion of the fifth academic audit cycle. Comments from universities confirmed that the workshops were a helpful addition to the suite of preparatory materials:

The workshops were useful in raising awareness as there is a lot of churn at universities. The workshops are now on line – a much more agile way to do things and really handy.

The workshops were very valuable in getting the process started. They gave a focus regarding the timeline, talked about evidence and embeddedness, and the framework across the whole university.

The Panel concluded that this preparation is likely to be sufficient to provide adequate guidance for the universities and panels as they approach the Cycle 6 audits.

Section D: Quality Enhancement

AQA SUPPORTS QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PROCESSES THAT ASSIST UNIVERSITIES

As described in its Self-review Report (p.42), AQA's quality enhancement activities include:

- support for the Cycle 6 universities' enhancement theme,
- communications,
- events that encourage the development and sharing of good practice in academic quality.

The Panel considers each of these activities below.

Enhancement Theme

As defined in the Guide to Cycle 6 (p.5), "an enhancement theme is a topic of national significance and important to all universities, that all universities work on in a common time period. Universities are not all expected to do the same thing or take the same approach to the theme. Each university undertakes the enhancement theme in a way that fits with its own priorities and ethos".

The Enhancement Theme was a new component of Audit Cycle 6 and advice was taken from the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education - Scotland (QAA Scotland) as part of its introduction. Enhancement Theme activities were overseen by a Steering Group supported by AQA. The enhancement theme topic for Cycle 6 is 'Access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori students and for Pasifika students'. The purpose of the Enhancement Theme is to share good practice, as the Notes from the final ETSG meeting describe:

- *An enhancement theme should be a mechanism for focussing and sharing practice and it is to be expected that it will build on rather than start practice.*
- *The enhancement theme had provided a basis for leverage and awareness raising for some universities.*

The Cycle 6 Guide (p.9) outlines the relationship of the enhancement and audit phases of Cycle 6 Academic Audit. They are connected as follows:

- University progress on the enhancement theme will be assessed in the audit component of the cycle.
- Initiatives and work undertaken as part of the enhancement theme are likely to provide evidence for a range of guideline statements.

The Panel consulted all stakeholders about the Enhancement Theme aspect of the Cycle 6 audit cycle. The feedback that was received demonstrated that much of the value of the enhancement theme work has been qualitative improvements in trust, relationship building and goodwill, rather than quantitative improvements in access and achievement.

Stakeholders have viewed the work as worthwhile and of assistance to universities:

> *The recent audit enhancement theme encouraged a specific focus on the area of Māori and Pasifika success, which although already a priority at [our university], highlighted*

the need for a university-wide approach. It was useful to learn more about how colleagues at other universities were addressing similar issues. This took place both at the Enhancement Theme Steering Group meetings but also with the wide dissemination of regular progress reports. The Enhancement Theme also provided a welcome opportunity for staff across [the university], including the senior leadership team, Academic Board and the [students' association] to reflect on where we have reached and have some open and honest discussions about where [the university] needs to go.

The initiatives taken by AQA in the post-Cycle 5 phase in developing the Enhancement Theme and in supporting and sharing good practice in areas critical to universities in New Zealand are in themselves good practice. … There is real value in encouraging institutional collaboration and the sharing of good practice, which has been achieved by AQA. It will always be a challenge to identify a focus for these discussions that meets the needs of all eight universities. This contrasts very positively with some international practice which relies heavily on simplified reporting processes and a limited interaction between institutions.

[The enhancement theme activities] did add value – they gave extra heft that this is important work to do.

The Panel has no hesitation in making the following commendation:

Commendation 9
The Panel c*ommends* AQA for incorporating the Enhancement Theme initiative as part of the frame of reference for the Cycle 6 Audit, thereby enabling universities to focus on Māori and Pasifika students' access, outcomes and opportunities.

With a view to continuous improvement, the Panel received a number of suggestions from stakeholders for consideration in future enhancement activities. These include:

- The inclusion of subject experts in Enhancement Theme activities to advise on good practice. Learning from those with first-hand experience of working with Māori students and/or Pasifika students would be beneficial.
- Several stakeholders believed that, because the Enhancement Theme focused on Māori and Pasifika students, the Enhancement Theme Steering Group needed to be led by Māori and Pasifika. This reflects the political and cultural expectations that Māori and Pasifika communities should have autonomy and control over their own pathways.

The Panel supports the view that If there are to be future AQA projects or workstreams that focus on Māori or Pasifika, then AQA needs to ensure that they are chaired or led by Māori or Pasifika experts.

Recommendation 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.

Communications and Events

The Panel received feedback in written submissions and in discussions with stakeholders that communications and events facilitated by AQA encourage the development and sharing of good practice in academic quality. Although somewhat lengthy, the feedback below goes some way to describing the high regard in which a range of stakeholders hold AQA's activities in this area.

> *Tauira Pasifika (The Voice of Pasifika Learners in Tertiary Education) commend AQA's annual events of the Enhancement Theme Symposium and Student Voice Summit. Each event has provided an opportunity for universities to participate in collective action where Pasifika learner representatives are able to build relationships with senior leadership members, academics and professional staff on neutral grounds and away from universities.*

> *The Student Voice Summit is a great forum – great to have collaboration with staff and students.*

> *AQA is a strong advocate and supporter of professional development opportunities that benefit individuals, but also universities and the sector as a whole. For example, recently it was instrumental in the organisation of workshops on Academic Integrity and securing funding to bring experts from Australia to facilitate two workshops in New Zealand. Professional development activities such as these are of great benefit to the universities and we are always keen to take advantage of these learning opportunities.*

> *AQA recently worked with the NZQA, UNZ and TEQSA to deliver an Academic Integrity Workshop which was very well attended by staff from a variety of tertiary providers. One outcome of this workshop is the initiation of an academic integrity community of practice. This community is still relatively new but has already engaged participants in discussions over academic integrity during the COVID-19 situation.*

D1. AQA encourages and assists universities in ongoing improvement of academic quality, including a commitment to flexibility and appropriate innovation in promoting academic quality. (CHEA 10F)

In addition to the evidence provided in the Introduction to this Section and AQA's Self-review Report, the Panel considered the Enhancement Theme Steering Group Terms of Reference, interim review and response, frameworks, synthesis of plans and Enhancement Theme Symposium materials. The Panel was very impressed with the materials created to support the Symposia. Positive feedback in relation to the innovative nature of the enhancement theme activities was received from university and international stakeholders:

> *AQA has a strong emphasis on enhancement; in international terms, one of the strongest, perhaps comparable with the enhancement-led approach of QAA Scotland. Such processes work well with relatively small homogenous sectors, where the quality differential between providers is relatively narrow.*

> *With the introduction of the quality enhancement theme into the Cycle 6 academic audit AQA has recognised the importance of each university*

addressing the theme in a way that will benefit ourselves. An understanding of the need for both flexibility and innovation is shown through the way the theme has been managed.

The Enhancement Theme was an experiment, taken from another country. It created good internal discussion, challenged ghettoisation of strategies to increase success, it opened up conversations, had good discussions about who should lead the process. It allowed difficult discussions about how to work in a connected way to enhance Māori and Pasifika success.

Based on the evidence provided, the Panel endorses AQA's own assessment that it is innovative in promoting improvements in academic quality and quality enhancement.

D2. AQA recognises that quality enhancement is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programmes.

