Academic audit in times of ongoing COVID-19:

A working paper to guide Cycle 6 Academic Audit

Summary

The ongoing impact of COVID-19 means that AQA needs to consider options for proceeding with academic audits in the event of changes in government COVID-19 Alert levels. Based on a review of national and international experiences, the following model for Cycle 6 Academic Audits is proposed:

1. Planning and follow-up visits are planned to occur face-to-face with a pivot to online if necessary.
2. The first panel meeting (2 days) will be an online meeting.
3. The site visit schedule will be planned as a face-to-face meeting at the university but will change to a 4-day meeting to allow for online pivot options and the possibility of losing a day due to panel members and agency staff needing to return home. Contingency schedules for completing the site visit online will be developed.
4. The international panel member will contribute remotely as a 'consulting panel member' (but could contribute in-person if they and the university agree to accept the risks involved with this or if the COVID-19 pandemic situation improves).
5. If it is clear at the time of the second planning meeting that a site visit will be held online, the international panel member may contribute synchronously (depending on time zones).

The implications of the proposed model are increased planning complexity, the need for technology capability and support to be available and a change to audit process in terms of the international panel member. However, these can all be managed and international precedent exists for the changed role of the international panel member. Cycle 6 Academic Audit will remain consistent with international expectations of good practice.

The intent of the proposed model is to provide as much certainty and commonality of audit experience for universities as possible. It will be reviewed as part of the interim review of Cycle 6. No changes to the Cycle 6 Audit Framework or self-review portfolios are anticipated. From a cost perspective, this model would use existing principles where direct costs are met by universities.

Introduction

The COVID-19 has had and continues to exert a disruptive influence on higher education globally, including on the quality assurance of higher education (Hou and Lu, *in prep*.). Universities in Aotearoa New Zealand experienced significant impacts from COVID-19 (Matear, 2021a). AQA's response to the pandemic was to defer, at the request of the universities, the start of the academic audit phase of Cycle 6 for 12 months (Matear, 2020a). Some external quality agencies in other parts of the world also employed a deferral response, but others transitioned quality assurance activities to operate online and developed protocols to support this (ENQA, 2020). Universities in Aotearoa New Zealand also continued with other quality assurance activities online, for example, programme reviews. As AQA (and the universities) now prepare for the resumption of the audit cycle, they are able to learn from the experiences of agencies and universities who undertook quality assurance activities online (ENQA 2021a; ENQA 2021b).

This paper first sets out options for undertaking academic audit and criteria for helping determine the option to use. It then focuses on 'site visits' and outlines other matters to be considered in

online and blended site visits before proposing a 'pandemic-adjusted model' for Cycle 6 Academic Audits. Implications of the proposed model for AQA, universities and the audit process are identified.

This paper explores how academic audit might be undertaken and matters to be considered with different options. It does not discuss or anticipate any change to the academic audit framework itself. The academic audit framework is considered to be sufficiently robust and flexible to be able to accommodate increases in online teaching and related activities by universities (Matear, 2020b).

Similarly, this paper does not constitute the entirety of guidance for undertaking academic audits. Further information and expectations are included in the Guide to Cycle 6 Academic Audit (Matear, 2020c) and the Auditor Supplement (Matear, 2019). The Auditor Supplement will be redeveloped to incorporate material from this discussion paper.

Feedback on an earlier version of this paper was sought from universities and experienced auditors. Their contributions, advice and suggestions are gratefully acknowledged. The earlier paper was posted as a pre-print on ResearchGate (Matear, 2021b).

Options for undertaking academic audit

Academic audits have 4 main phases where interaction occurs (Figure 1). Most attention however is focussed on the second panel meeting and site visit. Drawing from the experiences of EQA across the world (ENQA, 2021a; ENQA 2021b), there seem to be 4 main options for undertaking academic audit[1]:

1. Traditional face-to-face models (F2F)
2. Online models where all stages of the process and all panel members and interviewees are online.
3. Hybrid models where some stages of the process may be undertaken face-to-face (for example, the site visit) and other stages (for example, planning meetings) may be online.
4. Blended models (which overlap with the above options) where both F2F and online are present in any stage of the audit process.

Figure 1 Interaction phases of the audit process

Each of these options has advantages and challenges. The summaries below are drawn from a series of ENQA webinars on EQA's experiences with online EQA (ENQA 2021a; ENQA 2021b). Feedback and thoughts on remote reviews were also provided by national and international auditors with experience of undertaking online reviews and audits and with different quality assurance systems.

