



New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit

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Te Wāhanga Tātari

# **Audit Report: Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP)**

**November 2011**

**This Audit Report was independently commissioned by Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara  
for their Committee on University Academic Programmes**

New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit  
November 2011

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## Audit Terms of Reference and Scope

In April 2011, Universities New Zealand - Te Pūkai Tara invited the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) to conduct an audit of the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP). CUAP had previously been reviewed by NZUAAU in 1996 and 1999, and by an ad hoc panel appointed by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee in 2005.

The terms of reference for the Audit, as endorsed by the Vice-Chancellors, were as follows:

1. To determine how effectively CUAP has met the terms of reference set by the NZVCC;
2. To recommend any changes or improvements in CUAP's quality assurance process;
3. To provide comment on CUAP's terms of reference and the composition of the Committee, including comment on its possible future activities, structures or goals.

It was agreed that the scope of the audit would include CUAP's work related to University Entrance and secondary school relationships, as well as that related to programme approval and review.

CUAP's terms of reference are:

1. To act for Universities New Zealand and on behalf of the New Zealand community of universities by:
  - a. setting up and applying inter-university course approval, accreditation, and moderation procedures;
  - b. granting or refusing approval under the agreed procedures to new qualifications and courses of study, or changes in qualifications and courses of study for which approval is required, and for which due application has been made by a university;
  - c. promoting the coherent and balanced development of courses of study within the New Zealand university system and ensuring that the quality of course developments is consonant with high academic standards;
  - d. facilitating cross-crediting arrangements for students transferring between programmes and institutions.
2. To act for Universities New Zealand:
  - a. As the body which the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) will consult about policies and criteria for the approval of courses of study and their accreditation in the universities;
  - b. Through its sub-committee on university entrance, as the body which is consulted by NZQA on the standards to be established for entrance to university, and which makes recommendations to NZQA on such standards;
  - c. In establishing, through its sub-committee on university entrance and after consulting with NZQA, criteria for provisional entrance and ad eundem admission at entrance level;
  - d. In obtaining for NZQA university representatives on bodies, panels and committees.
3. To provide advice and comment on academic developments across the university system to institutions, professional bodies and agencies.
4. To undertake specific tasks as may be requested of it from time to time by Universities New Zealand.

## Audit Process

A three-person panel was appointed by NZUAAU to carry out an audit of CUAP in August and September 2011. As agreed with Universities New Zealand, the Panel consisted of a New Zealand academic staff member with experience in managing or developing programmes in a university, a senior New Zealand university academic without recent or extensive involvement with CUAP, and an international member with experience of programme approval and accreditation. All Panel members were on the register of trained auditors maintained by the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit or the Australian Universities Quality Agency.<sup>1</sup> As the Director of the NZUAAU had been a recent member of CUAP, it was agreed that NZUAAU's Quality Enhancement and Communications Manager would provide secretariat support to the Audit.

Panel members were provided with a self-review portfolio prepared by CUAP addressing the terms of reference with a focus on strengths and progress, challenges, and proposed enhancements. The Panel also reviewed supplementary materials including minutes of meetings, samples of programme proposals and graduating year reviews, and extracts from correspondence obtained during the peer review process. Letters and emails inviting submissions were sent to CUAP members, member universities, the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations, and external stakeholders, including professional bodies and relevant government organisations.

The three-day site visit took place in Wellington from 14 – 16 September 2011. During this time, the Panel interviewed 32 representatives of various participant and stakeholder groups, in person or by phone or video conference. At the end of the site visit, the Panel met with representatives from Universities New Zealand and CUAP to provide initial feedback and an indication of likely recommendations, commendations and affirmations arising from the audit.

Dr Jan Cameron  
Director  
New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit

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<sup>1</sup> In Australia, this function has since been transferred to the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency.

## **Members of the Audit Panel**

Professor Gareth Jones CNZM (Chair)  
Director, Bioethics Centre  
University of Otago

Associate Professor Martin Carroll  
Pro Vice-Chancellor, Learning, Teaching and Community Engagement  
Charles Darwin University

Dr Roy Nates  
Head of the Department of Mechanical Engineering  
Auckland University of Technology

### *Secretariat:*

Heather Kirkwood  
Quality Enhancement and Communications Manager  
New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit

## **Acknowledgements**

The Panel wishes to thank the Executive Director and other staff of Universities New Zealand – Te Pūkai Tara (UNZ) for their warm welcome and for the support provided during the three-day site visit. The Panel also thanks all of those who contributed to CUAP's self-review portfolio and assisted with requests for additional information, particularly the Manager, Academic Policy. The Panel is grateful for the constructive comments and observations of all individuals and organisations that provided a written submission and/or gave their time to appear before the Panel.

Professor Gareth Jones  
Chair, CUAP Audit 2011

## Summary of Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations<sup>2</sup>

### Commendations

1. The Panel *commends* the commitment to the peer-review model utilised by CUAP including on-going efforts to improve the effectiveness of that model.
2. The Panel *commends* CUAP for a succinct and useful Functions and Procedures Handbook.
3. The Panel *commends* CUAP for developing processes which facilitate the achievement of consistency of quality across university programmes at the time of approval.
4. The Panel *commends* the universities and staff for their participation in and commitment to the CUAP process.
5. The Panel *commends* CUAP on its role in the Joint Consultative Group (JCG) as a means of engaging in on-going discussion with NZQA.
6. The Panel *commends* recent improvements to the Graduating Year Review process, which have led to improvements in the internal quality assurance processes of the member universities.
7. The Panel *commends* CUAP's commitment to student input through membership of NZUSA on CUAP.
8. The Panel *commends* the secretariat of CUAP for the diligent support provided.