As discussed in Section D3 below, AQA recognises that quality enhancement is primarily the responsibility of universities. In considering the identity and autonomy of universities in addressing the Enhancement Theme, and how AQA supports this diversity, the Panel heard that each university is at a different point in its journey. This point emerged in a number of submissions:

While this is supported well by AQA there is a recognition by them that quality enhancement is the responsibility of the institutions. In some cases, universities will be at different stages of this development.

The enhancement theme initiative is commendable and has been carefully developed. Passing leadership to university staff has emphasised university ownership of both the theme and the activity.

This variety was reflected in the feedback from universities that the Panel received:

Each university is at a different point in the development of these areas. [Our university] is already doing a lot for Māori and Pasifika students. We already had projects underway. [The Enhancement Theme work] gave us an opportunity to reflect but not [to introduce] new initiatives.

The Enhancement Theme was crucial for [our university]. [We were] starting from a zero base and have made huge progress in improving outcomes for more students and in the education of staff. It was the impetus that we needed to address the issue. It came at a great time for us and we are really pleased at the progress made.

During these discussions the Panel found that AQA's support of the Enhancement Theme provided leverage for universities to continue work in the area. One university found that the benefits of the Enhancement Theme were not just for Māori students and Pasifika students but also for international and domestic students and that

"universities worked together but addressed the issue differently". Their view was that the Enhancement Theme "livens the audit process and brings life and purpose to it".

D3. AQA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of quality enhancement processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for quality enhancement resides with the institutions and its programmes.

AQA reported (SRR, p.46) on the identification of 'enhancement initiatives' by universities in their own self-review reports and that audit panels will respond to these more proactively in the Cycle 6 audit reports. Stakeholders also indicated that AQA has a clear understanding of its role in this area:

> *AQA understands that quality enhancement is primarily the responsibility of universities and supports us by providing opportunities to introduce, assess and improve our processes.*

> *AQA, in its interactions, communications, and processes has been mindful that quality enhancement is the primary responsibility of the universities. The role played by the agency is supportive, and is demonstrated through the content of communications, the newsletters, and also the various conferences, forums and training events conducted.*

D4. AQA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and, strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.

In the 2017 Terms of Reference that have guided the work of the Enhancement Theme Steering Group and the universities' enhancement theme activities, the costs and funding arrangements are clearly outlined. It is clear that AQA has taken into account the financial costs of attending Steering Group meetings and has strived to schedule and manage the arrangements for these as time and cost effectively as possible.

D5. AQA recognises and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions.

The Panel found evidence of AQA's recognition of institutional diversity, as it relates to enhancement activities, throughout the documentation on the enhancement theme, including in AQA's Summary of University Enhancement Theme Initiatives:

> *Universities have different emphases and initiatives for their individual enhancement theme plans.*

AQA's Self-review Report describes how "universities developed individual enhancement theme plans that reflected their different student bodies, contexts and priorities" (p.47). Feedback from universities also supported this understanding:

> *AQA encourages universities to share information and good practice. Not all processes and outcomes suit every university, but by sharing how things do and do not work, we can all improve our quality processes in some way. The enhancement theme conferences provided an opportunity for all Universities to*

get together and share. Including students in the conferences and providing them the opportunity to address a group of people who can make a real difference in universities was an important step in quality enhancement.

The Enhancement Theme Steering Group was also guided by this recognition:

It is not surprising that the narrative is different for each university. It is important to recognise and capture these different perspectives.

Additional discussion of AQA's recognition of institutional diversity can be found in Section C4 above.

Section E: Confidence

AQA CONTRIBUTES TO CONFIDENCE IN THE ACADEMIC QUALITY OF NEW ZEALAND UNIVERSITIES

As AQA mentions in its Self-review Report, supporting confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities is part of AQA's purpose. To gather evidence to support the claims made in the Self-review Report in relation to this term of reference, the Panel consulted the AQA Executive Director, AQA Board Chair and Deputy Chair, and the Chief Executive Officer of Universities New Zealand. In addition, the relevant legislation, AQA Constitution and policies, and Cycle 6 audit documentation were examined.

E1. AQA has an established legal basis and is recognized by a competent external body. (1.1.1)

As described by Universities New Zealand, there are two bodies overseeing the quality assurance of universities: Universities New Zealand's Committee on University Academic Programmes and the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities. AQA was established in 1993 by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee as an independent body to give effect to NZVCC's responsibilities as the entity primarily responsible for quality assurance matters in the tertiary education sector (Education and Training Act (2020) S253C). AQA is not a separate legal entity.

Unlike most other external quality assurance organisations, AQA does not have any documentation verifying its legal status (e.g., Certificate of Incorporation) and the specific authority it reports to. According to AQA's Constitution AQA is an unincorporated body. While it was established by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee, it is operationally independent of NZVCC in the conduct of its quality assurance activities.

Since 2012, AQA has been recognised as being aligned with the INQAAHE GGP. Its current recognition is valid until 1 December 2020. AQA is also a Full Member of the Asia Pacific Quality Network.

E2. AQA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices. (1.1.2)

The Panel found considerable evidence to support this criterion. As well as the work undertaken in the development of the Cycle 6 Audit process alluded to in B2 above, significant effort has been put into guideline statement mapping exercises with international peer organisations such as TEQSA (Australian Higher Educational Standards Framework) and QAA in the United Kingdom (Quality Code). The resulting Cycle 6 Audit Framework and associated Enhancement Theme activities are examples of how AQA aligns itself with international comparator organisations.

E3. AQA has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external reviewers. (1.1.3)

Although AQA does not have a stand-alone policy on prevention of conflicts of interest, nevertheless, it has a clear requirement and mechanisms for its staff, decision-makers

and external reviewers to declare any potential conflicts of interest. These are outlined in its Audit Policy, external reviewer Panel Agreement and staff employment agreements.

The Panel notes the two Enhancement Initiatives related to managing conflicts of interest.

> **Enhancement Initiative 3**
> **Review audit policy and revise to include previous association.**
>
> **Enhancement Initiative 4**
> **Review and revise feedback processes in audit.**
>
> **Suggestion 10**
> The Panel suggests that AQA considers developing a stand-alone policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that brings together all the various strands related to this matter.

E4. AQA has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of higher education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives. (1.2.1)

Although AQA does not have a mission statement, its 'purpose' is set out in its Constitution. AQA's core mandate is to contribute to the advancement of New Zealand universities 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; and, supporting confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities. AQA outlines in its Strategic Framework 2017-2022 that it will achieve its purpose by focusing on two strategic goals (objectives): quality assurance and quality enhancement. The scope of AQA's quality assurance activities is described in its Terms of Reference and a range of policies and plans guide its operations.

E5. AQA has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives, and, adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria. (1.3.1)

AQA's governance structure and the composition of the AQA Board are set out in its Constitution. The Constitution clearly describes the appointment process and the range of stakeholders that are included on the Board.

Several university stakeholders commented on a perceived lack of visibility of the Board and its role. The Panel acknowledges AQA's responsiveness in updating their website to include further information on the AQA Board members following the submission of the Self-review Report and prior to the remote site visit. Such initiatives to increase the visibility of the Board may be useful to ensure a clear strategic view on the direction of quality assurance in New Zealand.