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[1] The NVAO in Flanders uses hybrid and blended terminology – but defines them differently (Delanoy, 2021). This paper follows definitions of hybrid and blended learning from Saichaie (2020) where blended is a "blend of face-to-face and online" and hybrid is the intentional use of technology as a replacement for some activities.

Traditional (F2F)

F2F models have the advantages of being well-established and familiar. Existing training is oriented towards F2F models. They also facilitate good panel dynamics and interaction with interviewees easily. Body language and non-verbal cues can be used to help put interviewees at ease. The panel chair is able to manage interactions and deliberations in a natural and non-imposing manner. It is relatively easy to adapt and respond to emerging issues or to re-orient a line of questioning. Panel focus is easier to maintain as they are removed from normal workplaces. F2F site visits are also 'rewarding' for panel members as although they work hard, there are also opportunities for informal professional interaction and discussion.

However, F2F models are relatively expensive (flights and accommodation) to organise, they are not flexible or adaptable if (COVID) circumstances change and people are unable to travel. While some blended elements are possible, it would not be desirable just to transfer an interview schedule designed for F2F to an online model (although it could be done). Doing this would be an emergency response and should be able to be avoided now that we are able to plan for contingencies.

In the current context, the ability to book flights and managed isolation and quarantine (MIQ) slots that meet audit timelines for international panel members is likely to be extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Online

Fully online models for online quality assurance have been used internationally by some agencies and those agencies have shared their experiences. As with transition from F2F teaching and learning to online and blended teaching and learning there is, or should be, a difference between online quality assurance that is undertaken as an emergency response and online quality assurance that is planned and designed for an online environment. The experiences of emergency online quality assurance can be used to plan for intentional online quality assurance. Although ways of online working are becoming more common and familiar, there still needs to be recognition that the move to online was difficult and stressful for many people and online may be associated with a more stressful environment.

Within the context of undertaking academic audits in Aotearoa New Zealand and engaging with ākonga Māori and Māori staff, the importance and value of meeting kanohi ki te kanohi (face-to-face) also needs to be appreciated. This is "key principle of being and doing as Māori" (Ngata, 2017). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Māori authors were considering how ICT might support and impact on Māori communities, traditions, lifestyle, language and customs (Whaanga, Keegan and Apperly, 2017). Their advice and advice from Māori members of audit panels should guide how academic audits operate online, as well as in a traditional kanohi ki te kanohi mode.

Overall, costs should be lower as travel and accommodation costs are not incurred or are reduced. However, planning and preparation costs are likely to be higher (Fredericks, 2020). Online models 'should' be more resilient to changes in travel restrictions and allow all members to participate equally. Internationally, some agencies have reported that online EQA has increased accessibility for some groups of students (Cox and Boland, 2021).

Displacement of costs also needs to be considered. If panel members are working online, costs may be incurred by either the panel member's institution or the panel member themselves. These could include costs of printing and office supplies, as well as provision of hardware. Panel members should

be able to claim reimbursement for actual and reasonable costs. In some cases, AQA may need to provide computer accessories such as headsets, webcams and broadband connections.

Technology obviously requires much more attention for online external quality assurance. IT infrastructure, connectivity and equipment need to be considered as do the appropriateness, capability, usability, reliability and security of the platform and the training, competencies and experience of users (the agency, panel members and universities). To date, it appears that familiar platforms including Zoom and MS-Teams have been used to undertake online quality assurance. In some cases these have been supplemented by other communication tools. However, other options may exist and external quality assurance may need to be redesigned for online delivery and to take advantage of online affordances. However, such issues may increase the complexity of managing a site visit for both the agency and the university.

Agencies internationally have not reported a less robust examination of the university in online reviews but it is different (Frederiks, 2020). Agencies have commented on challenges with panel and interview dynamics, panel support and wellbeing and additional training and preparation requirements. They have also commented on adaptions (for example, video walk throughs) to enable panel members to gain a 'feel' of an institution and examine physical facilities. Academic audits for universities in Aotearoa New Zealand do not typically involve visiting physical facilities, although being on a university campus does assist in appreciating the context of a university and auditing <u>that</u> university with its priorities and student body.

Experienced auditors who have participated in online reviews or institutional audits have commented that the self-review portfolio and provision of evidence takes on even more importance in an online environment. Similarly, panel pre-visit preparation is also more important in online audits as it is much more difficult for the panel to redirect a line of questioning when site visits are virtual. Interviews in an online review or institutional audit are even more critically a triangulation of positions the panel has already come to or is coming to, again reinforcing the importance of evidence and preparation.