### Affirmation

1. The Panel *affirms* the establishment of the LEAD Professions/UNZ Working Group on Academic Co-operation as an important step towards establishing a framework for managing the relationships between CUAP and professional bodies at the national level.

### Recommendations

1. The Panel *recommends* that CUAP, in the interests of further strengthening the postal resolution process, develop guidelines for peer review drawing upon good practices already within the system and upon ethical guidelines such as those in the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) Benchmarking Code of Conduct.
2. The Panel *recommends* that the ToR 1a (*setting up and applying inter-university course approval, accreditation, and moderation procedures*) be amended to read: "setting up and applying inter-university course approval, accreditation, and moderation procedures, which ensure that the quality of course developments is consonant with high academic standards and mindful of the nation's interests."

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<sup>2</sup> NZUAAU audit reports make *recommendations* for further improvement, *commend* good practices, and *affirm* activities recently initiated by universities to enhance academic quality, but for which evidence of outcomes is not yet available.

3. The Panel *recommends* that the ToR 1c (*promoting the coherent and balanced development of courses of study within the New Zealand university system and ensuring that the quality of course developments is consonant with high academic standards*) be deleted from CUAP's terms of reference, and subsequent items be reordered accordingly.
4. The Panel *recommends* that the ToR 1d (*facilitating cross-credit arrangements for students transferring between programmes and institutions*) be amended to read: "promoting the development of courses of study within the New Zealand university system that will facilitate the transfer of students between programmes and institutions".
5. The Panel *recommends* that the TOR 2d (*in obtaining for NZQA university representatives on bodies, panels and committees*) be amended to read: "In obtaining university representatives for NZQA approval panels, committees and other similar bodies, as required".
6. Noting the importance of recurring programme review, the Panel *recommends* that UNZ, under advice from CUAP, establish guidelines for institutional periodic programme review.
7. The Panel *recommends* that, recognising CUAP has until now required universities to "advise CUAP annually of reviews they have undertaken" (Functions and Procedures 2011-2012, section 4.7), and recognising further that this has not been a particularly effective step in the quality assurance process, UNZ request NZUAAU to ensure that as a fixed feature of its audit process, it review a university's programme review schedule and, where necessary, refer significant non-compliance with this schedule or unsatisfactory programme performance identified through these reviews to CUAP for further consideration.
8. Noting that all universities undergo various forms of accreditation of programmes by internationally represented bodies, the Panel *recommends* that CUAP should use the outcomes of these reports as an indication of international benchmarking.
9. The Panel *recommends* that CUAP's template for programme proposals be amended to demonstrate that the proposed programmes have been assessed by universities in terms of giving effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.
10. The Panel *recommends* that the programme proposal template, and the emphasis of CUAP's deliberations in the peer review process, give more explicit attention to the relationship between research and the programme proposal.
11. The Panel *recommends* that CUAP's programme approval process includes the power for CUAP to seek and/or receive input as deemed necessary from other parties (e.g., professional bodies), with the expectation that this provision would only be used under extraordinary circumstances.
12. The Panel *recommends* that CUAP further develop its website in order to enhance the profile of the approval and accreditation processes and improve ease of access to information for key stakeholders.
13. The Panel *recommends* that the CUAP programme approvals process be managed online, preferably with a web browser interface, enabling electronic submission, processing, monitoring and reporting of proposals.



14. The Panel *recommends* that, in the interests of attending to the full scope of CUAP's responsibilities and in the interests of providing effective continuity, CUAP be supported with a staffing of two positions comprising a senior position (Executive Officer) to coordinate policy matters and an administrative assistant to coordinate the programme approval processes and website.

## Section 1: Background

The Education Act 1989 provides the legal authority for the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP). Under Section 159AD of the Act, the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee (now operating under the name Universities New Zealand – Te Pōkai Tara) is established as “the body primarily responsible for quality assurance matters” in universities. Universities New Zealand discharges this responsibility through CUAP, and through the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit.<sup>3</sup>

Section 241 provides for the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee to set up inter-university course approval and moderation procedures, to approve courses and accredit universities to provide these courses, and to make recommendations to the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) on university entrance criteria. Section 253A provides for the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee to exercise for universities the powers of course approval and accreditation exercised by the NZQA for non-university tertiary provision.

The model put in place through the creation of CUAP means that New Zealand's eight universities are asked to work collectively to maintain standards for the New Zealand university sector. Individual university departments initiate proposals which may be new programmes or material changes to existing programmes. These proposals are developed and reviewed internally. Proposals are accompanied by supporting evidence such as a business case and the outcome of external and professional body consultation, where relevant. The university's Academic Board, and then Council, approve the proposal and forward it to CUAP. Proposals are required to address the criteria for approval and accreditation as established by NZQA (in consultation with CUAP) and published in the New Zealand Gazette. CUAP then sends the proposals out to the seven other universities.

Universities select suitably qualified reviewers within their institution to read the proposals and offer comments. Where there are few or no relevant reviewers within the universities, international expertise can be sought. Universities exchange emails about matters in proposals that need clarification or are of concern. Any proposals not receiving approval by all universities at the conclusion of this process are put on the agenda for the next CUAP meeting. At this meeting, remaining problems are discussed and, where resolved, formal resolutions are passed. Proposals with outstanding issues may be reworked and resubmitted to the next round. CUAP may vote to reject proposals, although in practice the iterative peer review process usually leads to eventual approval or to unsatisfactory proposals being withdrawn.

Following approval, CUAP may require a university to report on implementation and the progress of a new qualification at the end of the first and second years. As a further step in the moderation process, every new qualification or new subject is required to undergo a Graduating Year Review at a specified time following its introduction (usually at the point of the first cohort's graduation). These reports are sent to CUAP and then reviewed by individuals in a selected number of other universities. CUAP is empowered to seek remedial action where this is warranted.