The Constitution also describes AQA's purpose as contributing to the advancement of New Zealand university education by "engaging as a leader and advocate in the development of academic quality". To achieve this purpose AQA's Goal of Quality Enhancement focuses on facilitating and supporting an enhancement orientation to quality assurance … in its own activities. Further, in the Terms of Reference in the Constitution it states that AQA will acknowledge the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi (partnership, participation and protection).

The Panel discussed AQA's governance arrangements and the possibilities for more explicit acknowledgement of Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles of partnership and participation with Māori auditors, senior Māori university staff, Māori students and members of the Enhancement Theme Steering Group.

The Panel believes that AQA has an opportunity to model power sharing with Māori in its governance. It was the observation of a stakeholder that:

> *AQA sets the tone for universities and has an opportunity to model good practice. If universities saw AQA modelling the Treaty relationship it would make it look possible. If Māori experience is made central, it raises the whole boat.*

Furthermore, in the notes from the final meeting of the Enhancement Theme Steering Group it is observed that:

> *A lot of analysis of students exists, but there is less analysis of culture change in institutions. Enabling students to succeed as Māori and as Pasifika requires a culture change in universities. This change is important at all levels of leadership and management, including governance.*

When discussing participation at governance level with student and Māori stakeholders the Panel heard of the difficulties faced when there is only a single voice bringing a particular perspective.

> *One student on a committee is isolated, it can be daunting to be a student rep.*

With this in mind, and taking into account the model of culture change that AQA has an opportunity to provide, it is the view of the Panel that these voices be strengthened on the AQA Board.

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Kotahi te aho ka whati, **ki te kāpuia e kore e whati**
One strand of flax is easy to break, but many strands together will stand strong

</div>

The Panel makes the following recommendations:

> ### Recommendation 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.**

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

The Panel also heard from students about the practical steps that would support them on the AQA Board and would enhance their ability to contribute to the work of the Board.

- *We need an effective handover process for incoming student reps on the AQA Board. We need more training opportunities, so students are confident and equipped to engage.*
- *Through training and induction, students need to be empowered to build capacity, feel comfortable and assist engagement with governance and audit.*

In supporting these suggestions, the Panel makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 9
The Panel *recommends* that the term of each student representative on the AQA Board be for one year[8] with TMĀ and NZUSA determining their representatives[9], and that TMĀ student members are also remunerated for their time and all student members receive appropriate induction.

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

E6. The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality. (1.3.2)

The Panel explored this criterion in some depth with the AQA Executive Director, Board Chair and Deputy Chair, and the Chief Executive Officer of Universities New Zealand. AQA's Constitution clearly describes AQA's operational independence (S1.4), however the Panel noted that seven of the eight Board members are appointed by NZVCC, with the eighth member being the Executive Director.

The Panel learned in its discussions of the process by which Board appointments are made including the national advertisement, nomination and recommendation process. The AQA Constitution allows for a range of voices in the composition of the Board including students, academics and employers. The Panel also noted the regular review of the Board's Register of Interests.

The Executive Director explained that an audit report, although coordinated and prepared by the Executive Director, is the assessment and evaluation findings of the

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[8] Generally, student representatives are elected for a one year term. However, given the size of their roles many burn out and do not stay for two years. With good handover processes (for example the incoming student coming to the last meeting with the out-going student), the issue that it takes some time for a student to learn and feel able to contribute can be mitigated. A one year term does not prohibit a student staying for two years, but that should not be the expectation.

[9] The added step of several student representatives being nominated by NZUSA then one being appointed by NZVCC can make it difficult to find representatives willing to serve.

designated audit panel. While serving on the AQA Board, the Executive Director has the same responsibility as other members of the Board, and the approval of each audit report is the collective consensus of the entire Board.

The Panel was reassured by these discussions that AQA's practices meet the requirements of this criterion.

E7. AQA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria. (4.1.1)

The Panel was impressed with the Cycle 6 audit documentation provided to date. It is comprehensive, clear and professional. University staff and auditors spoke highly of the quality of the materials and guidelines provided to support the audit process. The Panel also noted that AQA's governance documents were available and easily accessible on the AQA website.

The Panel supports AQA's Enhancement Initiative relating to the availability of its policies on the AQA website.

Enhancement Initiative 5
Make policies available on the AQA website.
Consider publishing agendas and minutes of Board meetings on the AQA website.

Suggestion 11
The Panel suggests that AQA consider adopting a policy template as part of this initiative.

E8. AQA reports its decisions about higher education institutions and programmes. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements. (4.1.2)

The Panel noted AQA's commitment to publishing and disseminating the audit reports of New Zealand universities, both on its website and in hard copy to key stakeholders. Feedback from university stakeholders confirmed the Panel's view that this is an area of good practice:

> *This is an area where AQA does extremely well. Reports are publicly available but more importantly, AQA has been successful in promoting international confidence in the quality of New Zealand universities and has maintained a strong presence in the international context via INQAAHE and other international bodies.*

The Panel supports AQA's Enhancement Initiative relating to public reporting.

Enhancement Initiative 6
Strengthen the commitment to public reporting for international reviews.

Such an initiative will increase the visibility of AQA's international reach and enhance views of the Agency as a credible commentator.

E9.   AQA has mechanisms to facilitate [with] the public a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken. (4.1.3)

The Panel recognised AQA's efforts in relation to making audit reports more accessible to a non-specialist audience, while acknowledging that general public interest in such reports is low.

The Panel supports AQA's Enhancement Initiative relating to public understanding of audit reports and academic quality.

Enhancement Initiative 7
Review, and revise if warranted, mechanisms for improving public understanding of academic audit reports and possibly academic quality more broadly.

The Panel suggests that this review might form part of the response to Recommendation 1 relating to the development of a broader communications and engagement strategy. It is the Panel's view that such work would support confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities beyond its specialist audience, as AQA itself suggests in its Self-review Report.

E10. AQA decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution's self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the HEIs. (5.1.1)

The Panel acknowledges the work that AQA has undertaken in reflecting upon the Cycle 5 audit process and its willingness to amend processes for Cycle 6 in the light of feedback from stakeholders. Having considered the material in the Self-review Report, the Guide to Cycle 6 Academic Audit and the associated Auditor Supplement and having discussed the audit process with auditors and universities, the Panel is satisfied that this criterion has been met.

E11. AQA decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies. (5.1.2)

The Panel notes that the section of this criterion related to the reports of other quality assurance bodies has limited applicability in the New Zealand context. The Panel referred to the Academic Audit Policy, Guide to Cycle 6, Auditor Supplement and discussions with universities when considering this criterion.

One university noted that the Guideline Statement process provides a foundation for consistency and that the Executive Director also had a helpful role in ensuring consistency across each audit and between the universities. Other universities commented:

It is a panel process with Board moderation. There is a good process for challenging recommendations. We have a right to contest recommendations and feel heard in the challenge process.

Consistency in responses and decision making is valued and respected.

AQA processes are comprehensive and well-articulated, and are in line with international standards. The Panel endorses the role of the AQA Board as moderator in the audit process.

E12. AQA decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures. (5.1.3)

As described in its Self-review Report, AQA's 'decisions' are in the form of findings in audit reports, expressed in terms of commendations, affirmations and recommendations, and decisions whether to 'accept' a university's follow-up report and mid-cycle report. The audit panel's findings comment on, and refer back to, each of the guideline statements (published criteria) contained in the Cycle 5 Handbook and Guide to Cycle 6 and follow a similar structure to the Self-review Report. Having considered the criteria and procedures in the audit Guides and a selection of Cycle 5 audit reports, the Panel is satisfied that this criterion has been met.