Factors to consider in planning for online academic audits are explored further in the next section.

Hybrid

Traditional approaches to academic audit do use some online elements such as zoom for short panel meetings and share drives for accessing the self-review portfolio and report writing. The hybrid model for academic audit anticipated here would use face-to-face (or blended) for some steps in the audit process (most likely the site visit) and online for steps such as the first panel meeting. Hybrid models can include both the advantages and disadvantages of both F2F and online models. Their main advantage however is that they can use the mode that is more appropriate for the stage of the audit process and gain some cost and resilience advantages of online models.

Blended

Blended models of site visits cover different configurations. Their differentiating characteristic is that both face-to-face and online modes are used in the same interview session at the same time.

Some aspects of a blended approach have been used previously, such as meeting with interviewees who are unable to travel to meet with the panel or who are based at another campus. However, blended in this context can also include some panel members, most likely the international panel

member(s), contributing remotely.[2] Adding a blended component to face-to-face and hybrid models increases complexity for both the agency and the logistical support provided by the university.

The two most likely forms of blended models are:

1. Having one or more panel members contributing online while the rest of the panel are together F2F.
2. Having the Panel Chair and agency on site at the university with other Panel members contributing remotely.

A further form of blended model is to change the nature of the contribution of one or more of the panel members from a full panel member to a consultant panel member or moderating panel member. This would most likely apply to the international panel member. A consultant panel member would review materials, pose questions and review report writing; but would not be expected to participate synchronously.

Acting as a consultant panel member could be challenging and opportunities may need to be sought for synchronous engagement and interaction. However, experienced auditors and feedback from universities have expressed reservations about an international panel member endeavouring to contribute synchronously when the rest of the panel are together. Discussions in breaks between interviews make an important contribution to panel deliberations. International quality assurance agencies have expressed a view that blended models are the most difficult to manage (Fredericks, 2020).

Other implications of moving to a consulting or moderating international panel member include ensuring that other panel members have international experience of quality assurance. Given the expectations of other panels members, particularly the chair and senior New Zealand academic, it is likely that they would have international experience.

Choice of mode

As outlined above, each of the options has advantages and disadvantages. Criteria for evaluating options are set out in Table 1. Traditional (F2F) site visits have advantages in lack of (organisational) complexity, ability for a panel to appreciate the context of a university, agility to be able to adjust lines of questioning or deal with emergent issues and sociability. However, F2F modes lack resilience to be able to proceed in the event of external shocks. F2F modes are also relatively expensive to deliver. Hybrid and blended options fall between the F2F and online options with respect to most of the criteria, although blended options are also complex. Whether the advantages of cost and resilience afforded by online modes outweigh the advantages of online needs to be discussed. Other matters to be considered with respect to online and blended modes are discussed further below.

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[2] Note that in the ELIR processes in Scotland, international panel members can be included as an option but are not required. See https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/en/reviewing-higher-education-in-scotland/enhancement-led-institutional-review/handbook-and-guidance# p17.

Table 1 Evaluating options

	Traditional (F2F)	Hybrid	Blended	Online
Cost	Highest			Lowest
Complexity	Lowest		Highest	High
Contextualisation	Highest			Lowest
Resilience	Least			Most
Agility	Most			Least
Professional engagement	Most		Uneven	Least

Pivoting between modes

One of the objectives of this paper is to try and avoid the need for an emergency transition between a planned face-to-face site visit and an online or remote site visit. It may not be possible to know with certainty when planning a site visit for a university whether a face-to-face site visit will definitely be possible or whether international panel members will be able to travel in and out of the country easily. The potential for New Zealand Government COVID-19 Alert levels and other COVID-19 conditions, to change between agreeing the schedule and the site visit occurring also exists. The changes to New Zealand Government COVID-19 Alert levels for the August 2021 outbreak occurred with very short notice (less than 12 hours) and site visit planning needs to be able to accommodate short notice of changes in COVID-19 Alert levels.

Site visits

Site visits (which include the second meeting of the audit panel) are a focal point in the academic audit process and deserve particular attention. All other steps are scheduled in terms of weeks before or after the site visit. Site visits are also the most logistically complex part of the audit process, typically involving 50-60 members of a university. The intention in Cycle 6 is to streamline site visits and place more attention on examination of evidence in the self-review (Guide to Cycle 6, p31). However, they will still be a logistically challenging part of the audit process.

