

Enhancement Themes – Answers to Questions

New Zealand universities will include an enhancement theme in the overall design of their Cycle 6 Academic Audit. This is a new activity for New Zealand universities, and this document provides answers to some questions that may be asked. If this document does not include the question you would like to ask, please email director@aqz.ac.nz and it will be added.

What is an enhancement theme?

An enhancement theme is a topic of national significance and important to all universities, that all universities will work on in a common time period. Universities will not all be expected to do the same thing or take the same approach to the theme, but they are expected to be working on the theme topic, sharing good practice and providing constructive peer review of developments and plans.

Are enhancement themes used in other places?

Scottish universities have been using enhancement themes for over a decade. New Zealand universities will learn from Scottish universities regarding what has worked well for them, and consider what would be appropriate and useful for New Zealand universities.

How does the enhancement theme ‘fit’ into Cycle 6 Academic Audit?

Cycle 6 Academic Audit has a 7-8 year period between the Cycle 5 and Cycle 6 audits for individual universities. Enhancement theme activities will occur over the first 3 years of the Cycle 6 timeframe, after which the emphasis will shift back to academic audit for the remaining 5 years of the cycle. Recommendations from the enhancement theme will be addressed in the audit component of the cycle.

What is the topic of the enhancement theme?

The enhancement theme will address access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students.

What are the objectives of the theme?

The specific objectives will vary by university. However, the overall objective is to improve access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students in university study.

Why has this theme been chosen?

The participation and achievement of Māori students and Pasifika students is a priority within the Tertiary Education Strategy. New Zealand universities have made good progress on access, support and

achievement for both of these groups of learners. However, the universities and AQA all recognise that further progress can be achieved.

How was the theme chosen?

The theme was selected at a meeting of the Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic), Assistant Vice-Chancellors (Academic), or similar positions (or their nominees) at a meeting with AQA in January 2017. It was subsequently approved by the AQA Board and has been critiqued and refined in correspondence between AQA, the Vice-Chancellors, Te Kāhui Amokura and at a further meeting of DVCs and AVCs Academic, or equivalents, in July 2017.

How long does the enhancement theme last?

The theme is on a topic that all universities are already actively engaged with and pursuing. However, the enhancement theme component of Cycle 6 academic audit will last for 2-3 years. While work in universities is likely to be ongoing, the enhancement theme component of Cycle 6 academic audit will finish at the end of 2019.

What will happen to the enhancement theme after 2019?

Universities are likely to carry on working on the enhancement theme topic. However, from the perspective of Cycle 6 Academic Audit, the enhancement theme is expected to inform some changes to some guideline statements that provide the framework for the audit component of Cycle 6. Universities' progress against those guideline statements will be audited between 2021 and 2023.

What value will be derived from an enhancement theme, especially if universities already have work underway on the theme topic?

The enhancement theme will promote sharing of good practice across universities. It will make it easier for those involved to identify colleagues, critique initiatives, and share good practice. There are likely to be benefits from all universities intentionally addressing an enhancement theme topic concurrently. There are also likely to be findings that will be relevant to other groups of learners, for example first-in-family learners or rural learners. The theme will be evaluated to assess whether and how value is being added.

How will a university that is already performing well with respect to the theme benefit from participation?

As with other aspects of academic audit, some of the greatest benefit of the audit process comes from the University's own self-review processes. Well performing universities can challenge themselves to improve further, as well as contributing to enhancement across the university sector.

Will universities not just copy one another?

Universities will learn from one another. Direct copying is unlikely to be effective as each university has its own history, context, capabilities, priorities and students. What works in one university may not work in the same way for another. One of the benefits of sharing good practice is that universities will also learn why initiatives work well in one university, but may be different in another.

Will universities be willing to share what they are doing when they are competing for students?

One of the principles that underpins quality assurance activities in New Zealand universities is that quality assurance is collective and collegial. AQA functions with the cooperation of all New Zealand universities and the engagement and expertise of individuals and universities' communities.

What is the impact or outcomes of an enhancement theme?

In general terms, the outcome of an enhancement theme would be to see an overall increase and improvement in access, outcomes and opportunities for access, outcomes and opportunities for Māori students and for Pasifika students.

Will all universities be expected to do the same things?

No. All universities will work on the same theme, but it is expected that each university will undertake the enhancement theme in a way that fits with its own priorities and ethos. For example, some universities may focus on postgraduate students, others may focus on curriculum design and others on outreach and relationships with schools.

Who is involved and how will the theme be managed?

The enhancement theme will be led by universities through a steering group. The steering group will comprise the DVC Academic or equivalent, or their nominee, from each university; the Chair and another member of Te Kāhui Amokura; two Pasifika members from universities; and two senior or postgraduate students who are Māori and Pasifika. The enhancement theme steering group will report to the Vice-Chancellors.

Why is AQA involved in the enhancement theme?

AQA's constitution establishes that part of its purpose is to apply quality enhancement processes that assist universities in improving student engagement, academic experience and learning outcomes. The enhancement theme is consistent with this aspect of AQA's purpose. AQA's role is to support and

facilitate the scheme through providing secretariat support for the Enhancement theme steering group. AQA will also manage theme evaluations and the development of synthesis reports.

How will this be funded?

Each university will meet their costs of participation. AQA activities will be funded from its operating grant. Additional funding will be sought where appropriate.