The CUAP model of approval, accreditation and moderation is often described as being unusual, if not unique, in tertiary education. The focus of the Audit Panel was on whether, and how effectively, CUAP achieves its objectives, and what the evidence is for these conclusions. The Panel then sought to consider what commendations, affirmations and recommendations might be made to assist CUAP to ensure good practice in its activities.

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<sup>3</sup> The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit is established by, but operationally independent of, Universities New Zealand.

As it undertook this audit, the Panel was conscious of two areas of immediate potential comparison – domestically, the programme approval and accreditation processes in place for the rest of the tertiary sector in New Zealand, via NZQA, and internationally, the programme approval and accreditation models operating for universities in comparable countries. Hence, as the Panel undertook its investigation, particular attention was paid to domestic and international comparisons of good practice. The following is a summary of the Panel’s observations as well as suggestions for areas of improvement.

## Section 2: How CUAP meets its terms of reference

The terms of reference of CUAP are divided into four functions. The first function (Terms of Reference 1a – 1d) relates to the course approval, accreditation and moderation tasks of CUAP. The second function (Terms of Reference 2a – 2d) defines CUAP's responsibilities to, and relationship with, NZQA including CUAP's role as the consulting body on matters related to universities. The third function (Term of Reference 3) requires that CUAP provide advice and comment on academic developments across the university system, while the final function (Term of Reference 4) requires that CUAP undertake specific tasks as may be requested of it from time to time by Universities New Zealand. The following section summarises the Panel's findings for each of the functions described.

### Function 1

To act for Universities New Zealand and on behalf of the New Zealand community of universities by:

- 1a. setting up and applying inter-university course approval, accreditation, and moderation procedures;
- 1b. granting or refusing approval under the agreed procedures to new qualifications and courses of study, or changes in qualifications and courses of study for which approval is required, and for which due application has been made by a university;
- 1c. promoting the coherent and balanced development of courses of study within the New Zealand university system and ensuring that the quality of course developments is consonant with high academic standards;
- 1d. facilitating cross-crediting arrangements for students transferring between programmes and institutions.

The Panel heard from many sources about the robustness and rigour of the CUAP peer review system. The process in place was regarded as an appropriate and effective method of granting approval for new or altered qualifications and courses of study, with the procedures clearly established and conveyed through the Functions and Procedures handbook, and through CUAP member briefings.

The peer review model was described by most interviewees as valuable and constructive. It was contrasted with the self-accreditation model operating in Australia and other jurisdictions, and the Panel concluded that it generated a more broadly independent and expert level of scrutiny. It was also contrasted with other models of external academic accreditation, such as those conducted by various United States accrediting authorities, and the Panel concluded that the CUAP model involved a suitable, if not superior, level of disciplinary expertise. The Panel was impressed by the hard work and collaborative efforts of individuals involved to maintain standards in university quality at the point of initial approval.

The Panel accepts that the peer-review system as currently operating would not function as well as it does without considerable commitment from the universities as a whole and a wide range of staff within them. In particular, it notes the contributions of staff who handle most aspects of the approval processes at each university, along with the CUAP members themselves.

#### Commendation 1

**The Panel *commends* the commitment to the peer-review model utilised by CUAP including on-going efforts to improve the effectiveness of that model.**

#### Commendation 2

**The Panel *commends* CUAP for a succinct and useful Functions and Procedures Handbook.**

### **Commendation 3**

**The Panel *commends* CUAP for developing processes which facilitate the achievement of consistency of quality across university programmes at the time of approval.**

The Panel spoke to a number of people about the perceived and actual externality of the Committee. Universities hold the view that CUAP is providing a very strong external check by means of the Committee's critical and evaluative peer review process. This was contrasted with self-accreditation of universities elsewhere in the world. The issue of competitiveness and 'patch protection' was canvassed at length. The Panel found that although it is a strong perception, within and outside the sector, in practice it is not a significant issue at the current time. This was largely attributed to the calibre of the personnel involved in CUAP processes, to the training of CUAP members within their universities to closely observe the gazetted criteria, and the moderating of reviewer remarks by email exchanges. In addition, CUAP members themselves seek to ensure that objections that were likely to be 'patch protection' were identified and removed from the discussions about academic quality concerns.

### **Commendation 4**

**The Panel *commends* the universities and staff for their participation in and commitment to the CUAP process.**

In view of the critical role of peer review as the core element of CUAP's functioning, CUAP needs to be vigilant in maintaining its integrity. The Panel accepts that peer review is working satisfactorily, but needed to closely examine the process to reach that verdict. Most external stakeholders will not have the opportunity to consider the CUAP process in such detail. It is the view of the Panel that the externality and international standing of CUAP processes needs to be made more visible than at present.

The Panel was also acutely aware that the peer review model is dependent upon good working relationships between CUAP members themselves and also their universities. Herein lies a potential weakness of the current model were these relationships to break down. The Panel formed the view that the Committee would benefit from adopting guidelines to acknowledge the competitive environment in which the universities and, therefore CUAP, are operating and to strengthen the peer review process. With these considerations in mind, the Panel looked to examples of relevant ethical guidelines that might assist CUAP members in their deliberations. The American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) Benchmarking Code of Conduct is an example of an internationally accepted set of guidelines for engaging in benchmarking activities in a competitive environment. In the Panel's view, the development of a set of guidelines specifically for CUAP members and for other individuals participating in the postal resolution process would increase the integrity of the Committee and strengthen external perception of the Committee's work.