 Table 2 sets out options for site visits where either panels members and/or interviewees may be F2F, online or a mix of F2F and online (blended).

Table 2 Site visit options

Panel	Interviewees		
	All F2F (agency on site) (social distancing may be required)	Blended (agency on site and online)	All online (Agency technology)
All F2F (social distancing may be required)	Traditional	Traditional but minority of interviewees contribute remotely. U arrange tech.	Panel can be together but not necessarily on U campus
Blended (1) (agency technology)	Site visit at University but international panel member contributes remotely	Site visit with international panel member contributing remotely and some interviewees	Some members of Panel can be together, all interviewees are online.

Blended (2)	Site visit at University with Panel Chair and agency on site, other panel members contribute remotely		
All online (Panel Chair could be co-located with Agency) (agency technology)	Traditional from U perspective but panel are all individually remote	Some interviewees may be on the University campus, others online?	Fully online – all Panel members and interviewees are online

The following is a non-exhaustive list of matters to be considered in determining whether to use blended and online options for site visits and to be aware of in considering whether to allow for pivoting to an online mode.

Technology

- Whose technology will be used? It is likely that AQA will need to increase its technological capabilities. The panel will also need access to secure sessions for private meetings.
- It is important that technology be planned and delivered with professional configurations, operation and support.
- Set-up and testing times need to be included in the 'site visit' schedule.
- Choice of platform for online interviews and meetings. Zoom and potentially MS-Teams are the default options, but others with more specific functionality for conducting remote reviews might exist. However, Zoom and MS-Teams are relatively familiar technologies which should reduce training requirements.
- Need to ensure that all panel members and interviewees have access to appropriate technology. There may be merit in setting technology standards and working environment expectations for panel members and/or provide equipment and potentially broadband connections (webcams, external monitors, headsets). Interviewees meeting the panel as a group should have individual microphones and, if possible, cameras.
- Do all panel members and interviewees have access to appropriate environments in which to work? Appreciating that panel members may be working from their homes, we still need to ensure that these environments will support a positive experience for interviewees and are free from distractions. Security of interview sessions needs to be considered.
- Data security needs to be considered including the security of home networks. In pre-COVID audits, there would have been an expectation that no external IT systems or resources would be used for audit materials and that multi-user devices (shared laptops) would not be used.
- Whether interview sessions should be recorded needed further consideration. Some experienced auditors advise that online meetings should not be recorded to maintain trust and confidence in the confidentiality of the process. However, clear protocols around consent to record and timing of destruction of the recordings can be established. Recordings do offer advantages in drafting audit reports and provide a useful backup. It should be noted however that a 'record' is made of interview sessions in the form of notes taken by panel

members and the AQA secretariat. These notes are destroyed after the publication of the audit report.

- There are also ethical considerations for an online site visit. The panel and interviewees also need to have confidence that they understand who part of every session is (and who is not). Where interviewees are participating face-to-face or from university locations, an AQA staff member may need to be on the ground at the University.

Site visit schedule and length of 'online' day for panel members

Site visits typically involve long and quite intense days for panel members. Although many people are now used to long days in online meetings, fatigue, panel dynamics and the quality of interactions between panels and interviewees need to be considered. The Greater Good Science Centre suggest that Zoom fatigue derives from the intensity of close-up eye contact, constantly seeing yourself in real-time, normal mobility being limited by being in online meetings and higher cognitive load in online meetings (Ramachandran, 2021). It also suggests possible solutions that can be incorporated into planning remote site visits.

Time zone differences for international panel members need to be taken into account and include meal breaks as well as the working day. ENQA suggests 3 hours time difference for panel members (ENQA, 2020). For Aotearoa New Zealand this would limit the participation of international panel members to the Pacific and East Coast Australia. Time zone acceptability could be extended from west coast North America (-19 hours) to Perth/Shanghai (-4 hours) (Table 3)[3].

Table 3 Sample time zone differences

Los Angeles	Aotearoa	Perth
1500	1000	0600
1800	1300	0900
2200	1700	1300

Individual auditors may have different tolerances and preferences for work hours that would fall outside these normal expectations. The impact on an international panel member's work time on other panel members also needs to be taken into account. Use of a consultant panellist could extend the range of time zones that international panel members could be drawn from.

Time zone differences also need to be considered if students studying offshore are to be interviewed during the audit.

