

## Cycle 6 Academic Audit

### Summary

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities has determined the model for a sixth cycle of academic audit for New Zealand universities. Their resolution has been agreed with the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors.

Cycle 6 Academic Audit will retain consistency with international expectations, allow universities to address an issue of strategic priority and national importance and be responsive to the contexts and priorities of individual universities. It enables the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors to continue to meet their responsibilities for quality assurance.

The AQA Board has resolved that the Cycle 6 Academic Audit for New Zealand universities will:

- A. Maintain an internationally referenced, cyclical, peer-review model of external quality assurance.
- B. Maintain a high-trust, enabling, relationship between the universities and AQA that recognises and respects universities' responsibility and accountability for quality as well as AQA's Terms of Reference and independence.
- C. Maintain the scope of academic audit on teaching, learning, support and outcomes for students.
- D. Build on and refresh the Cycle 5 academic audit framework (guideline statements) and further emphasise outcomes and the use of evidence.
- E. Incorporate a thematic enhancement topic agreed by all universities that will address an issue that is both a strategic priority for universities and of national importance. The enhancement theme topic for Cycle 6 is *"Access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori students and for Pasifika students"*.
- F. Audit universities 7-8 years after their Cycle 5 audit.
- G. Include students or recent graduates in audit panels.
- H. Amend the audit delivery method so that Panels spend more time together initially and that time spent at the university can be more targeted and require meeting with fewer individuals.
- I. Develop audit reports to comment on outcomes and enhancement initiatives, as well as processes.
- J. Include a public report on a university's response to recommendations. A mid-cycle follow-up report on Cycle 5 recommendations will be introduced.

Further work, in consultation with universities, is required to operationalise Cycle 6 (particularly points D, E, G and J). It is anticipated that the first university in Cycle 6 would submit its self-review early in 2021.

## Introduction

AQA distributed a consultation paper, setting out a proposal for a sixth cycle of academic audits, to universities on 21 October, 2016. A draft proposal, reflecting the feedback from universities, was considered by a university working group consisting of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) (or equivalent) from each university, or their nominee discussed the model for Cycle 6 at a meeting on 11 January, 2017. Correspondence between AQA, the Vice-Chancellors and Te Kāhui Amokura refined and agreed on the enhancement theme.

The next section provides further comment on each of the components of Cycle 6.

## Cycle 6

Cycle 6 will build on Cycle 5. This recognises and leverages the quality assurance strengths and capabilities that New Zealand universities possess. Enhancement has been a long-standing feature of academic audit for New Zealand universities and audits are considered to be ‘enhancement-led’. Cycle 6 will further develop the enhancement aspect of academic audit by introducing an enhancement theme component. Development of the enhancement theme component has been guided by the Scottish Quality Assurance Agency’s experience of enhancement themes. In building on Cycle 5, there is also potential to refresh the framework and approach, taking into account the experience of Cycle 5 and national and international developments.

The overall model for Cycle 6 Academic Audit is presented in the figure below and the components are discussed further below.

Yr 1	3	4	5	7	8
Enhancement theme	Self-review	Thematic emphasis			Review of cycle
		Audit framework (guideline statements)			
Mid-cycle report		Includes report on any outstanding recommendations from Cycle 5			
Provision for early audit					

Cycle 6 Academic Audit for New Zealand universities will:

A. Maintain an internationally referenced, cyclical, peer-review model of external quality assurance.

This will retain commonality with smaller, high-quality, systems such as Scotland and Ontario and consistency with both the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015) and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Guidelines of Good Practice (2016). The potential to move to a minimum/threshold-standards approach was considered. However, a framework and approach that utilises cyclical review was preferred for the above reasons. The retention of peer reviewers is also preferred.

B. Maintain a high-trust, enabling, relationship between the universities and AQA that recognises and respects universities' responsibility and accountability for quality as well as AQA's Terms of Reference and independence.

In feedback, universities commented that academic audit does not exist in isolation and universities are subject to range of reporting and accountability requirements. Where appropriate, Cycle 6 should utilise these mechanisms and maintain the ability for academic audit to reflect an individual university's ethos and priorities.