### **Recommendation 1**

**The Panel *recommends* that CUAP, in the interests of further strengthening the postal resolution process, develop guidelines for peer review drawing upon good practices already within the system and upon ethical guidelines such as those in the American Productivity and Quality Center (APQC) Benchmarking Code of Conduct.**

Overall, the Panel's findings, validated by the evidence provided and responses from individuals and organisations consulted, were that CUAP was effectively discharging its responsibilities with regard to Terms of Reference 1a and 1b.

The Panel's view of how well CUAP is discharging Term of Reference 1c was less positive. It became apparent to the Panel that this ToR is open to varying interpretations, particularly the word "balance". Possible interpretations expressed to the Panel ranged from an expectation that CUAP will regulate provision in accordance with an assessment of the needs of the current and future labour market, to an understanding that CUAP would consider whether the proposing university had undertaken a market analysis to determine that there was sufficient demand for a programme. The dominant view expressed to the Panel seemed to be that the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is better placed to address the former end of the spectrum, which is far beyond CUAP's capacity or mandate, but that CUAP is reasonably well placed to be mindful of, but not bound by, the latter end of the spectrum.

It was the view of the Panel that CUAP should not bear the responsibility for the tertiary education aspect of national workforce planning. A key factor in this deliberation is the extent to which consideration of the demand for a programme could compromise the ability of CUAP, and especially the peer reviewers within universities, to focus dispassionately on the quality of a proposed programme. Were this to be the case it would curtail CUAP's ability to adequately fulfil Terms of Reference 1a and 1b.

On balance, the Panel believes that CUAP's primary focus ought to be on the quality of a proposed programme. While this does not exclude some consideration of the programme's target market and resource issues, these aspects are largely separable from considerations of the programme's place in a competitive environment. As such, the Panel believes that this ToR should be deleted, and that the references in ToR 1c to the quality of course developments and high academic standards should be amalgamated with ToR 1a as shown below.

#### **Recommendation 2**

**The Panel *recommends* that the ToR 1a (*setting up and applying inter-university course approval, accreditation, and moderation procedures*) be amended to read: "*setting up and applying inter-university course approval, accreditation, and moderation procedures, which ensure that the quality of course developments is consonant with high academic standards and mindful of the nation's interests.*"**

#### **Recommendation 3**

**The Panel *recommends* that the ToR 1c (*promoting the coherent and balanced development of courses of study within the New Zealand university system and ensuring that the quality of course developments is consonant with high academic standards*) be deleted from CUAP's terms of reference, and subsequent items be reordered accordingly.**

In making these recommendations, the Panel is mindful of NZQA's observation that there has not been a significant expansion in the number of programmes at Levels 7-10 over recent years. As such, it would appear that CUAP's relatively light attention to the "balance" of offerings in the market has nonetheless proved adequate.

Similar problems were encountered with interpretations of ToR 1d, with many respondents suggesting that this was not currently undertaken by CUAP and indeed should not be, with the facilitating of cross-crediting arrangements being firmly within the role, and at the discretion, of the individual universities. The Panel also heard a view that CUAP could play a greater role in assisting the transparency of this process, particularly for students. The Panel notes that regulations with regard to credit for previous study are a requirement under the current gazetted criteria established by NZQA (in consultation with CUAP). Accordingly, it would appear that although CUAP does not currently, and probably should continue not to play a role in cross-credit arrangements, it should continue to promote a university system that is supportive of the transfer of students between

programmes and institutions. As a result, it is the Panel's view that ToR 1d should be amended as follows:

#### **Recommendation 4**

**The Panel *recommends* that the ToR 1d (*facilitating cross-credit arrangements for students transferring between programmes and institutions*) be amended to read: “promoting the development of courses of study within the New Zealand university system that will facilitate the transfer of students between programmes and institutions”.**

In leaving this as a modified Term of Reference, the Panel considers that CUAP should be more active in ensuring that cross-credit arrangements are working. The Panel leaves it to CUAP to decide how best this might occur in practice.

#### **Function 2**

To act for Universities New Zealand:

- 2a. As the body which the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) will consult about policies and criteria for the approval of courses of study and their accreditation in the universities;
- 2b. Through its sub-committee on university entrance, as the body which is consulted by NZQA on the standards to be established for entrance to university, and which makes recommendations to NZQA on such standards;
- 2c. In establishing, through its sub-committee on university entrance and after consulting with NZQA, criteria for provisional entrance and ad eundem admission at entrance level;
- 2d. In obtaining for NZQA university representatives on bodies, panels and committees.

The Panel observed a positive and constructive relationship between CUAP and NZQA. This was evidenced by positive dialogue between the two organisations, a collaborative working relationship such as in the area of University Entrance, and on-going discussions at or alongside CUAP meetings and the Joint Consultative Group (JCG). The Panel was encouraged by the strong levels of understanding demonstrated by both organisations of the other's activities, and mutual desire to continue to work positively and constructively.

The Panel, with reference to its own terms of reference, canvassed CUAP members, NZQA and other stakeholders on the ways in which CUAP discharges its responsibilities with regard to University Entrance. No issues of substance were raised, and the Panel received feedback that the most recent period of consultation over changes to University Entrance requirements had been positive and constructive. The Panel concluded that CUAP (via the Sub-Committee on University Entrance) was operating well in this area and found no compelling reasons to suggest change.

In the Panel's view, CUAP is discharging its responsibilities with respect to Terms of Reference 2a – 2c.