E13. Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action. (5.1.4)

Although AQA does not impose recommendations on universities, the expectations and processes related to the one-year follow-up and mid-cycle reports are clearly set out in section 4.8 of the Guide to Cycle 6. AQA post-audit follow-up is consistent, effective and robust (see Section C8 above).

E14. AQA's reported decisions are clear and precise. (5.1.5)

The Panel notes the feedback on the wording of recommendations in the Process Review of Cycle 5 (p.22) and the response from AQA to improve the process for Cycle 6 by allocating sufficient time for auditors to agree on the areas and wording of commendations, affirmations and recommendations, and to reach consensus in alignment with the audit's terms of reference. The Panel also endorses the AQA Board's role in reviewing and approving an audit report before it is released to a university to ensure that the reported decisions are clear and precise and can be easily understood by the university being audited.

E15. AQA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation. (5.2.1)

AQA uses a feedback process to gather information on participants' experiences of all academic audits and audit related activities. This mechanism enables AQA to respond proactively where problems have been identified or improvements could be made. The Process Review of Cycle 5 allowed an in-depth consideration of the entire audit cycle to inform improvements for Cycle 6 and ensure any negative feedback could be addressed before the beginning of the audit phase of Cycle 6.

The Panel endorses this approach as appropriate for the scale of AQA's activity.

E16. AQA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes. (5.2.2)

The Panel notes the review of the Review and Appeals Policy in light of Recommendation 13 (A13 above) in the 2015 External Review. AQA has a transparent, well-documented and well-articulated policy for appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes. The Panel is satisfied that this policy clearly sets out the procedures for resolving issues and conducting appeals.

> **Affirmation 3**
> **The Panel *affirms* that AQA has a transparent, well-documented and well-articulated policy for appeals on its review and decision-making process. The appeal processes and procedures in place are examples of good practice.**

E17. Appeals are conducted by a Panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside AQA. (5.2.3)

The Review and Appeals Policy sets out the levels of appeal and Appeal Panel composition. The appeal processes and procedures in place are examples of good practice.

Section F: Efficiency and Effectiveness

AQA TRANSACTS ITS CORE BUSINESS EFFICIENTLY AND EFFECTIVELY

This section focuses on AQA's business processes and whether these are efficient and effective in supporting and enabling AQA's quality assurance and quality enhancement goals. In considering this term of reference the Panel consulted AQA's suite of planning and review documentation and questioned all internal and external stakeholders.

F1.   AQA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently. (1.3.3)

The Panel is satisfied that AQA's broad structure of Board, Register of Auditors and Reviewers, and permanent secretariat is an effective approach that enables the Agency to carry out its external review activities. Responsiveness to institutional diversity is maintained by the auditor and audit panel appointment process and consistency is provided by Board oversight and the permanent secretariat.

Having satisfied itself in relation to the broad structure of the organisation, the Panel then drilled down to focus on the configuration of the secretariat to assess whether the current composition is appropriate to meet the needs of a fast-changing tertiary sector subject to the consequences of external events.

The Panel initially referred back to the 2015 External Review Report where they noted that, at the time of that review, AQA had two professional staff members. The comments made in 2015 are again echoed by university, auditor and international stakeholders in 2020:

- *Would be good to have a bit more depth in AQA.*
- *Would like AQA to have more institutional weight.*
- *AQA have done a fantastic job with minimal resources.*
- *AQA's staff is, to put it simply, very small. To say the agency punches above its weight would be an understatement.*

The Panel also acknowledges the view of NZVCC that quality assurance of universities should be light touch, pragmatic and of good quality.

> **Suggestion 12**
> Having considered the possibilities for benefit to the sector and the 'value add' that additional professional staff could bring, the Panel is of the view that it would be very timely for the AQA Board to consider how the Agency's staffing profile can best support the universities and the sector in the medium and longer term.

Further discussion of this matter continues in Section F3 below.

AQA has a strategic plan that helps assess its progress and plan for future developments. (1.3.4)

AQA has a Strategic Framework 2017-2022 outlining its strategic goals and the strategies used to achieve these goals. The Framework is underpinned by AQA's Constitution and operationalised through the annual Statement of Performance Expectations and planning documents supporting the Cycle 6 academic audit. The Panel acknowledges the Statement of Performance reported in the 2018-19 Annual Report and the subsequent comments on impact and practice enhancements. This comprehensive reflection on progress is constructive and ensures future activities are focused and support AQA's strategic goals.

The Panel is satisfied that AQA has a strategic plan in place, which provides a road map for its progress and planning for future strategic and operational directions.

F3. AQA has a well-trained, appropriately-qualified staff, able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. (1.4.1)

The Panel notes that auditors and reviewers are specific to each audit cycle and that they are appointed to a Register of Auditors and Reviewers by the AQA Board (SRR, p.6). Auditor training in relation to external evaluation has been considered in Section C13 above.

Within its Secretariat, AQA has one professional staff member, the Executive Director, supported by a part-time assistant and other administrative staff contracted through the Service Level Agreement with Universities New Zealand. Stakeholders spoke highly of the calibre of these staff:

> *The staff are well-trained and the Executive Director has experience within the sector which adds to the confidence of universities.*

Notwithstanding the high regard in which AQA staff are held, the Panel notes that AQA has raised several matters in its Self-review Report related to the appointment of appropriately qualified staff. These include:

- the risks associated with having a single professional staff member;
- the desirability of recruiting specialist expertise for the analysis and writing of good practice materials.

The Panel agrees that these are areas that merit urgent consideration and offers a number of observations and suggestions to support AQA's deliberations related to these matters.

Single professional staff member
By its own admission, AQA recognises the risks associated with having a single professional staff member. It is the view of the Panel that the contingency plan involving the former Executive Director as part of business continuity arrangements is not desirable. There is a fine but distinct difference between being shadowed and supported by the former Executive Director and a robust succession plan.

Furthermore, the Panel heard some concerns from stakeholders related to ensuring the wellbeing of the Executive Director and the Board's responsibilities in this area.

> *The role can be lonely. The Board needs to ensure they are 'caring' for the Executive Director.*

The risks, responsibilities and risk mitigation activities relating to the wellbeing of staff are described in AQA's Risk Management Procedures and the Health, Safety and Personal Wellbeing: Guidelines and Procedures. The latter describes several approaches to mitigating the possibility of poor staff wellbeing including job-sharing between staff and temporary staff assistance (clause 3.1). The Panel supports these approaches as part of broader workforce planning.

The Panel also heard that with a single staff member "there is an onus on one person to cover both the academic and mātauranga Māori (Māori knowledge) perspectives". In the view of this stakeholder an enhanced capacity that could challenge institutions may lead to systemic change and more and different perspectives. The Panel supports this view.

Specialist expertise

The Panel supports the recruitment of contracted specialists to increase the reach and capability of the Agency. Discussions amongst the Panel and with stakeholders resulted in the following suggestions:

- *Writers for audit reports would free up the Executive Director to be more strategic and would make the auditor role more attractive.*
- *The appointment of a Chair of the Register of Auditors would free up Executive Director time. The Executive Director (subject to the approval of AQA Board) should consider electing/selecting an appropriately qualified expert to chair the AQA Registered Auditors' Team. The Executive Director would then have a like-minded professional with whom to discuss ideas, proposed strategies and audit and enhancement activities.*
- *Secondments from universities or other agencies for particular projects.*
- *The convening of an Advisory or Reference Group to support the Executive Director, particularly in relation to the partnership goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and as referred to in AQA's Enhancement Initiative (SRR A5, p.11).*

> **Enhancement Initiative 8**
>
> **Consider enduring models for advice and guidance on giving effect to the term of reference that AQA will acknowledge the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.**

Notwithstanding the excellent performance of the current Executive Director, the Panel had concerns related to the sustainability of AQA's staffing configuration in the long term, particularly if AQA becomes resourced to take on a more advocacy (rather than service provision) role.

