

Report of the 2014 Academic Audit of the University of Auckland Executive Summary

Established in 1883 as a constituent college of the University of New Zealand, the University of Auckland is New Zealand's largest university. In 2013 it had a total enrolment of 41,363 students and 4,909 staff (FTE), of whom 2,131 were academic staff. The University's academic offerings range from foundation to doctorate level and the majority of programmes are taught in an on-campus mode of delivery.

The University was audited by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) in 2014. 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. Given the University of Auckland's desire to place itself alongside highly ranked peer institutions internationally, the Panel also paid attention to areas where international benchmarking was considered appropriate, while at the same time recognizing that the audit framework has been developed to evaluate New Zealand universities within a New Zealand context.

The University was last audited by AQA (as the then New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit) in 2009. The University provided an update against the findings of that Audit, and the Panel was pleased to see progress made against most of the 2009 recommendations. In the areas of benchmarking and digital technologies the Panel reiterated the findings of the previous audit, indicating that it believed the University would benefit from further work which would ensure it achieves the high quality learning and teaching environment which is consistent with its ambitions. The Panel recommends the University develops a high-level benchmarking statement which sets out the objectives and scope of institutional benchmarking, guidelines for benchmarking for different kinds of activities and outcomes, and designated responsibilities.

Since 2011 the University of Auckland has embarked on a substantial review of faculty professional and administration processes and roles. The University has also recently introduced a new distributed leadership framework. The objectives and change management processes underlying both of these projects signalled a move towards rationalising the complexity of professional and administrative support in a multifaceted organisation. The Panel considered that the changes proposed should address a number of the issues with which it had concerns. The University is commended on its attention to developing, assessing and rewarding leadership capability of all staff and to the articulation of its philosophy and objectives in the Leadership Framework.

The University's current Strategic Plan expresses a vision to be a "research-led, international university, recognised for excellence in teaching, learning, research, creative work, and administration, for the significance of its contributions to the advancement of knowledge and its commitment to serve its local, national and international communities". To achieve this vision, the University has developed 19 objectives and seven aspirations in the areas of: staff recruitment and support; student recruitment and experience; research; Māori; partnerships; autonomy, sustainability and equity; and, global standing and service to New Zealand. The Panel was of the view that there was some inconsistency in the development of KPIs across the University's various strategic documents and reporting sequences. It felt that the revised Planning and Accountability Framework, when adopted, should address some of the inconsistencies which risk obscuring the University's progress against its own objectives.

The Panel considers the University's Long Term Capital Plan over the next decade to be ambitious, but was satisfied that those responsible for maintenance, refurbishment and development of infrastructure are well versed in the space needs and expectations related to teaching and learning and have good processes in place for gaining input related to pedagogical developments.

The University has a structured approach to student input and feedback, ensuring that this happens systematically at the level of the student's individual class, at school, department and faculty level and at institutional level. The Panel considered these processes for ensuring a student voice is heard at all organisational levels of the University are exemplary.

The University's current Learning and Teaching Plan includes several "actions" related to digital technologies, digital learning and alignment of infrastructure developments with teaching and learning requirements. However the Panel deduced that decisions to engage in use of contemporary digital technologies for teaching remained largely a matter of individual staff preference or were individual department or school or faculty initiatives. The Panel recommends that the University gives urgent attention to developing a coherent strategy to develop digital technologies and staff engagement with these for student learning.

Information resources under the stewardship of Libraries and Learning Services are highly regarded and the University is commended for continuing to provide exceptionally good quality services to staff and students.

The University aims for "a diverse student body of the highest possible academic potential". The University is commended on its long-standing comprehensive, systematic and informed approach to encouraging the access and transition of Māori and Pacific students, including the University Targeted Admission Scheme (UTAS), clear communication of admission requirements and wide range of activities to support transition. In particular, the Panel commends the support provided by the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences' Māori and Pacific Admission Scheme (MAPAS) and the Tuākana Learning Community.

The University identified some areas of risk surrounding the provision of academic advice, and the Panel recommends that it establishes formal protocols in this area. In the provision of non-course-related information, the University is commended on its AskAuckland website and mobile app.

The University's processes for course and programme approval are consistent and robust, and include a range of mechanisms to seek relevant stakeholder input. The University's current Graduate Profile is in need of refreshment to reflect its contemporary aspirations for its graduates.

The Guidelines for Programme Reviews are comprehensive. The Panel recommends that the University explores ways of ensuring that programmes which are subject to professional accreditation review are reviewed regularly for assurance that they also deliver general education and non-discipline-specific experiences which align with the institution's Graduate Profile.

The Panel considered that the University's processes for managing and monitoring assessment practice and outcomes are sound. It is satisfied that the University has adequate procedures in place for identifying and assisting students who might be at risk of not meeting the University's achievement expectation. The University is commended on the introduction of a mandatory academic integrity course and on its initiative in making this available for open access.

The University has recognised the particular issues of student engagement that are linked to a multiple site, city-based institution with a large percentage of students living at home. Overall, the Panel was satisfied that the University has very good support services to ensure a safe and inclusive environment for its staff and students.

The Panel was impressed with the University's triangulated approach to teaching evaluation and is satisfied that the University has appropriate mechanisms in place to reward staff who demonstrate excellent teaching capability. The Panel affirms the University's new Academic Standards policy as a defining document to clarify performance and responsibility expectations of academic staff. The Panel also affirmed the research ethos of the Centre for Learning and Research in Higher Education and the wide range of services it offers to staff and postgraduate students.

The University has ambitious goals for postgraduate student numbers and completions, and routinely benchmarks its postgraduate activities with comparator universities. The University has robust examination processes in place, and is commended on the extensive range of resources and services it makes available for doctoral students. The Panel recommends that the University implements electronic systems for reports on research supervision.

The University has made significant progress in its overall risk management since the previous audit in 2009. The Panel affirmed the University's planning and risk management procedures at an institutional level, while urging the University to give priority to finalising the proposed Teaching and Learning Continuity Plan and communicating this to all staff and, as appropriate, to students.

In sum, the Panel had no issues of serious concern regarding the University of Auckland's conformity with the expectations expressed in the Cycle 5 Guideline Statements. The majority of these were met, in some cases at a high standard. In most cases where improvements are needed, the University had identified this in its self-review.

The University identified nine enhancements which it intends to undertake by 2016. The Panel supports these enhancement initiatives.

The Panel has made eight commendations, six affirmations and seven recommendations.



The full report is available from the AQA website: www.aqa.ac.nz/aucklandcycle5.

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