C. Maintain the scope of academic audit on teaching, learning, support and outcomes for students.

Universities that commented agreed that the scope of academic audit should remain on teaching, learning, support and outcomes for students; and key contributing processes.

D. Build on and refresh the Cycle 5 academic audit framework (guideline statements) to reduce any overlaps and address gaps and further emphasise outcomes and the use of evidence.

In confirming this component it is recognised that two universities did not consider that there was a need for more of a focus on outcomes or evidence. One of these universities did agree that there was scope to "sharpen" the Cycle 5 framework. Other universities were broadly supportive of this direction, provided that the individual contexts of universities were retained and care was taken in the development of any metrics to minimise the possibility of unintentional rankings being developed. The intention behind developing metrics, where relevant, further is for auditors and universities to be better able to appreciate the extent to which practices and outcomes are systemic or embedded across a university. The refresh of the Cycle 5 framework for Cycle 6 will involve further consultation with universities. This follows the development approach which was considered successful and effective for Cycle 5.

E. Incorporate a common thematic, or focus, enhancement element that addresses a topic of strategic priority for universities and is of national importance.

This component of Cycle 6 is inter-related with extending the length of the audit cycle (point F). It is informed by the enhancement themes that are a component of the Scottish model of quality assurance. It also responds to a recommendation in the 2015 External Review of AQA that "... AQA consider in consultation with the universities and other stakeholders, how Cycle 6 might be more focused. This is to ensure that universities can derive the most benefit from the audit process and ensure alignment with each university's strategic goals, including what it means to be a university, and an academic, in the 21st century". In its one-year follow-up report on recommendations in the External Review, the AQA Board commented that "This recommendation is being progressed with the proposal for Cycle 6 including a greater emphasis on

enhancement. This would allow universities to focus on particular issues or activities that are of relevance to either individual universities, groups of universities or the university sector as a whole”.

A common enhancement theme will be an active, shared commitment to addressing a topic of importance to all universities. It will require universities to commit to contributing to and advancing the theme. The Scottish experience of enhancement themes is that three years are required to undertake a theme. It should be noted that although a theme may be common, this does not mean that all universities would be expected to have the same priorities or responses to the theme.

The potential benefits of the enhancement theme component of Cycle 6 are that:

- It will be of benefit to all universities and to learners across the university system and provides an opportunity for universities to focus on and advance a significant topic. It will also provide more opportunities for staff to engage with an important topic.
- There are greater opportunities for learning from Cycle 5. The relatively short gap between the end of Cycle 4 (final Cycle 4 report published October 2012) and the commencement of Cycle 5 (first self-review submitted July 2013) may have limited the opportunity for learning from Cycle 4. There is a clear view however that Cycle 5 has delivered value for universities.
- Universities have adequate time to progress recommendations and enhancement initiatives from Cycle 5. The impact of any response to a recommendation that involves undergraduate students is not likely to be evident in the current follow-up timeframes.
- Undertaking a common enhancement theme would be consistent with ‘System Expectations’ in the Tertiary Education Strategy 2014-18 that system-level performance improvement requires “work[ing] together to improve outcomes for students and for New Zealand” (p21).
- Other benefits from a joint, collaborative approach to a significant issue are likely to accrue.

These potential benefits were considered by the working group to outweigh any benefits of continuing solely with the existing model of academic audit or competitive pressures between universities.

Enhancement theme activity and progress will be overseen by a steering group. Universities’ progress on the enhancement theme will be evaluated in the Cycle 6 academic audit. Costs of undertaking enhancement theme activities will be borne directly by universities. It may be possible to gain external funding to support meeting and other costs.

A theme will require significant work from AQA in supporting the theme and in establishing supporting infrastructure, as well as ongoing evaluation of progress. AQA will provide a secretariat function and facilitate the management of the enhancement theme. QAA-Scotland have also found that enhancement themes generate research outputs as well as good practice guides and universities may wish to engage from a research perspective.