Suggestion 13

The Panel strongly suggests that it would be prudent of the AQA Board to consider the appointment of additional appropriately qualified staff, while at the same time putting in place a succession plan for the medium and long-term sustainability of the Agency.

Recommendation 11

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

F4. AQA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives. (1.4.2)

The Panel spent some time exploring this criterion with all internal and external stakeholders, particularly as it relates to Section F1, and as further covered in Section F3 and Recommendation 11.

Physical Resources

AQA is centrally located in Wellington in a shared office with Universities New Zealand. Most stakeholders viewed this arrangement as beneficial and supportive, although several universities noted the physical closeness and administrative arrangements with UNZ could give the impression of a lack of independence.

AQA has functional facilities and appropriate equipment to undertake its planned strategic and operational activities. It has been using iCloud since 2019, which works extremely well, evidenced by the very streamlined and efficient distribution of the key and supporting documents relating to the submission of its Self-Review Portfolio.

Financial Resources

AQA's Finance Policy is prudent, clear and appropriate, and its financial reporting arrangements with UNZ were clearly explained in the Self-review Report. The Service Level Agreement with UNZ is a sensible and efficient way to manage administrative activities for a small organisation. From the Annual Report 2018-2019, it is evident that AQA is financially sustainable, albeit with no changes in the scope and extent of its operational and strategic activities. For the 2018-2019 year, AQA has improved its net asset status by more than $30,000 ($302,589) as compared to that of 2018 ($270,762).

AQA's financial resourcing was also considered in the 2015 External Review (Section 1.2) where it was concluded (p.19) that if the role of the Agency was to expand then more funding would be required so that capacity could be increased. Similar arguments were advanced by stakeholders during the 2020 review:

AQA needs to be resourced more appropriately if quality standards are to be monitored effectively.

Throughout this submission I have raised concerns about the budget allocation for AQA and whether it is sufficient to ensure that AQA can maintain a position of supporting the real quality assurance needs of New Zealand universities in a manner that recognises the implementation of international good practice. New

Zealand has a small university system which will always put pressure on the allocation of sufficient funding. The small size of [the] AQA Secretariat will always limit the scope of activities and the introduction of new initiatives. … It is critical that the Board keep these issues under review and be prepared to seek additional support from Universities New Zealand.

In its discussions, and as illustrated in the quote above, the Panel found that stakeholders were very conscious of the costs to the universities of increased financial resourcing. The Panel observes, however, that AQA holds funds in its reserves.

Suggestion 14
In order to further enhance its Purpose as a leader and advocate in the development of academic quality, the Panel suggests that the Board consider whether and how a proportion of these reserves might be used to increase the capacity and capability of the Agency.

F5. AQA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff. (1.4.3)

The Panel considered this criterion as it relates to the AQA Secretariat. The professional development opportunities provided for the secretariat (conference and workshop attendance, specific training where required) were considered appropriate. AQA also conducts professional development activities for its external reviewers which are discussed in Section C13 above.

F6. AQA has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives. (2.1.2)

AQA provides substantial evidence confirming that effective mechanisms are in place for reflection and reviews of its operations and activities. The Panel saw examples of the feedback that AQA receives following all its events and activities. The regular reports by the Executive Director to the AQA Board on progress towards the objectives in the Statement of Performance Expectations also enable AQA to monitor the effectiveness of its operations.

The Panel notes, however, that some of the evidence provided in the feedback reports lacks quantifiable information.

Suggestion 15
The Panel suggests that the inclusion of consistently quantifiable information in future feedback reports would increase their value in assessing effectiveness.

Affirmation 4
The Panel *affirms* the work of the Executive Director in adopting good practice in AQA operations and putting in place self-review mechanisms for monitoring its own activities and progress.

F7. AQA periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements. (2.1.3)

Evidence in support of this criterion was amply provided by the series of whole-of-cycle reviews following the completion of the Cycle 5 academic audit. With its 'Lessons for Cycle 6' the Process Review of Cycle 5 Academic Audit, in particular, has informed improvements to the upcoming academic audit phase of Cycle 6. Another example is provided by the analysis of the Cycle 5 commendations, affirmations and recommendations[10] which resulted in the decision to extend the length of the period between each university's academic audit.

F8. AQA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed. (2.1.4)

That AQA has been subject to regular external reviews is clearly set out in AQA's Self-review Report (p.5), with the external review reports and one-year follow-up reports publicly available on the AQA website.

In considering this criterion, the Panel noted comments from submitters who mentioned the timing of external reviews in relation to the audit cycle. Panel members agree that the timing of the 2020 review within the audit cycle has had a bearing on its focus and emphasis.

Suggestion 16
The Panel suggests that the next external review of AQA take place to coincide with the Cycle 6 Audit Cycle Review of Cycle phase described in Figure 1 above (p.8).

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[10] Cycle 5 Academic Audit of New Zealand Universities: An Analysis of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations, June 2018.

Section G: International and Other Activities

AQA UNDERTAKES APPROPRIATE INTERNATIONAL AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

AQA's International Framework 2019-2022 describes the Agency's objectives in relation to international activities and the manner in which these contribute to the Goals and Strategies included in AQA's Strategic Framework 2017-2022. Descriptions of international activities and collaborations, and the value universities place on these, have been described in Sections B2 and B3 above.

G1. AQA gains value from international engagement.

> AQA's Statement of Performance Expectations 2019-2020 has as one of its Measures:

> *Gain or add value from international engagement, demonstrated through practice change, invitations to undertake work internationally, provide advice or contribute to conferences (3.2).*

> AQA explains in its Self-review Report (p.63) that the rationale for including this measure is to retain a focus on the reason for international engagement. It was evident to the Panel, through discussions with universities and international stakeholders, that AQA is an internationally respected organisation that uses its international connections to leverage benefits for New Zealand universities. The work with QAA Scotland in relation to the introduction of the Cycle 6 Enhancement Theme, the 2020 programme review for Fiji National University and the academic integrity workshops undertaken in conjunction with TEQSA are all examples of how AQA has gained or added value through international engagement.

G2. The EQAA (AQA in NZ) in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programmes offered and their characteristics. (6.1.1)

> The Panel notes that this criterion is not currently relevant to AQA. However, the Panel observes that, as Cycle 6 includes all students and all modes of delivery, the quality assurance of offshore delivery of New Zealand qualifications would be assessed through the academic audit process.

G3. Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered. (6.1.2)

> This criterion is not directly applicable to AQA, as it is the universities and CUAP that have responsibility for programme approval and delivery. However, as described in Section G2 above, the information provided to students as part of any offshore delivery of New Zealand qualifications would be considered in the Cycle 6 assessment, particularly Guideline Statement 8 and Guideline Statement 17.