#### **Commendation 5**

**The Panel *commends* CUAP on its role in the Joint Consultative Group (JCG) as a means of engaging in on-going discussion with NZQA.**

The Panel was alerted to changes in recent years that have seen the final Term of Reference under this function become less and less relevant. It was noted that CUAP is now seldom asked to obtain representation for NZQA on bodies, panels and committees. While the Panel was of the initial view that this Term of Reference could be removed, they recognised that CUAP continues to be involved in proposing names for some committees, and wishes this to continue. The Panel encourages this,

and is of the view that CUAP is the appropriate body through which it should be done. As a result, and to reflect the irregular occurrence of this activity, the Panel suggests a minor rewording of Term of Reference 2d as follows.

#### **Recommendation 5**

**The Panel *recommends* that the TOR 2d (*in obtaining for NZQA university representatives on bodies, panels and committees*) be amended to read: “In obtaining university representatives for NZQA approval panels, committees and other similar bodies, as required”.**

The Panel suggests that CUAP discusses the matter with NZQA at a meeting of the JCG, with a view to clarifying its role in this area.

#### **Functions 3 and 4**

3. To provide advice and comment on academic developments across the university system to institutions, professional bodies and agencies.
4. To undertake specific tasks as may be requested of it from time to time by Universities New Zealand.

CUAP’s additional responsibilities include participation in the Joint Consultative Group (between Universities New Zealand and NZQA), involvement in the Quality Assurance Consultative Group (which includes the Tertiary Education Commission and the Ministry of Education, along with NZQA and the NZUAAU), hosting international visitors, and national and international conferences.

It is noted that the distinctive model represented by CUAP generates significant interest from universities and government agencies in other jurisdictions. Consequently, efforts should be made to promulgate the merits of this model and highlight its benefits for the quality of teaching programmes across the universities.

The Panel heard that with CUAP meeting times now significantly shortened due to improvements in processes for course approval and the use of email for correspondence, opportunities have been reduced for the discussion of broader issues affecting universities, including international developments. While useful discussions occur at CUAP, and in between meetings via email exchanges, the Panel is of the view that Functions 3 and 4 of CUAP’s Terms of Reference are not being regularly discharged, and this is an area where additional value could be gained from CUAP. The Panel did not hear about significant problems with the quality of the advice and comment provided by CUAP; rather the Panel came to the view that this was an area in which more could and should be done.

One reason for the Panel’s questioning of the adequacy of CUAP’s performance on these Functions stems from the diverse nature of CUAP’s responsibilities. Functions 1 and 2 are far more focused on approval, accreditation and moderation matters, and require the input of members skilled in these areas. By contrast Functions 3 and 4 represent a far more global academic perspective, and take CUAP into territory much closer to that of Vice-Chancellors and other senior academic managers.

These TOR potentially place considerable demands on CUAP members, and while the Panel is not proposing a change in membership, it is of the view that CUAP members should, ideally, be drawn from a range of senior positions within the constituent universities, such as Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic). With regard to the academic policy aspect of CUAP’s activities, the Panel heard that when policy/broad sector issue documents are prepared and circulated to CUAP members, it is not always clear how far within an institution these can be circulated and how widely within an



institution input is actually sought. Clarification of this may assist with strengthening the feedback received on policy and discussion documents and establishing a pan-university viewpoint (including dissenting views). This may also be relevant to the effectiveness of CUAP's engagement with NZQA (Function 2).

It was the Panel's view that these two functions are important Terms of Reference for CUAP and while being discharged adequately when required, could become a more prominent component of CUAP's role. It is recognised that the resourcing of the Committee may need to be amended to support this (see Section 8).

## Section 3: The quality assurance process

The New Zealand university quality assurance system for programmes has four key stages:

1. CUAP provides initial approval using a peer-review process;
2. CUAP requires a Graduating Year Review report which is subject to peer-review;
3. Universities periodically review their programmes; and
4. NZUAAU checks that these reviews are taking place.

The university system is augmented by professional body accreditations and other internal and external checks and balances.

The Panel is of the view that this system is fundamentally sound and while it may be internationally unusual in its form, its components are consistent with international good practice in quality assurance processes. The Graduating Year Review process, in particular, attracted considerable praise in its new form and was attributed as an initiative that had made substantive improvements to universities' internal quality systems.

### **Commendation 6**

**The Panel *commends* recent improvements to the Graduating Year Review process, which have led to improvements in the internal quality assurance processes of the member universities.**

However, there are some problems with this four-step approach in its current application. The Panel offers the following comments and recommendations aimed at strengthening this system, rather than proposing any radical changes.

### **Visibility and cohesion**

It is the view of the Panel that it is timely for CUAP to raise its profile and place a greater focus on instilling confidence in the university quality assurance system for external parties. The university sector, in the view of the Panel, underestimates the value of ensuring that external stakeholders (including students, industry, professional bodies and government) have a simple and transparent means for knowing of, and understanding, the CUAP accreditation and approval process.

There was a view expressed to the Panel that, although all of the components of a quality assurance system are present, understanding the links between them and ensuring there are no gaps as a result, is also important in order to give confidence in the system as a whole. It is the view of the Panel that this might be relatively easily achieved through a greater web presence and related efforts to increase the visibility of CUAP 's work and policy advice (see subsequent sections).

The Panel also recognised improvements in the working relationship between CUAP and NZUAAU. This had been a focus of recommendations in the previous audit, and the Panel was pleased to see this as part of a more cohesive quality assurance system, while not jeopardising the independence of operation of either body.

### **Recurrent programme approval**

Internationally, it is increasingly rare to find university quality management systems that involve a one-time approval of courses with no recurring approval requirement. Notwithstanding CUAP's current requirement that major changes are submitted for approvals, courses can change substantially over time without meeting the criteria at any one point in time that would constitute a

major change. Even those courses that do not change at all in terms of content or delivery will change in terms of their relevance and relationship to a constantly changing world.