The enhancement theme topic for Cycle 6 is *“Access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori students and for Pasifika students*. This topic is a strategic priority for all universities and is an issue of national importance. It will complement work already underway in and across universities. AQA (then NZUAAU) has previously undertaken work and produced a report on “New Zealand Universities and Te Tiriti o Waitangi” (2004) as part of its ‘Series on Quality’. The composition of the steering group for

this theme will be Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic) or equivalent, or their nominees, the Convener and another member of Te Kāhui Amokura, two senior Pasifika members of universities, and two students. AQA and Te Pouhārō, Portfolio Manager – Education System & Māori, UNZ will provide secretariat support.

While the enhancement theme is focused on access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori learners and wider equity outcomes for Pasifika learners, it is anticipated that there will be positive implications for universities considering how outcomes can be improved for an increasingly diverse student body, student transitions and universities in other jurisdictions seeking to improve outcomes for indigenous learners. Reports and papers will be produced as part of this process and sharing of good practice and progress will also be advanced through conferences, workshops and other events (again following the Scottish approach). Other potential themes discussed by the working party were student transitions, learning and diversity and twenty-first century graduate skills. Future topics will be considered in the review of Cycle 6.

*F. Audit universities 7-8 years after their cycle 5 audit.* Universities were supportive of extending the period between academic audits beyond five years, as this reflected the maturity of New Zealand universities with respect to their own quality assurance processes, the wider reporting and accountability framework for universities that academic audit contributes to and, as noted above, recognises that major academic quality initiatives in response to audit recommendations can take some years to become embedded. A period of 7-8 years has been adopted as this also allows for a resequencing of the order in which universities undertake academic audit.

Internationally, 8 years is not without precedent, although it is at the longer end of a period between external reviews. In Australia, for example, TEQSA will re-accredit universities (and other providers) on a timeframe of up to seven years, although it does also undertake an annual risk assessment of all providers. As noted above, the New Zealand universities demonstrate mature quality assurance management capabilities. No systemic concerns about quality assurance are considered to exist and the potential value to universities (and students) of addressing a significant enhancement theme is considered to be greater than undertaking academic audit on a shorter timeframe.

While quality assurance is considered to be an ongoing process, international experts have commented that the pattern of engagement between universities and AQA over the 7-8 year period is important. It is proposed that a mid-cycle report on Cycle 5 will be introduced to assist in maintaining continuity of quality assurance activities. This would be in addition to the existing one-year follow-up report and the two-year informal follow-up meeting. It is anticipated that for the audit component, the pattern of engagement between a university and AQA would be as follows:

Year	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Cycle 5 report	One-year follow-up report	Two-year informal meeting		Mid-cycle report (NEW)	Informal follow-up (NEW)	Planning meeting Audit		Cycle 6
Ongoing	CUAP (quarterly), Support for Quality conference (annual), Professional and other accreditations, internal quality assurance								

It should be noted that the current configuration of CUAP means that universities also have regular peer-review of academic activities with respect to academic programmes, including internal programme review cycles. AQA maintains a dialogue with universities and it is anticipated that universities would signal any major changes relevant to quality assurance. Provision would need to exist for an academic audit to be conducted in a shorter time period, should the need to do so be agreed. Further (indicative) detail on timeframes and schedules for Cycle 6 academic audit is set out in Appendix 1.

G. Include students or recent graduates in audit panels. Responses from universities indicated that they were supportive of including students, or recent graduates. Work is required to develop a framework that operationalises this point. This is being progressed through a Memorandum of Understanding that has been signed between AQA and NZUSA.

H. Amend the audit delivery method so that Panels spend more time together initially and that time spent at the university can be more targeted. Again, responses from universities indicated that they supported this point. It is recommended that panels meet initially for 2-3 days and have a second meeting for 2 days. This should reduce the number of members of a university that an audit panel would need to meet with and also allow questions to be more clearly targeted. A preliminary meeting to be held by skype or videoconference may also be required. Other comments included the need for auditor training and development and this is recognised.