Other matters to consider in developing an online or blended site visit schedule are:

- Panel workload – session planning needs to recognise the intensity of online meetings and include sufficient breaks to reduce fatigue.
- Need to schedule setup and test time for interview sessions. This has consequences for AQA staff who need to both support the panel and manage technology.

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[3] Source:
https://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/meetingtime.html?iso=20210714&p1=264&p2=137&p3=196

- The need to schedule panel only meeting time and whether this is different from a F2F schedule.
- Whether shorter days should be used, with the consequence that the site visit takes place over 4-5 days, rather than the planned 3 days. This has consequences for the University which will be mirroring and supporting agency audit logistics.

Planning and managing interview sessions

Some aspects of planning and managing interview sessions have been identified above. Other issues to be considered include:

- Interview sessions are usually well structured and questions are usually planned in advance. Cycle 6 has established clear categories of questions (framing, probe, validation)[4] that are likely to be asked in an interview. However, the need for structure and preplanning is greater in an online interview as there is less ability to adapt or adjust lines of questioning. The greater structure may allow for shorter interview sessions.
- Welcoming interviewees and introductions may take a little longer and the need for empathy is magnified in the online environment.
- Panel members will need to be especially alert to any challenging or sensitive topics as these can be more difficult to manage and support online. For tauira Māori, Māori staff, students and staff who are Pacific Peoples, these topics could include experiences of racism.
- More advice should be developed to help prepare interviewees for panel sessions, including expectations of how the session will work and how to signal responses. Panel member photos can be provided with bios in advance. QQI and N-StEP have developed joint advice which might form a guide (Cox and Boland, 2021).
- If interviewees are face-to-face, group sizes may need to be smaller. Some experienced auditors suggest a maximum of 4 people together in an interview session. If interviewees are together, face-to-face, and the panel is online, a tendency for interviewees to discuss among themselves may need to be managed.
- Other options for interviewing larger groups are to either hold two sessions or run parallel or breakout sessions. Running parallel sessions has implications for online and in person support.
- The panel chair may need to be more directive in managing interview sessions and be proactive in including all panel members and interviewees, especially those who may be online when others are face-to-face.
- The need to be aware of what both panel members and interviewees are seeing. How many individuals are panel members and interviewees looking at? Will it be clear to all interviewees who are the panel members? Background slides could be used to easily identify panel members.
- If social distancing is required as part of group interviews, the negative impact of wearing masks on sound quality and reading non-verbal cues also needs to be considered.
- Auditor training should include advice on online meeting 'etiquette', such as hand raising, having microphones on mute unless speaking, no eating, minimising background noise, smiling, speaking slowly, looking at the camera, making sure faces are not hidden by laptops, not checking phones. These would all come naturally in a face-to-face meeting but the loss of body language and sense of presence in an online environment means that they are

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[4] Guide to Cycle 6, p32

worth emphasising. One of the Spanish quality agencies have developed '10 commandments for online site visits' (Ortega and Sánchez, 2021).

Panel dynamics and support

European agencies, in particular, have given a lot thought to how panel dynamics and panel support can be managed in an online environment to ensure panel members remain motivated, engaged and feel supported. Suggestions include:

- Additional advice on time management for panel members including blocking time in calendars, setting unavailable auto-replies on emails and turning email and other potential interruptions off.
- Virtual dinner and drinks in advance of the audit.
- 'Care' packages for the panel to contribute to some commonality of experience.
- Supplementary communications with panel members to check-in.
- Opening panel only sessions a little earlier to provide some time for informal interaction.

The role of the panel chair may need additional support and training to help with matters that either arise in online meetings or can be more difficult to manage online.

Agency

There are implications of moving to an online site visit for AQA. Some implications have been signalled above and are reiterated here. They include:

- Technological capacity and capability (for AQA and for panel members), including security. It may be possible to contract or second Ed Tech or IT expertise from a university (other than the university being audited) or another agency. Another option may be to include tech support in the audit arrangements agreed with a university.
- AQA's support for panel members may need to include support for technology issues.
- Providing all meeting links in a single, easy to access, schedule. Important comments can also be included.
- Additional training requirements for panel members to be able to undertake an audit online and developing advice and guidance for interviewees.
- Supplementary feedback mechanisms to adjust processes if necessary.
- Different support requirements for the panel and panel chair.

Proposed Pandemic-adjusted Model for Cycle 6 Academic Audits

Having considered the experience and commentary on remote experiences of site visits and some initial feedback from universities, the following model for Cycle 6 Academic Audits is proposed. The intent of the proposed pandemic-adjusted model is to provide as much certainty and commonality of audit experience for universities as possible.