It was established that while CUAP has technically required universities to “advise CUAP annually of reviews they have undertaken” (Functions and Procedures, section 4.7), in reality this information has been difficult to obtain from the universities, and the information collected is incomplete. The Panel also received the very strong message that this process of review belonged within the universities where it was being managed and documented within their own quality assurance frameworks.

It appears from NZUAAU reports that all New Zealand universities have some form of programme review process. However, they vary in form and frequency. There is scope for some standardisation of best practice in programme reviews to strengthen ongoing programme accreditation. The Panel believes this can be achieved without unreasonably interfering with institutional autonomy. Examples of standardised requirements might pertain to:

- the time frame for reviews, such as requiring them every five years (although this period may vary for different disciplines);
- the involvement of at least one international peer reviewer;
- the requirement for the Programme staff to provide responses to the Review Report;
- sign-off by Academic Board of the Review Report and Response.

#### **Recommendation 6**

**Noting the importance of recurring programme review, the Panel *recommends* that UNZ, under advice from CUAP, establish guidelines for institutional periodic programme review.**

In respect of the fourth step, there is nothing that compels NZUAAU to investigate, as a standard feature of its audit function, that all a university’s programmes due (or overdue) for internal review during a certain time period have in fact been reviewed. In the Panel’s view, it ought to do so in order for the national system to be robust.

However, this must be a meaningful exercise, and not merely a check box function. For the most part, institutions are best placed to address continuous quality issues for approved courses. The role left for the regulator is to deal with *in extremis* situations. It is an important part of a national regulatory process that an entity has the capability to withdraw course approval or place conditions upon course approvals. CUAP, via Universities New Zealand, has these powers under the Education Act.

NZUAAU does not have legislated power to take action in respect of a programme’s approved status. In the rare event that a programme has performed very poorly, as identified through a review, or has not been reviewed for an unacceptable period of time, it should refer the matter to CUAP for further consideration.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**The Panel *recommends* that, recognising CUAP has until now required universities to “advise CUAP annually of reviews they have undertaken” (Functions and Procedures 2011-2012, section 4.7), and recognising further that this has not been a particularly effective step in the quality assurance process, UNZ request NZUAAU to ensure that as a fixed feature of its audit process, it review a university’s programme review schedule and, where necessary, refer significant non-compliance with this schedule or unsatisfactory programme performance identified through these reviews to CUAP for further consideration.**

Finally, as noted earlier, the university system is augmented by professional body accreditations and other external checks and balances. These accreditations and quality assurance processes occur throughout the university system and provide external, generally international, validation of the quality of New Zealand university academic programmes. It is the Panel's view that these accreditation reports should be utilised by CUAP as a form of benchmarking, and as part of visibly connecting the multiple strands to the quality assurance processes of university academic programmes.

**Recommendation 8**

**Noting that all universities undergo various forms of accreditation of programmes by internationally represented bodies, the Panel *recommends* that CUAP should use the outcomes of these reports as an indication of international benchmarking.**

## Section 4: Commitment to the Treaty of Waitangi

The gazetted Criteria for Approval and Accreditation of Courses state: “It is expected that organisations will, in the development and delivery of courses, give effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi as expressed in their business plans and/or quality management documents”.<sup>4</sup>

The Panel believes that it would be appropriate for CUAP to require evidence that this is reflected in the programme proposals. At present, this is not reinforced in the CUAP Functions and Procedures 2011-12 handbook and the Panel was unable to determine that CUAP has any means for determining to what extent consideration has occurred during programme approval.

The Panel considered whether including a Māori member on CUAP would attend to this, but determined that such an approach would not necessarily impact upon this issue at course level. Rather, it turned its attention to the information CUAP currently requests of each university in making a course approval proposal. None of the information would necessarily indicate whether or not a university had assessed the course in terms of giving effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi. It was the view of the Panel that a minor adjustment to the Programme Proposal template would rectify this omission and act as a trigger for verification that this criterion had been satisfied.

### **Recommendation 9**

**The Panel *recommends* that CUAP’s template for programme proposals be amended to demonstrate that the proposed programmes have been assessed by universities in terms of giving effect to the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.**

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<sup>4</sup> New Zealand Gazette, No.188, 4 December 2008, p 4962.

## Section 5: Commitment to research-informed teaching

There are two degree approval processes in New Zealand: that of CUAP, and that of NZQA. These are differentiated by their processes. Perhaps more importantly, they are also differentiated by the nature of the institutions with which they are dealing. In the case of CUAP, it deals with universities, which are required by legislation to provide research-informed teaching.<sup>5</sup>

This is a major point of distinction. However, the extent to which the current CUAP process ensures that programme proposals reflect research-informed teaching could be improved. The only way in which it currently appears to be explicitly addressed in the proposals considered by CUAP is by means of the names and titles of staff designated to teach the programme. The Panel views this as insufficient in itself (for example, academic rank does not necessarily indicate research activity) or in terms of breadth of consideration. Other factors, such as the relationship between curriculum content and research activity in the university, and especially in the school or department involved in the proposal before CUAP, could be brought into the discussion.

### **Recommendation 10**

**The Panel *recommends* that the programme proposal template, and the emphasis of CUAP's deliberations in the peer review process, give more explicit attention to the relationship between research and the programme proposal.**

The Panel recognises that this will be more difficult for emerging disciplinary areas and for newer institutions, but expects that CUAP can ably take these factors into consideration.

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<sup>5</sup> Education Act 1989, No. 80 (as at 30 August 2011), Section 162 (4)(a)(ii), "their [universities'] research and teaching are closely interdependent and most of their teaching is done by people who are active in advancing knowledge".