G4. AQA cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices. (6.2.1)

The Panel acknowledges that, in relation to imported and exported higher education, this criterion is outside the scope of AQA's activities. The Panel notes the Memoranda of Understanding with the Australian, Hong Kong and Taiwanese quality assurance agencies and the relationships fostered with QAA Scotland, the Samoan Qualifications Authority, INQAAHE and the Asia Pacific Quality Network (see also Section B3 above). The work that has been undertaken under the aegis of these arrangements and relationships to improve mutual understanding and share good practice is illustrative of AQA's cooperation with international networks.

G5. AQA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition. (6.2.2)

AQA advises in its Self-review Report (p.65) that this is an area in which the Agency has not previously been involved, and that, as referred to in Section G3 above, the Agency's engagement would be signalled only through the academic audit process.

Notwithstanding this, an auditor with experience of transnational education mentioned this area as one where AQA could potentially add value to the sector. In the auditor's view, the development of transnational education is fast moving and an example of external developments for which New Zealand universities may be unprepared. Furthermore, a Pacific stakeholder suggested that this area could be further enhanced with Pacific universities, as an opportunity exists for New Zealand to enhance its regional leadership through academic quality assurance work.

Suggestion 17
The Panel suggests that an environmental scan by the Agency of the quality assurance of transnational education and international students in onshore student cohorts could add value to New Zealand universities.

As discussed in Section B6 above, such an activity would be a further illustration of AQA's proactive leadership role and ability to add value at a national level.

Section H: Conclusions

As described in the Introduction, the purpose of this review is to assess how effectively AQA assists the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee to discharge its responsibilities for quality assurance matters in universities through:

- delivering on its purpose in line with its terms of reference,
- meeting or exceeding the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice, and
- transacting core business processes efficiently and effectively.

Delivering on its Purpose in line with its Terms of Reference

AQA's purpose is to contribute to the advancement of New Zealand 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, and
- supporting confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities.

Leader and advocate

Universities, auditors and international stakeholders all provided examples of AQA's active and positive engagement in regional and international quality assurance activities. AQA is seen as a credible commentator on international quality assurance matters.

AQA's ability to influence actual quality within universities and to provide proactive national leadership is, however, limited by its size. The Panel suggests that universities might consider whether, with additional capability, AQA could add more value by being able to respond proactively to external events and rapid changes in the sector.

Quality assurance and quality enhancement

The Panel found that AQA has a central role in ensuring there are excellent standards and good practice in quality assurance and quality enhancement within the university sector. The Panel found considerable evidence that, while academic quality is ultimately the responsibility of each university, AQA's quality assurance and quality enhancement activities assist universities in improving student engagement, academic experience and learning outcomes.

AQA has undertaken a range of activities to promote and support the development of New Zealand universities' internal quality assurance processes as part of the Cycle 6 audit cycle. The Panel also recognises that universities are at different levels of maturity on some quality matters and, in some instances, it may be that AQA learns from the universities themselves by taking inspiration from the Ako methodology[11].

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[11] The concept of ako means both to teach and to learn. It recognises the knowledge that each group brings to their interactions, and it acknowledges the way that new knowledge and understandings can grow out of shared learning experiences.

Universities have an opportunity to highlight their own identity, context and strategic priorities as part of their Self-review Report and this is encouraged in the Guide to Cycle 6. Universities appreciated that the framework for Cycle 6 audit is not prescriptive, that it is sensitive to a university's own strategic directions and priorities, and that there is considerable flexibility to address a university's particular context. Throughout the documentation on the enhancement theme the Panel also found evidence of AQA's recognition of institutional diversity, as it relates to enhancement activities.

The Panel found commendable good practice demonstrated in the comprehensive and consultative process and preparatory work in advance of the Cycle 6 audit. It also found that the reliability and consistency of this process is supported by the availability of the comprehensive written guides, the training provided to audit panel members, and the moderation of audit reports provided by the Executive Director and the Board.

In acknowledging that AQA has an important role in ensuring there are excellent standards and good practice in the sector, Māori stakeholders laid down a challenge to AQA to continue to facilitate the national and international conversation around how Te Ao Māori can be incorporated into the audit process at a fundamental level.

The Panel found that the Enhancement Theme work was of value to universities, particularly as a forum for relationship building. Positive feedback on the innovative nature of the enhancement theme activities was received from university and international stakeholders.

Confidence

AQA supports confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities in a number of ways. A range of governance documents outline its purpose and objectives, and a range of policies and plans guide its operations. The scope of AQA's quality assurance activities is clearly described in its terms of reference. The Panel has made a number of recommendations relating to AQA's governance arrangements to ensure that these reflect its terms of reference and include all relevant stakeholders.

The Panel was impressed with the Cycle 6 audit documentation. Significant effort has been put into guideline statement mapping exercises with international peer organisations and audit decisions (findings) are based on published criteria and follow well-documented procedures. AQA's post-audit follow-up is consistent, effective and robust, and the Panel noted AQA's commitment to publishing and disseminating audit reports.

The Panel is satisfied that the AQA Board is independent and acts impartially in its decision making. AQA has a clear requirement and mechanisms for its staff, decision-makers and external reviewers to declare any potential conflicts of interest and has clear procedures for dealing with complaints and appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.

In fulfilling its Purpose, AQA addresses its own terms of reference, in particular those relating to areas of importance to universities; undertaking quality assurance reviews that are robust, fair and perceptive and which respect the individual contexts of universities; and identifying and promoting good practice in quality assurance and enhancement.

AQA does commendable work in supporting the contribution of an effective student voice in quality assurance and enhancement and has made genuine efforts to acknowledge the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The Panel encourages AQA to continue this work, with the longer term ambition of truly reflecting the partnership goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Having considered the evidence provided, it is the view of the Panel that AQA delivers on its Purpose in line with its terms of reference.

Meeting or exceeding the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice

Appendix 2 summarises the Panel's assessment in relation to whether AQA complies with the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice. The Panel has used the following notation:

Met (R)	The guideline has been met with some reservations, i.e., the Panel has identified an area which could be further improved.
Met	The guideline has been met with no reservations.
Exceeded	The guideline has been met with no reservations and there has been commendable good practice.

Having considered the evidence provided, it is the view of the Panel that AQA meets, and in a number of cases exceeds, the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice.

Transacting core business processes efficiently and effectively

The Panel is satisfied that AQA's structure of Board, Register of Auditors and Reviewers, and permanent Secretariat is an effective approach that enables the Agency to carry out its external review activities and to meet its quality assurance and quality enhancement goals.

AQA's strategic plan provides a road map for its progress and planning for future strategic and operational directions. As part of its strategic planning, the Panel suggests that it would be prudent for the AQA Board to consider AQA's staffing profile in the medium and longer term. AQA provides substantial evidence confirming that effective mechanisms are in place for reflection, and for internal and external reviews of its activities.

AQA has appropriate physical and financial resources, and the Service Level Agreement with Universities New Zealand is a sensible and efficient way to manage the administration of a small organisation. AQA is financially sustainable with considerable financial reserves, and the Panel suggests that the Board consider whether a proportion of AQA's reserves might be used to increase the capacity and capability of the Agency.

In conclusion, it is the considered view of the Panel that AQA effectively assists the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee to discharge its responsibilities for quality assurance matters in universities. AQA and its Executive Director are to be commended for their overall excellent performance. The oversight of quality assurance in New Zealand universities is in good hands.