1. The Planning meeting and follow up visit will be planned to take place face-to-face in the first instance, with a pivot to online if necessary. As these stages involve relatively few

people who are all based in Aotearoa New Zealand, this is a straightforward pivot and some timing changes would be possible.

2. The first Panel meeting will be planned to be an online meeting. A contingency day will be scheduled in the event that panel members are required to change other working arrangements as a consequence of changes to COVID-19 Alert levels. No changes to this are anticipated unless the interim review of Cycle 6 finds that it is not working well.

3. The second panel meeting and site visit schedule will be planned as a face-to-face meeting at the university but will change to a 4-day meeting to allow for online pivot options, the possibility of losing a day due to panel members and agency staff needing to return home and shorter online days. Contingency schedules for completing the site visit online will be developed.

   a. If a change in COVID-19 Alert levels occurs during the site visit, the audit schedule for that day will be completed if possible, the following day will be a travel and readjustment day and the online schedule will commence the following day.

   b. If this planned pivot does not prove feasible (for example, if an outbreak is centred on the university being audited or panel members are required to self-isolate or become ill), some sessions may need to be rescheduled to allow the site visit to be completed. Another time to complete the site visit will be agreed between the university, the panel and AQA.

4. The international panel member will contribute remotely as a 'consulting panel member' (but could contribute in-person if they and the university agree to accept the risks involved with this or if the COVID-19 pandemic situation improves).

   a. If an international panel member is prepared to accept the additional risks associated with international travel, they could travel and join the site visit with other panel members. This is only likely to be an option from countries with no (or low) quarantine requirements to enter NZ. The international panel member and university would need to acknowledge that if the situation changed, they may be unable to return home as planned and agree to meet any costs associated with this.

5. If it is clear at the time of the second planning meeting that a face-to-face site visit is unlikely to be feasible, the site visit will be held online. In this situation the international panel member may contribute synchronously (depending on time zones).

6. Panel member agreements need to be amended to incorporate the potential for online or blended site visits and acknowledge that a pivot could occur. This means that Panel member remote working environments and competencies need to be met.

This proposed model is a combination of a hybrid model as some components – the first panel meeting – plan to replace a F2F meeting with an online one and a new 'dual' model as the second panel meeting will be planned for F2F and online modes with a planned contingency to move from F2F to online if needed. There are implications of this proposed pandemic-adjusted model for AQA, the universities and the audit process.

For AQA

- Planning the site visit will increase in time and complexity as contingency schedules need to be developed.
- AQA will need to plan for online site visits and ensure it has the technological capability and support to be able to do this. Currently AQA has little experience of conditioning a site visit online; however it is anticipated that experience will be gained in the external review of CUAP which will be a remote review.

- AQA will also need capacity to be able to manage a pivot to online. This will include changing travel arrangements for panel members and ensuring that panel members are prepared to work online. Hardware and connectivity requirements for panel members will be needed for the first panel meeting in any case.
- Panel chairs and senior New Zealand academic panel members with international experience of quality assurance should be sought.

For universities

- An additional day will need to be scheduled to allow for a pivot to online.
- Interviewees will need to schedule contingency meeting times in addition to face-to-face meeting times.

For the audit process

- A change in the way the international panel member contributes to audit. There are international precedents for this, but it is new for universities in Aotearoa New Zealand. However, academic audit will continue to be consistent with international expectations of good practice.
- Increased planned and planned contingency use of technology to conduct parts of the audit process.

All of these implications are considered to be manageable.

Conclusion

The overall experience of agencies and universities who have participated in online reviews seems to be that the quality of the evaluation has not been degraded. Internationally and in Aotearoa New Zealand, there are indications that significant components of teaching and learning will remain online or remain available online as part of a blended approach. This is also reflected in approaches to external quality assurance with some agencies signalling that they intend to retain at least some aspects of an online process.

This paper has examined a range of options for undertaking external quality assurance (academic audits) and the experience gained nationally and internationally to suggest a pandemic-adjusted model for Cycle 6 academic audits. The intent of the proposed pandemic-adjusted model is to provide as much certainty and commonality of audit experience for universities as possible.

An interim review of Cycle 6 is planned for after the second audit (ETSG, 2020). This interim review is to examine whether the audit framework and processes are eliciting the sort of information that was expected (including for GS#6 and #7 arising from the enhancement theme). The efficacy and experience of pandemic-adjusted model would be included in the interim review.

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