## Section 6: Committee composition

The Panel was asked to consider the composition of CUAP in its terms of reference. The Committee currently consists of one representative of each university, along with a representative of the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA), a Chair and a Deputy Chair. The Chair (or the Deputy Chair acting in his/her place) has no deliberative vote and a casting vote only if needed. Additional external members representing schools are co-opted on to the Sub-Committee on University Entrance.

The Panel was made aware of the very significant role played by the Deputy Chair, and the importance of this role for the overall functioning of CUAP, particularly in its relationships with other bodies. In spite of this, the Panel questioned the wisdom of having an additional member from one of the universities, thereby upsetting the balance of membership across the universities. The Panel decided against making any recommendations regarding this arrangement, although in making its recommendation on the resourcing of CUAP (Section 8; Recommendation 14) considered that some of the more administrative tasks currently undertaken by the Deputy Chair could be assumed by the proposed Executive Officer.

In its deliberations the Panel considered alternative membership models, with one or more external members, including the possibility of a chair appointed from outside any of the universities. It also considered a subdivision of CUAP membership, with one group of members considering CUAP approvals (Functions 1 and 2) and a different group looking at broad university matters (Functions 3 and 4). However, the Panel concluded that neither would solve perceived problems, and the disadvantages would outweigh the advantages.

Overall, the Panel felt that the current composition of the Committee was appropriate and was discharging its responsibilities effectively, although the balance of expertise on the Committee should always be borne in mind by CUAP. The Panel was impressed by the positive engagement of the NZUSA in the Committee, and the collaborative way in which CUAP and Universities New Zealand worked to ensure effective student participation in the process.

### **Commendation 7**

**The Panel *commends* CUAP's commitment to student input through membership of NZUSA on CUAP.**

One of the challenges facing CUAP is how best to fulfil its approvals role when faced with sub-degree programmes (levels 4-6), particularly those of a highly vocational nature. Where the relevant expertise of CUAP members and member universities is concentrated largely at degree-level and higher, the Committee may wish to consider co-opting an individual with expertise at sub-degree levels where appropriate. The Panel decided against a recommendation, along these lines, but raises the matter for discussion by CUAP. However, the power for CUAP to seek external input, as envisaged in the context of professional bodies in Recommendation 11 below, may also be considered relevant in the present context.

## Section 7: Professional bodies

In the main, outside organisations were supportive of the CUAP model. The key issue of discussion related to professional bodies and their ability to engage with the university programme approval process where they saw broader issues spanning more than one institution.

With regard to the concerns of professional bodies, the Panel heard repeatedly that universities themselves are best placed to liaise with professional bodies regarding individual programme proposals. The Panel heard, and was in agreement with the view, that individual universities should be required to undertake and provide evidence of their consultation and the results of that engagement. However, the Panel was also made aware of tensions and problems that had occurred between CUAP and professional bodies in recent years and that had not been able to be satisfactorily resolved through engagement with the proposing institution/s. It was apparent that complications could arise when courses of a more vocational nature, and also requiring professional accreditation, were brought to CUAP's attention. Some of these occurrences raised issues spanning more than one institution. The Panel was not convinced that adequate changes had been made to CUAP processes to reduce the chance of similar issues arising again.

The Panel noted that engagement with professional bodies was also a focus of the previous audit of CUAP and was encouraged to see that the LEAD Professions-UNZ Working Group on Academic Co-operation had been initiated, at the instigation of the professional bodies and incorporating CUAP. This was seen by the Panel as a helpful initiative and a positive step towards increasing CUAP's visibility and working relationships with such bodies.

### **Affirmation 1**

**The Panel affirms the establishment of the LEAD Professions/UNZ Working Group on Academic Co-operation as an important step towards establishing a framework for managing the relationships between CUAP and professional bodies at the national level.**

Not all professional bodies work in the same way, nor would they be seeking the same things from engagement with the CUAP programme approval process. Some professional bodies provide accreditation at the end of the programme (ie. the graduates); others do so before the programme offering commences. Certain professional bodies may be predisposed to a competency-based assessment model for the programmes under their purview. As these programmes are increasingly being offered within university contexts, with a higher level of theoretical content and a more merit-based assessment model, there may be a need for CUAP and the professional body to negotiate a shared understanding of academic requirements. Both parties may need to demonstrate flexibility in this regard.

The Panel took on board concerns expressed to it that the 'lobbying' of bodies directly to CUAP would not be appropriate. This was because the members of CUAP would not necessarily have the background to engage with the discipline under discussion. This might also undermine the autonomy of the affected university.

However, the Panel felt strongly that there might be a need in exceptional circumstances for additional input from professional bodies. This would be used only when a proposal had not managed to satisfy adequately the Committee's requirements for information that would ensure that "the quality of course developments is consonant with high academic standards and mindful of the nation's interests" (amended ToR 1a). The seeking and/or receiving of additional input of other parties, including professional bodies, would be at the discretion of the Committee, and it was envisaged would be used rarely and constructively.



**Recommendation 11**

The Panel *recommends* that CUAP's programme approval process includes the power for CUAP to seek and/or receive input as deemed necessary from other parties (e.g., professional bodies), with the expectation that this provision would only be used under extraordinary circumstances.

## Section 8: CUAP systems and resourcing

### Website

The CUAP website serves the functional purpose of providing access to the Functions and Procedures handbook, programme approvals made at CUAP meetings, New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF), and a summary brochure. These are all useful. However, the Panel believes that there is an opportunity to improve this site.

First, it is not immediately obvious how to get to CUAP from the UNZ home page. While CUAP is not a separate entity, nor a public-facing accrediting body, the approval/accreditation process is nonetheless a major aspect of UNZ's role and perhaps warrants a highlighted site. Indeed, the words "course approval" and "accreditation", the latter of which looms large in the public's mind, are all but invisible. It is the Panel's view that CUAP's role, in part, is to provide a level of assurance to the public at large that degree programmes are of an appropriate quality. At present, CUAP and its processes are largely unknown to the public or, where known, sometimes misunderstood. A stronger internet presence is one way in which the visibility of CUAP could be enhanced.