Appendix 1: External Review Terms of Reference – Detailed Criteria

The particular criteria are:

A. Introduction and context
   1. Response to recommendations in 2015 external review.

B. AQA demonstrates leadership and advocacy in the development of academic quality. This will be demonstrated by meeting the following criteria:

   1. AQA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.
   2. AQA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.
   3. AQA collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges.
   4. AQA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.
   5. AQA prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities.
   6. AQA is sought as credible commentator on matters of academic quality.

C. AQA undertakes quality assurance processes that assist universities. This will be demonstrated by meeting the following criteria:

   1. AQA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programmes.
   2. AQA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of IQA processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institutions and its programmes.
   3. AQA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and, strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.
   4. AQA recognises and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions.
   5. The standards or criteria developed by AQA have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.
   6. Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programmes or other non-traditional approaches to HE as relevant to the context in which they operate.
   7. Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within AQA's scope, and on the availability of necessary resources (e.g., finances, staff and learning resources).
   8. Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and, provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews.
   9. AQA procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.

10. AQA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent, and, includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review.
11. AQA has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from higher education institutions, in the form of quality criteria, or standards and procedures, for self-assessment and external review.
12. The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/programme being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners.
13. AQA has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external Reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals.
14. External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and, ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.
15. AQA's system ensures that each institution or programme will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external Panels, teams, or committees are different.
16. AQA carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated.
17. AQA provides higher education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report.
18. AQA provides clear guidance to the institution or programme in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.

D. AQA supports quality enhancement processes that assist universities. This will be demonstrated by meeting the following criteria (adapted from GGP QA criteria):

1. AQA encourages and assists universities in ongoing improvement of academic quality, including a commitment to flexibility and appropriate innovation in promoting academic quality (CHEA 10F)
2. AQA recognises that quality enhancement is primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions (HEIs) themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programmes.
3. AQA promotes the development and appropriate implementation quality enhancement processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for quality enhancement resides with the institutions and its programmes.
4. AQA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and, strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.
5. AQA recognises and values institutional diversity and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions.

E. AQA contributes to confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities. This will be demonstrated by meeting the following criteria:

1. AQA has an established legal basis and is recognized by a competent external body.
2. AQA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices.

3. AQA has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external Reviewers.
4. AQA has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of higher education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives.
5. AQA has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives, and, adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria.
6. The composition of the decision-making body and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality.
7. AQA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.
8. AQA reports its decisions about higher education institutions and programmes. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.
9. AQA has mechanisms to facilitate the public a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.
10. AQA decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution's self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to the HEIs.
11. AQA decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.
12. AQA decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and, can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.
13. Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.
14. AQA's reported decisions are clear and precise.
15. AQA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.
16. AQA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.
17. Appeals are conducted by a Panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside AQA.

F. AQA transacts its core business efficiently and effectively. This will be demonstrated by meeting the following criteria:

2. AQA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently.
2. AQA has a strategic plan that helps assess its progress and plan for future developments.
3. AQA has a well-trained, appropriately-qualified staff, able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.
4. AQA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.
5. AQA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.
6. AQA has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.
7. AQA periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.

8. AQA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.

G. AQA undertakes appropriate international and other activities. This will be demonstrated by meeting the following criteria:

1. AQA gains value from international engagement.
2. The EQAA (AQA in NZ) in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programmes offered and their characteristics.
3. Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered.
4. AQA cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.
5. AQA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition.

H. Conclusions

Appendix 2: INQAAHE GGP to AQA Terms of Reference Map[12]

	INQAAHE GGP	AQA TOR	Panel Assessment
1.	**THE STRUCTURE OF THE EQAA**		
1.1	**The EQAA's legitimacy and recognition**		
1.1.1	The EQAA has an established legal basis and is recognised by a competent external body.	E1	Met
1.1.2	The EQAA takes into consideration relevant guidelines issued by international networks and other associations, in formulating its policies and practices.	B2, E2	Met
1.1.3	The EQAA has a clear and published policy for the prevention of conflicts of interest that applies to its staff, its decision-making body, and the external reviewers.	E3	Met
1.2	**Mission and Purposes**		
1.2.1	The EQAA has a written mission statement and a set of objectives that explicitly provide that external quality assurance of higher education is its major concern, describe the purpose and scope of its activities and can be translated into verifiable policies and measurable objectives.	E4	Met
1.3	**Governance and Organisational Structure**		
1.3.1	The EQAA has a governance structure consistent with its mission and objectives and adequate mechanisms to involve relevant stakeholders in the definition of its standards and criteria.	E5	Met (R)
1.3.2	The EQAA's composition and/or its regulatory framework ensure its independence and impartiality.	E6	Met
1.3.3	The EQAA's organisational structure makes it possible to carry out its external review processes effectively and efficiently.	F1	Met
1.3.4	The EQAA has a strategic plan that helps it assess its progress and plan for future developments.	F2	Met
1.4	**Resources**		
1.4.1	The EQAA has a well-trained, qualified staff able to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach.	F3	Met (R)
1.4.2	The EQAA has the physical and financial resources needed to fulfil its goals and carry out the activities that emerge from its mission statement and objectives.	F4	Met (R)
1.4.3	The EQAA provides systematic opportunities for the professional development of its staff.	F5	Met
2.	**ACCOUNTABILITY OF THE EQAA**		
2.1	**Quality Assurance of the EQAA**		
2.1.1	The EQAA operates with transparency, integrity and professionalism and adheres to ethical and professional standards.	B1	Exceeded

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[12] The layout of this table is based on Appendix 2 in the *Report of the 2017 Review of CUAP*.

	INQAAHE GGP	AQA TOR	Panel Assessment
2.1.2	The EQAA has in place mechanisms that enable it to review its own activities in order to respond to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.	F6	Met
2.1.3	The EQAA periodically conducts a self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data collection and analysis, to inform decision-making and trigger improvements.	F7	Met
2.1.4	The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals, ideally not exceeding five years. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.	F8	Met
2.2	**Links to the QA community**		
2.2.1	The EQAA is open to international developments in quality assurance and has mechanisms that enable it to learn about and analyse the main trends in the field.	B2	Exceeded
2.2.2	The EQAA collaborates with other QA agencies where possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, and review of decisions, joint projects, or staff exchanges.	B3	Exceeded
3.	**THE EQAA FRAMEWORK FOR THE EXTERNAL REVIEW OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**		
3.1	**The relationship between the EQAA and higher education institutions**		
3.1.1	The EQAA recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves, and respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions and programs.	C1	Met
3.1.2	The EQAA promotes the development and appropriate implementation of internal quality assurance processes in accordance with the understanding that the primary responsibility for assuring quality resides with the institutions and its programs.	C2	Met
3.1.3	The EQAA bears in mind the level of workload and cost that its procedures will place on institutions, and strives to make them as time and cost effective as possible.	C3	Met
3.2	**The definition of criteria for external quality review**		
3.2.1	The EQAA recognises and values institutional diversity, and translates this valuation into criteria and procedures that take into account the identity and goals of higher education institutions.	C4	Met
3.2.2	Standards or criteria developed by the EQAA have been subject to reasonable consultation with	C5	Exceeded

