

Report of the 2014 Academic Audit of Victoria University of Wellington Executive Summary

Established in 1897 as a constituent college of the University of New Zealand, Victoria University of Wellington has existed as an autonomous university since 1962. In 2005 the University acquired the Wellington College of Education and now delivers its academic programmes from four sites in the Wellington metropolitan area. The University also has a small presence overseas. In 2013, the University had a total enrolment of 21,151 students (16,855 EFTS) and 1,885 full-time equivalent staff. Victoria's academic offerings span a wide range of programmes from foundation to doctoral level. The University lays claim to a "special character" arising out of the interplay of its interdisciplinary strengths, successful collaboration, supportive community of higher learning and the unique opportunities emanating from being located in the nation's capital city. It has New Zealand's only School of Government.

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. Victoria was most recently 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 is satisfied that appropriate action has been taken to address the 2009 recommendations. In particular, the Panel noted that the University has made considerable progress in its provision for Māori and Pasifika students.

At the time of the audit, the University had recently appointed a new Vice-Chancellor. It was developing a new Strategic Plan and in the process of reformulating the senior management structure and responsibilities. The Panel commends the University on its strong strategic planning process and the extent of stakeholder consultation for its new Strategic Plan. The Panel specifically commends the University on the clarity of its commitment to Māori in the Strategic Plan and with respect to Māori and Pacific development in the Equity and Diversity Strategy, and on the endeavours made to ensure structure and leadership are appropriate to give effect to the University's plans for Māori and Pacific students and staff. The Panel also commends the University on the embeddedness of mechanisms and activities to support the recruitment, retention and achievement of Māori and Pasifika students, including the Te Pūtahi Atawhai peer mentoring programme and the Wainuiomata Pasifika Education Success Initiative.

One of the University's major strategic initiatives is the Learning Partnership project. The Panel commends this initiative and accompanying plans, guidelines, resources and activities which support the philosophy of learner-centred academic processes within a co-ordinated framework. The Panel commends the University's work in developing its new Graduate Profile. The Panel was impressed by the consultation with both staff and students; the manner in which the connections between the Profile, graduate attributes and graduate outcomes are being mapped from course level to

institutional level; and the opportunities which are being provided to enable students to achieve co-curricular attributes.

Overall, the Panel commends the University on its coherent and coordinated suite of Strategies, Action Plans and Frameworks to guide its teaching, learning and student support and is satisfied the University has good processes in place to monitor use, acceptability and effectiveness of its services. The Panel recommends the University give priority to completing the Course Information Project and the review of academic advice in order to enhance the quality, reliability and consistency of academic advising across the University.

The Panel was convinced that the University has strong processes in place for endeavouring to ensure the design of spaces for teaching, learning and student informal use are informed by user experience and potential pedagogical developments. The University uses Blackboard as its learning management system, augmented by a range of other tools and technologies. The University is aware that there is scope for staff to extend their use of Blackboard beyond mainly the provision of information and that there is a challenge to link different disparate information systems together for the purposes of student reporting. The Panel recommends that the University gives priority to implementation of its Strategy for Digital Learning and Teaching.

The Panel was impressed by the coherence of the various institutional quality management processes and associated documentation developed in recent years. In particular the Panel commends the University on its suite of academic handbooks which comprehensively and clearly set out expectations and requirements for programme development, approval and review and for assessment, thereby forming a set of guidelines for all staff. The Panel is confident the University's review processes for programmes and courses are robust, systematic and are followed up to ensure good outcomes for the programme. It is recommended that the University develops a high-level benchmarking statement which sets out the objectives and potential strategies whereby staff might assure themselves that programmes, curricula and assessment are benchmarked to prevailing national and international standards. The Panel also discerned a disjunction with respect to quality assurance of programmes delivered overseas which needs to be addressed.

The Student Feedback on Teaching and Courses Policy sets out the conditions of and frequency with which courses and lecturers, including new lecturers and tutors, are expected to be subject to student evaluation. The Panel recommends that the University gives urgent attention to implementation of a proposal to require course outlines to include feedback to students regarding the outcomes and actions taken as a consequence of responses from course and teaching evaluations. The Panel is satisfied the University's academic appeals and grievance processes are robust.

The Panel commends the University on its success in raising the profile and valuing of excellence in teaching during a period of significant focus on improving institutional research output, and on its strong commitment to the development of teaching excellence.

The establishment of the Faculty of Graduate Research (FGR) was seen by the Panel to be a good initiative. The Doctoral Policy and the Master's Thesis Policy were considered to be examples of

good practice. The Panel suggests the FGR might extend its monitoring processes to include aspects of master's supervision and also recommends that the University explores development of a protocol which enables some centralised reporting of individual issues which might be serious, systemic or point to problems with University processes which need to be addressed. Overall, the Panel is satisfied that the requirements for external scrutiny through the examination process of both doctoral and master's theses facilitate national benchmarking and, in the case of PhDs, international evaluation.

The Panel had no issues of serious concern regarding Victoria University of Wellington's conformity with the expectations expressed in the Cycle 5 Guideline Statements. The Guideline Statements were met, in some cases at a high standard. The University identified eight Enhancement Initiatives which it intends to complete within the next audit cycle (by 2019). The Panel supports these enhancement initiatives and has emphasised some of them for prioritising.

The Panel has made 12 commendations, seven affirmations and eight recommendations.



The full report is available from the AQA website: www.aqa.ac.nz/victoriacycle5.

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