

Report of the 2016 Academic Audit of Lincoln University Media Release and Executive Summary

Established in 1878 as an Agricultural College of the University of Canterbury, Lincoln University became a University in 1990. Its main campus is at Lincoln in Canterbury. In 2011 Telford Rural Polytechnic based in Balclutha merged with Lincoln University. Students from the new Lincoln-Telford Division include distance students, students based in Northland as well as students based at the Telford campus.

In 2015 the University had a total enrolment of 5,819 students (2,934 EFTS) and 682 full-time equivalent staff. Its portfolio of programmes, from Level 1 to Level 9, is predominantly in land-based disciplines or vocational areas.

The University was audited by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) in 2016. The 2016 audit follows the methodology used for all New Zealand universities in the fifth cycle of academic audits. It focuses on teaching and learning and student support, including postgraduate. The AQA audit methodology incorporates a framework of 40 Guideline Statements which articulate the qualities or standards which a contemporary university of good standing internationally might be expected to demonstrate.

Prior to 2016, Lincoln was most recently audited by AQA (as the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit) in 2012. The University provided an update against the findings of that audit. While the audit Panel was aware of the pressures on Lincoln University resulting from the impact of the 2010 and 2011 earthquakes, and was mindful of the work involved subsequent to the merger with Telford Rural Polytechnic, it nevertheless expressed concern that some recommendations from the 2012 Cycle 4 audit relating to fundamental academic processes had not yet been fully addressed or were only being addressed as recently as 2015-2016.

At the time of the audit site visit a review of management and academic decision-making at the University was underway. A paper outlining options for the future of the University had also just been received by Council. The Panel was advised of these developments, however some proposals remained confidential; the Panel was not shown the contents of the Council paper. While the audit reflected the situation in place at the time of the audit, this audit report's recommendations must be read in light of subsequent developments.

The University has had a conventional academic management structure. The Panel learned that this was likely to change. The Panel is mindful that, because of its small size and the consequentially smaller pool of staff, Lincoln might be challenged to cover the full range of academic leadership roles which is normal for a university of any size. Similarly, the need to encompass a breadth of responsibilities within single roles might lead or have led to a dilution of impact in particular areas.

The Panel needed to evaluate leadership, management and governance as it was at the time of the audit. The Panel saw a need for a clear delegations statement pertaining to academic decision-making to be developed and communicated to staff. It also urged the University to complete a review and refreshment of all academic

policies. There is a need for much more robust strategic planning related to teaching and learning, with objectives which can be evaluated and appropriate key performance indicators. An apparent lack of external referencing and academic benchmarking was an issue raised in the previous Cycle 4 audit which remains relevant and did not appear to have been addressed in any systematic way.

Formal policies and processes in some academic areas were of concern to the Panel. In particular, policies, processes and expectations related to assessment and moderation needed attention, as did the provisions and procedures for appeals, academic grievances and complaints. The Panel assessed that the University's approach to academic integrity needed development. The Panel encouraged the University to expedite its redevelopment of policies and processes related to programme reviews.

The Panel has commented on how the University might address aspects of its Whenua (Māori) matrix within its curriculum and pedagogy, noting that this aspiration is dependent on staff capability. It was evident to the Panel that while a number of academic areas need development or review, there is good leadership being provided by the Library, Teaching and Learning Group in the development of teaching quality and support for student achievement.

The University has been doing some commendable work to encourage recruitment and support for students for whom university access might be a challenge. In particular, the Lincoln-Telford Division's activities in partnership with schools, trade academies and employers appear to be very effective in supporting transition to study. The University's Whenua Kura, which is a partnership between Lincoln University, Ngāi Tahu Farming and Te Tapuae o Rehua, aimed at enhancing participation and employment outcomes for Māori, was seen as a good initiative. A complementary Motu Strategy intended to enhance participation by domestic Pasifika students needs to be progressed. The University provides good support for its international students. The Panel was impressed by the contributions made by the Lincoln University Students' Association in several areas and urges the University to ensure that the very good links with management that LUSA has enjoyed in the past are sustained. The "open door" culture which exists with academic staff is a feature of the Lincoln experience and is appreciated by students.

At the time of the audit the University was placing strong emphasis on the development of the proposed Hub which would co-locate University staff with staff from several other land-based organisations. The Panel encourages the University to explore how this might benefit postgraduate study. Overall, the Panel was impressed with the University's policies and processes in the postgraduate area. These demonstrated a robust and coordinated approach across faculties which could be emulated in other areas. The "House Rules" documents covering both PhD and Master's requirements and student support are commended.

The University identified fifteen enhancements which were either in process or required. The Panel concurred that the areas identified need attention. The audit Panel has made eight commendations, four affirmations and thirteen recommendations.

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

Contact: comms@aqa.ac.nz or phone (04) 801 7924
Website: www.aqa.ac.nz
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