External review of AQA 2015 – One-year Follow-up Report.

This report sets out how AQA has addressed, or is addressing the recommendations made in the 2015 External Review of AQA. Following consideration by the AQA Board, a report will be provided to the Vice-Chancellors. This report builds on AQA's initial response to the recommendations, which was made to Vice-Chancellors in November 2015.

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

    The key issues with respect to this recommendation are continuity beyond a one-year term and whether or not the student representative has to come from the New Zealand Union of Student Associations (NZUSA) NZUSA.

    AQA has discussed the issue of continuity beyond a one-year term with NZUSA on a number of occasions and has written to NZUSA to encourage a revision of its criteria and processes for nominating students to allow this to occur. In response, NZUSA have indicated that they intend to present a proposal to recommend a two-year term for AQA Board nominees to their members at their Congress in late November.

    The AQA Board has confirmed that NZUSA should continue to be the nominating body for the student member of the Board. NZUSA's processes for nominating a student member of the Board include consulting with students' associations that are not members of NZUSA.

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

    The Board agrees on the importance of the Board being connected to international trends and developments and considers that it is well advised by AQA staff on these matters. The Board will continue to consider cost effective and cost-efficient means of enhancing international perspectives.

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

There are two sets of induction issues: induction into Board processes and (for non-university members) induction into NZ university matters. New Board members receive a compilation of materials including the AQA Constitution, Policies, recent Board agendas and newsletters. The Chair of the Board and Executive Director will meet with new Board members.

4. **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 AQA staff have actioned this recommendation. The email request to Board members has been revised to make it more explicit that their formal approval is sought (or reasons why this is not yet given), and provision is made on the AQA Board agenda to ensure formal approval is recorded for reports which have been approved between Board meetings.

5. **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.**

   This has been actioned and a debriefing report, compiled from feedback gained through existing processes, will be considered by the Board after audit site visits. Additionally, the Director will report to the Board on any issues which have been raised during the site visit.

   AQA staff note the mid-cycle report that was prepared, and a similar end-of-cycle report on audit process from the perspective of (a) auditors, (b) universities and (c) AQA staff will be developed. These reports enable systemic issues to be identified.

6. **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.**

   Consultation on the Cycle 6 framework includes a request for comment from universities on this proposal. (Note that universities currently report formally to the AQA Board on their response to audit recommendations one year after publication of audit reports.) The Board is wary of introducing what might appear to universities to be an additional compliance step, but recognises that public comment on actions taken in response to quality audit would be consistent with practice in a number of other jurisdictions.

7. **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.**

   AQA has ongoing discussion with NZUSA and some individual students' associations. In October 2016, AQA co-hosted a summit on the Student Voice and University Quality with NZUSA and Ako Aotearoa. This matter was also discussed at AQA's Support for Quality conference.

   The proposal for Cycle 6 includes having students (or recent graduates) as members of audit panels. Should this be agreed, a framework for engaging with students will be developed as part of the operationalisation processes for Cycle 6.

8. **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.**

    This recommendation is being progressed with the proposal for Cycle 6 including a greater emphasis on enhancement. This would allow universities to focus on particular issues or activities that are of relevance to either individual universities, groups of universities or the university sector as a whole.

9. **The Panel *recommends* that AQA ensure 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.**

    Formal auditor training reflects accepted good practice internationally. AQA facilitates opportunities for a number of NZ-based auditors to serve in overseas jurisdictions. AQA also encourages NZ-based auditors to attend relevant overseas conferences. Enhancing this aspect would require more financial support to expose NZ auditors to international practice – whether via visiting trainers or attendance at international conferences or recommendations to international agencies.

    Regarding international auditors on NZ panels, the Director provides informal briefings to them on relevant national and local contextual issues. Such briefings could be formalized. These could be different for each audit given timing stages. This will be considered further when developing training and panel appointment procedures for Cycle 6 audit.

10. **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.**

    Strategies for ensuring initial and ongoing training and support for auditors will be developed as part of the operationalisation of Cycle 6, once it has been agreed.

    Development of online training materials is a useful suggestion.

11. **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.**

    AQA always endeavours to appoint panels which reflect a diversity of skills, professional backgrounds and experience (as well as gender and ethnicity). "Ensuring" this, however, is sometimes beyond the resources of AQA given the attributes and availability of individual auditors. Auditors are appointed to panels because of their professional expertise *as auditors*.

Any distinctiveness of the institution would be a secondary consideration. The recommendation will be considered when auditors are appointed for Cycle 6.

12. **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.**

AQA believes universities are in no doubt about the importance of the Self Review Report. AQA receives regular and positive feedback from universities about the usefulness to them of the self-review process and resulting report for internal quality improvement and documentation. Throughout Cycle 5 AQA has reinforced the importance of self-review reports and has provided iterative guidance on the content and structure of these reports.

Given the reports are private to the individual universities, AQA does not share them. AQA believes this confidentiality is critical to ensuring universities feel safe undertaking a frank analysis of their achievement. However AQA does encourage sharing between universities themselves with the objective of addressing challenges and sharing good practice. To our knowledge, the main focus of such sharing is on the form and presentation of the reports, rather than on the content *per se.*

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

This recommendation has been actioned. Appeal provisions of other jurisdictions were reviewed as benchmarks and the Appeal Policy has been reviewed to include possible remedies.