

Report of the 2015 Academic Audit of the University of Waikato Executive Summary

Established in 1964, the University of Waikato is located in Hamilton, in the rohe of Waikato Tainui. The University also has a base in Tauranga, where it has offered papers since 1998, and teaches some papers online. The University's motto *Ko te Tangata* (for the people) reflects its philosophy that the University is "in, of and for the community". In 2014, the University had a total enrolment of 12,232 students (9,904 EFTS) and 1,483 full-time equivalent staff. Waikato's academic offerings span a wide range of programmes from foundation to doctoral level.

The University was audited by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) in 2015. The current 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 2015, Waikato was most recently audited by AQA (as the then New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit) in 2010. 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 2010 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 2015 audit, the University had recently appointed a new Vice-Chancellor. It was in the process of reformulating the senior management structure and responsibilities. One of the University's major strategic initiatives is the Curriculum Enhancement Programme. In the Panel's view this project has the potential to be transformative if it addresses the full spectrum of pedagogical dimensions, including curriculum, graduate outcomes, assessment and delivery. A number of the Panel's recommendations are intended to assist the University with its curriculum enhancement objectives.

The Panel explored a range of academic activities from a perspective of consistent application and equitable impact. It concluded that the federated model of provision across a number of areas posed a risk to the University. In some cases there was potential replication of activity (for example provision of institutional academic advice; support of priority groups of students); in other cases there is a risk that services to both staff and students are not delivered equitably (for example, student learning support; induction support for staff; variation in practice regarding appeals and management of academic integrity). In the Panel's view, this model is currently not conducive to sharing, whether of good practice or of local challenges. The Panel recommends that the University undertakes a thorough review of a range of different academic activities in order to identify where there is potential for unnecessary replication, inconsistency and/or inequity to occur. The Panel also recommends that once it has undertaken this review the University develops guidelines, procedures or policies (as appropriate) to ensure practices facilitate consistent quality of support for both staff and students.

The Panel was impressed by some of the University's recent and planned space developments and it was made aware of various activities available to staff to develop their teaching. The Panel concluded that the University needs to more proactively encourage staff to take advantage of the expertise available to them, in particular from the Waikato Centre for eLearning (WCEL) and the Teaching Development Unit. It is suggested that relocation of the management of the Centre for Tertiary Teaching and Learning out of a faculty would assist in this objective.

There are robust processes in place to ensure academic staff who are appointed are appropriately qualified and experienced. However the Panel was concerned that ongoing evaluation of teaching performance appears weak, since formal evaluation results normally are private to the individual concerned. The Panel recommends that the University reviews this practice and ensures that academic line managers receive performance data for the staff for whom they are responsible to inform the professional development reviews they undertake with these staff.

The University employs a range of processes for gathering feedback from current undergraduate students. The Panel recommends that the University develops a mechanism for gaining feedback from graduates, aligned with its current postgraduate exit survey. This will become increasingly important as the University implements the new graduate profile articulated within the Curriculum Enhancement Programme.

Processes and support in the postgraduate area are a strength of the University. The Panel supports the establishment of a School of Graduate Research. It commends the University on its overall management of postgraduate research and on the documentation pertaining to supervision. The intention to impose greater institutional oversight of faculty-based master's research is endorsed.

The University provides excellent support for Māori and Pacific students. It has some promising initiatives in place to support other groups who might face particular challenges in attending or succeeding at university, for instance rural students and those who are first-in-family. The Panel cautions that any significant growth in numbers of international students is likely to prompt an increasing need for support, particularly to assist students to overcome non-academic challenges.

The Panel encourages the University to develop work on benchmarking initiated in 2010, in particular by addressing which academic activities would most benefit from benchmarking, for what purpose, and including the identification of relevant comparator institutions.

On the basis of its assessment of the University's activities the Panel has made five commendations, seven affirmations and eleven recommendations. The University is expected to report on its response to the recommendations made by the Panel in twelve months' time (late 2016 or early in 2017) and again at the time of the next academic audit.

The full report is available from the AQA website: www.aqa.ac.nz/waikatocycle5.

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