

Report of the 2017 Review of the Committee on University Academic Programmes Summary

The 2017 Review of the Committee on University Academic Programmes (CUAP) has indicated strong support within the sector and from stakeholders who were consulted by the Panel that CUAP is operating effectively. Its processes of programme approval and accreditation, and moderation through the Graduating Year Reviews (GYR), are considered to be robust. The introduction of an online proposal management system has been a significant improvement, though further development is desirable to reduce workloads within universities and to enhance usability. The Panel recommends that CUAP develop its approach to moderation beyond the GYR, using outcomes of institutional programme reviews to identify good practices and systemic challenges.

While there is consensus across universities and within Universities New Zealand on CUAP's effectiveness, the Panel concluded that this confidence is not grounded in any kind of benchmarking and that there is opportunity for CUAP to explore processes in other jurisdictions, whether to validate its own confidence or to identify potential enhancements. More active interaction with agencies in other jurisdictions is encouraged.

There was little support from submissions or interviewees for a system of self-accreditation by New Zealand universities. Arguments for self-accreditation which the Panel learned of related to aspects of the programme approval process which are either internal to universities and not a CUAP responsibility or which might be easily addressed by CUAP or Universities New Zealand. In particular, the Panel has recommended changes which would expedite approval timing and responsiveness, such as more frequent submission of proposals and electronic approval of those proposals which are not problematic.

Peer review is considered by universities to be a strength of the approval process, but also poses some risks. The Panel has recommended introduction of more precise guidance for peer reviewers. At the same time the Panel has commended the commitment of peer reviewers (and other staff) and the time and expertise contributed to the approval process.

The Panel evaluated CUAP's activity against the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice. In most cases the relevant INQAAHE criteria are met, or partly met. However two significant areas require attention by CUAP. Firstly the Panel gained no evidence that CUAP formally monitors its own performance: the self-review report for the current review contained no evaluation and systematic self-evaluation was not evident in CUAP processes. Also, there did not appear to be any mechanism whereby CUAP feeds back

to the sector and wider stakeholders the outcomes of external evaluation or its response. The Panel has recommended that these matters be addressed.

Secondly, CUAP's current procedures for addressing complaints and disputes or appeals do not reflect good practice. There is an urgent need to formalise these processes, to ensure they are robust, impartial and have external credibility.

The Terms of Reference for CUAP are appropriate and are met or at least partly met. The Panel has recommended that the wording of some of the Functions needs to be reviewed or revised so that they reflect actual practice more accurately and are realistic in the context of CUAP's responsibilities. The Panel also identified some areas where terminology should be clarified, to differentiate responsibilities which lie with the staff of Universities New Zealand from those which are the business of the Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

In the Panel's view there is opportunity for CUAP, or a comparable group of Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic) (or equivalent), to take a strategic leadership role for the sector. This would assist CUAP to meet the "enhancement-led" principle to which it ascribes, with AQA, for university quality assurance. It would require CUAP to develop some strategic objectives and organise its activity to facilitate discussions on emerging issues within the sector. Related to this, the Panel conveys a desire by universities and other stakeholders for improved communication; some strategies for doing this have been suggested by the Panel.

The Panel reviewed CUAP's strategies for interacting with professional bodies. It concluded that these are currently appropriate but better communication, as outlined above, would enhance understanding. The Panel acknowledges the challenges faced by CUAP in accommodating the different professional requirements related to programme approval.

It was clear to the Panel that the subcommittee on University Entrance does an excellent job for the sector and functions efficiently. The Panel has recommended that the relevant CUAP Functions be reviewed to reflect some of the subcommittee's key work more accurately. An *ad hoc* subcommittee to deal with international matters pertaining to approval was also reported to be effective.

CUAP's interaction with other local agencies appeared to be satisfactory. The Joint Consultative group with NZQA and AQA fulfils a communication and informal consultation function. The Panel supports a suggestion that NZUSA be represented on this group; the Panel learned that student contributions as members of CUAP are valued and effective. There is a desire by students for more detailed induction and for a formal recognition of service.

From its review of the membership and work of CUAP and the subcommittee on University Entrance it was apparent to the Panel that both committees place significant reliance on the Deputy Chair of CUAP for knowledge, experience and time. While this contribution has been commended by the Panel, the

Panel also identifies a risk for Universities New Zealand and encourages development of succession planning for the role.

In the Panel's view the current staffing to support CUAP is adequate but it is noted that if CUAP adopts broader responsibilities then staff support will need to be reviewed.

The Panel has made six commendations and seventeen recommendations.

The full report is available from the AQA website: www.aqa.ac.nz

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