Secondly, the website ought to provide more immediate access for approved programmes. This is clearly the role of NZQF, and not a role CUAP should duplicate, but such access and the relationship between CUAP and NZQF could be highlighted. The current summary of decisions, while probably helpful to CUAP members, only enables viewing in date order by CUAP meetings. Other users would not necessarily know at what meeting a particular programme was considered.

Thirdly, the website ought, in the Panel's view, to be the primary interface for the technology-enabled programme approval process discussed below. The key users would be:

- Submitters, who wish to submit proposals, track their progress, and compose responses to the peer reviewers;
- Peer reviewers, who need to access the proposals, submit their comments and track progress;
- CUAP members, who need to be notified of proposals, assign peer reviewers, track progress, and vote on approvals;
- Public, who wish to see approved programmes (this would presumably primarily be by way of a link to NZQF).

Finally, the Functions and Procedures handbook could be presented in tagged html to improve its accessibility, not just as a downloadable PDF.

#### **Recommendation 12**

**The Panel *recommends* that CUAP further develop its website in order to enhance the profile of the approval and accreditation processes and improve ease of access to information for key stakeholders.**

### **Technology-enabled programme approval process**

CUAP's current process for Programme Approval involves a number of facets, including:

- interactions by people at a distance from each other;
- notifications;
- exchange of documentation (including with external stakeholders);
- issue generation and response (including multiple-author issues and responses);

- process tracking;
- approvals;
- filing and archiving;
- varying levels of public and private access to information.

The Panel concluded that this process is a prime candidate for a technology system with a web interface. Such a system could handle these requirements effectively and also enable aggregate analyses of such issues as timeliness of the process, and themes / recurring themes in peer reviewer comments (areas which are quite difficult to explore under the current process).

The Panel notes that this was a Recommendation in the 2005 review, and that CUAP's response appeared to minimise the potential benefits of an electronically-facilitated process. It is acknowledged that care must be taken to ensure such systems are user-friendly and facilitate rather than hinder the core process. Such systems are improving rapidly, and most academic staff will be very familiar with examples, such as those used by academic journals for review processes.

The Panel also acknowledges that the development of such a system would incur costs, but suspects these costs would be repaid over time through enabling more efficient processes, and adding new functionalities, as well as potentially using less paper.

#### **Recommendation 13**

**The Panel *recommends* that CUAP programme approvals process be managed online, preferably with a web browser interface, enabling electronic submission, processing, monitoring and reporting of proposals.**

#### **CUAP staffing**

CUAP's responsibilities constitute one of the most important aspects of New Zealand's quality assurance system for universities. The Panel believes that it is significantly under-resourced, and that this has impacted upon its ability to fulfil the scope of its current responsibilities, let alone ensure future capacity.

The International Quality Assurance Agency in Higher Education (INQAAHE), of which CUAP is a member, provides Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance which include as Item 2: Resources "The EQAA [External Quality Assurance Agency] has adequate and accessible human and financial resources to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. The EQAA's resources are also adequate for the appropriate development of the agency".<sup>6</sup>

The Panel is mindful that the functioning of CUAP has, since its inception, been heavily reliant upon the excellent services of one staff member (Universities New Zealand's Manager, Academic Policy). One of the key issues for CUAP is continuity of expertise. While this has been assured to date through the long service of this staff member and the current Deputy Chair, such continuity is nonetheless tenuous and not systematically assured.

#### **Commendation 8**

**The Panel *commends* the secretariat of CUAP for the diligent support provided.**

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<sup>6</sup>INQAAHE, August 2007. "Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance". Available online: [www.inqaahe.org/main/professional-development/guidelines-of-good-practice-51](http://www.inqaahe.org/main/professional-development/guidelines-of-good-practice-51). Accessed: 16 September 2011.

The Panel believes that CUAP's continuity and effectiveness would be strengthened through the establishment of a senior Executive Officer role. This would be a senior and full time UNZ staff position, and would have responsibility for such matters as:

- Briefing incoming CUAP Members;
- Monitoring the tertiary education policy environment nationally and internationally, and bringing matters to the attention of CUAP;
- Coordinating (but not unilaterally implementing) CUAP's policy advisory function;
- Other tasks as identified by CUAP, including liaising with external stakeholders as required.

It became apparent to the Panel during its interviews that there is, has been and will no doubt continue to be more than enough work in the academic policy space to justify this being a full time position. With such an Executive Officer in place, there would be reduced requirements placed on a Deputy Chairperson role outside of deputising for the Chair during CUAP meetings.

The Panel also believes that CUAP would benefit from administrative support that would enable greater usage of information technology as envisaged by the previous recommendations. This position would be responsible for maintaining the enhanced CUAP website (a sub-site of Universities New Zealand's website) and the online proposal management system.

#### **Recommendation 14**

**The Panel *recommends* that, in the interests of attending to the full scope of CUAP's responsibilities and in the interests of providing effective continuity, CUAP be supported with a staffing of two positions comprising a senior position (Executive Officer) to coordinate policy matters and an administrative assistant to coordinate the programme approval processes and website.**

## Appendix 1

List of participant groups whose representatives met with the Audit Panel and/or made a written submission:

- CUAP members
- Universities New Zealand
- 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 Universities Academic Audit Unit
- Institution of Professional Engineers of New Zealand
- Midwifery Council of New Zealand
- New Zealand Union of Students' Associations
- Tertiary Education Commission
- New Zealand Qualifications Authority