I. Develop audit reports to comment on outcomes and enhancement initiatives, as well as processes. The proposal for consultation had suggested that audit reports include summative judgements. Those universities that responded indicated that they were not in favour of this as they considered that the audit methodology did not support summative judgments being reached. Universities did indicate that they would support greater articulation in audit reports as to how commendations, affirmations and recommendations had been reached. Universities also indicated that evidence of outcomes was present in the audit process but that the audit reports could reflect this further. This would help increase public accessibility of the reports. This will be considered in the further consultative work to refresh the framework. The model of audit panels making commendations, affirmations and recommendations will be retained, and audit panels will comment on the enhancement initiatives identified by universities in their self-review reports.

J. Include a public report on a university's response to recommendations. The universities that responded to this point saw no reason why a university's report on its response to the audit report would not be made publicly available. One university suggested that these reports would have to be approved by the university for release. It is recommended that making such a report would be the university's responsibility. The one-year follow-up report will be retained (and made publicly available) and that a mid-cycle (up to four years) further report, also to be made publicly available, will be introduced.

## **Costs**

The enhancement theme is likely to incur costs for universities. However, it is hoped that universities will be able to leverage existing work to support the proposed theme. Steering Group meetings will be aligned with CUAP meetings to reduce travel time and costs.

It is anticipated that the direct costs of academic audit to universities would remain broadly comparable with those for Cycle 5. A small increase may be required to allow the international panel member to attend two meetings in New Zealand, if this was considered to be desirable. This increase however is likely to be offset by the longer time period between audit site visits, shorter site visits and panels not needing to meet with as many members of staff of a university.

### Timeframes

As indicated in Figure 1, Cycle 6 will have two major, but inter-connected, components comprising an enhancement theme period and an ‘audit’ period. Progress on the enhancement theme will be evaluated in the ‘audit’ component. Key dates in the proposed Cycle 6 are set out in the table below. A more detailed schedule is set out in Appendix 1.

Date	Enhancement theme	Audit	Ongoing Cycle 5
April 2017	Agreement on Cycle 6		Mid-cycle reports and good practice guides published
September 2017	First meeting of Steering Group		
September 2017 – end 2019	Enhancement theme activities	Audit framework refreshed and guides published	
2020	Self-reviews of progress as part of self-review activity	Self-reviews commence Auditor training	
2021 - 2023	Progress assessed as part of audit	Cycle 6 audits	
2024	Review		

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**Appendix 1a: (Indicative) University Schedule for Cycle 6 Academic Audit**

Year/week	2021	2022	2023
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10	U1 submit self-review	U3 site visit	U6 site visit
11			
12		U4 submit self-review	U7 submit self-review
13			
14			
15			
16			
17			
18	U2 submit self-review		
19			
20		U5 submit self-review	U8 submit self-review
21			
22			
23			
24		U3 report	U6 report
25			
26	U1 site visit		
27			
28		U4 site visit	U7 site visit
29			
30			
31			
32			
33			
34	U2 site visit		
35			
36		U5 site visit	U8 site visit
37			
38			
39			
40	U1 report		
41			
42		U4 report	U7 report
43			
44			
45			
46	U3 self-review	U6 self-review	
47			
48	U2 report		
49			
50		U5 report	U8 report
51			
52			

NB: this schedule is indicative and further consideration will need to be given to semester dates in finalising the audit timetable for individual universities.



### Appendix 1b: (Indicative) Schedule for Cycle 6 Audits

Order	University	Cycle 5 Report	Midcycle report	Cycle 6 Report
1	Auckland	Oct 2014	Oct 2018	Oct 2021
2	Victoria	Nov 2014	Nov 2018	Nov 2021
3	Massey	Feb 2014	June 2018	June 2022
4	Canterbury	Feb 2015	Feb 2019	Oct 2022
5	Waikato	Oct 2015	June 2019	Dec 2022
6	Lincoln	Dec 2016	June 2020	June 2023
7	Otago	Sept 2016	June 2020	Oct 2023
8	AUT	April 2016	Sept 2020	Dec 2023