	INQAAHE GGP	AQA TOR	Panel Assessment
	stakeholders and are revised at regular intervals to ensure relevance to the needs of the system.		
3.2.3	Standards or criteria take into consideration the specific aspects related to different modes of provision, such as transnational education, distance or online programs or other non-traditional approaches to higher education as relevant to the context in which they operate.	C6	Met
3.2.4	Standards or criteria explicitly address the areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope.	C7	Met
3.2.5	Criteria or standards and procedures take into account internal follow up mechanisms, and provide for effective follow up of the outcomes of the external reviews.	C8	Exceeded
3.2.6	The EQAA procedures specify the way in which criteria will be applied and the types of evidence needed to demonstrate that they are met.	C9	Met
3.3	**The external review process**		
3.3.1	The EQAA carries out an external review process that is reliable and based on published criteria and procedures. It follows a self-assessment or equivalent, and includes an external review (normally including a site visit or visits), and a consistent follow up of the recommendations resulting from the external review.	C10	Met
3.3.2	The EQAA has published documents, which clearly state what it expects from higher education institutions, in the form of quality criteria or standards and procedures for self-assessment and external review.	C11	Met
3.3.3	The external review process is carried out by teams of experts consistent with the characteristics of the institution/program being reviewed. Experts can provide input from various perspectives, including those of institutions, academics, students, employers or professional practitioners.	C12	Exceeded
3.3.4	The EQAA has clear specifications on the characteristics and selection of external reviewers, who must be supported by appropriate training and good supporting materials such as handbooks or manuals.	C13	Exceeded
3.3.5	External review procedures include effective and comprehensive mechanisms for the prevention of conflicts of interest, and ensure that any judgments resulting from external reviews are based on explicit and published criteria.	C14	Met
3.3.6	The EQAA's system ensures that each institution or program will be evaluated in a consistent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees are different.	C15	Met
3.3.7	The EQAA carries out the external review within a reasonable timeframe after the completion of a self-	C16	Met

	INQAAHE GGP	AQA TOR	Panel Assessment
	assessment report, to ensure that information is current and updated.		
3.3.8	The EQAA provides the higher education institutions with an opportunity to correct any factual errors that may appear in the external review report.	C17	Met
3.4	**The requirements for self-evaluation**		
3.4.1	The EQAA provides clear guidance to the institution or program in the application of the procedures for self-evaluation, the solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents, or the preparation for external review as necessary and appropriate.	C18	Met
4.	**THE EQAA AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO THE PUBLIC**		
4.1	**Public reports on the EQAA's policies and decisions**		
4.1.1	The EQAA provides full and clear disclosure of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.	E7	Exceeded
4.1.2	The EQAA reports its decisions about higher education institutions and programs. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.	E8	Met
4.1.3	The EQAA has mechanisms to facilitate a fair understanding of the reasons supporting decisions taken.	E9	Met
4.2	**Other public reports**		Met
4.2.1	The EQAA discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.	B4	Met
4.2.2	The EQAA prepares and disseminates periodically integrated reports on the overall outcomes of QA processes and of any other relevant activities.	B5	Met
5.	**DECISION MAKING**		
5.1	**The decision-making process**		
5.1.1	The EQAA's decisions take into consideration the outcomes of both the institution's self-assessment process and the external review; they may also consider any other relevant information, provided this has been communicated to higher education institutions.	E10	Met
5.1.2	The EQAA's decisions are impartial, rigorous, and consistent even when they are based on the reports of other quality assurance bodies.	E11	Met
5.1.3	The EQAA's decisions are based on published criteria and procedures, and can be justified only with reference to those criteria and procedures.	E12	Met
5.1.4	Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action.	E13	Met
5.1.5	The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.	E14	Met
5.2	**The EQAA's process for appeals and complaints**		Met

	INQAAHE GGP	AQA TOR	Panel Assessment
5.2.1	The EQAA has procedures in place to deal in a consistent way with complaints about its procedures or operation.	E15	Met
5.2.2	The EQAA has clear, published procedures for handling appeals related to its external review and decision-making processes.	E16	Met
5.2.3	Appeals are conducted by a panel that was not responsible for the original decision and has no conflict of interest; appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.	E17	Met
6.	**THE QA OF CROSS BORDER HIGHER EDUCATION**		
6.1	**Criteria for cross border higher education**		
6.1.1	The EQAA in a sending country makes clear that the awarding institution is responsible for ensuring the equivalent quality of the education offered, that the institution understands the regulatory frameworks of the receiving countries, and that the institution provides clear information on the programs offered and their characteristics.	G2	Met
6.1.2	Students and other stakeholders receive clear and complete information about the awards delivered.	G3	Met
6.1.3	The rights and obligations of the parties involved in transnational education are clearly established and well known by the parties.		Not applicable
6.2	**Collaboration between agencies**		
6.2.1	The EQAA cooperates with appropriate local agencies in the exporting and importing countries and with international networks. This cooperation is oriented to improve mutual understanding, to have a clear and comprehensive account of the regulatory framework and to share good practices.	G4	Met
6.2.2	The EQAA seeks ways to cooperate in the external quality assurance in transnational education provision, for example through mutual recognition.	G5	Met

Appendix 3: Members of the Review Panel and Acknowledgements

Members of the Review Panel

Panel Chair
Emeritus Professor Gareth Jones
Department of Anatomy
University of Otago

Professor Rawinia Higgins
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Māori)
Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington

Ms Isabella Lenihan-Ikin
President
New Zealand Union of Students' Associations

Ms Pauline Tang
Former CEO of THE-ICE (International Centre of Excellence in Tourism and Hospitality Education) and Immediate Past Vice-President of INQAAHE

Secretary
Ms Heather Dickie

Acknowledgements

The Panel thanks the AQA staff and Board, particularly the Executive Director Emeritus Professor Sheelagh Matear, for the quality of the Self-Review Portfolio and other supporting documentation provided to the Panel. The Executive Director is also thanked for her prompt attention to the requests made by the Panel for further information.

The Panel also wishes to thank all those who spoke with the Panel and who provided written submissions. The interviews and submissions were extremely valuable and the insights gained greatly assisted the Panel members in forming their conclusions.

The Panel also acknowledges the assistance provided by Universities New Zealand.

Appendix 4: Interviewees and Correspondents

Participant groups whose representatives met with the Review Panel and/or made a written submission:

- Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities
- Auckland University of Technology
- Lincoln University
- Massey University
- University of Auckland
- University of Canterbury
- University of Otago
- University of Waikato
- Victoria University of Wellington
- New Zealand Union of Students' Associations
- New Zealand International Students' Association
- Te Mana Ākonga - National Māori Tertiary Students' Association
- Tauira Pasifika - The Voice of Pasifika Learners in Tertiary Education
- Committee on University Academic Programmes
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority
- Ako Aotearoa National Centre for Tertiary Teaching Excellence
- Universities New Zealand

A number of auditors and international and other stakeholders also met with the Panel and/or made a written submission.

Appendix 5: Acronyms

APQN	Asia Pacific Quality Network
AQA	Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities
CUAP	Committee on University Academic Programmes
EQAA	External Quality Assurance Agency
GGP	INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
NZISA	New Zealand International Students' Association
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZUSA	New Zealand Union of Students' Associations
NZVCC	New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education – Scotland
SRR	Self-review Report
TEC	Tertiary Education Commission
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (Australia)
TKA	Te Kāhui Amokura (Universities New Zealand's sub-committee on Māori)
TMĀ	Te Mana Ākonga - National Māori Tertiary Students' Association.
UNZ	Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara, the operating name of the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (NZVCC)