Evolving Quality

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Abstract

Quality assurance expectations and methods need to evolve to meet the changing needs of universities (and other institutions), governments and students. Quality assurance also needs to be forward looking to ensure that it addresses future challenges to academic quality. Therefore, the agencies responsible for undertaking quality assurance also need be future focussed and evolve.

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand universities has been in existence for 25 years this year. In contrast to many quality assurance bodies, it has remained in largely the same form and employing the same overall method of quality assurance. Despite this apparent 'sameness', how AQA will undertake its sixth cycle of academic audit constitutes both continuity and evolution in academic quality. It needs to both reflect and respond to changes impacting on universities and continue to support the maintenance of high standards of academic quality that New Zealand universities are known for.

Keywords: quality assurance, academic audit, development, New Zealand, universities

Introduction

Quality assurance expectations and methods need to evolve to meet the changing needs of universities (and other institutions), governments and students. Quality assurance also needs to be forward looking to ensure that it addresses future challenges to academic quality. Therefore, the agencies responsible for undertaking quality assurance also need be future focussed and evolve.

Much has been written and continues to be explored about the changing nature of tertiary education: how students are becoming more diverse, their changing expectations about how, where and when they learn; the sorts of qualifications and other credentials that are available through universities and other providers, and the ways in which these can be accessed; and how the staff of tertiary institutions are changing, as well as changing expectations for those staff.

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand universities has been in existence for 25 years this year. In contrast to many quality assurance bodies, it has remained in largely the same form and employing the same overall method of quality assurance, insofar as academic audit has been our method, since the establishment of AQA and its predecessor organisation, the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU).

Despite this apparent 'sameness', how AQA will undertake its sixth cycle of academic audit constitutes both continuity and evolution in academic quality. It needs to both reflect and respond

[1] http://www.ipm.edu.mo/heconf2018/

to changes impacting on universities and continue to support the maintenance of high standards of academic quality that New Zealand universities are known for.

This paper will set out how quality assurance for New Zealand universities is evolving to meet both the changing expectations of universities and quality assurance and examine its future focus. It first sets out the context for New Zealand universities as background to the development of Cycle 6. It then comments on key factors that were considered or reviewed in the development of Cycle 6. This is followed by a description of Cycle 6, with particular attention to three components. The final section develops conclusions and suggests implications.

This paper draws on discussion and consultation papers that were used in the Cycle 6 development process. It also includes material from the Guide to Cycle 6.

**The Quality Context for New Zealand Universities**

 New Zealand universities have particular characteristics that contribute to shaping their quality assurance arrangements. Many of these characteristics are so deeply embedded as to be both self-evident and 'invisible' through acceptance. Being explicit about these characteristics will however assist in understanding why the New Zealand universities are developing their quality assurance arrangements in the way that they are. Key characteristics include:

- The quality assurance system for universities is mature and the universities themselves have mature quality assurance processes.
- The university system itself has been relatively stable (notwithstanding responses to shifts in funding and policy directions) and entry and exit of players has not been a feature of the system. All New Zealand universities are considered to be of high international quality.
- The Vice-Chancellors are responsible for quality assurance matters in universities. As part of giving effect to these responsibilities, the Vice-Chancellors have established the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities to "maintain and enhance the quality of the academic activities of universities …" (AQA, 2018).
- Quality assurance for New Zealand universities does not have a regulatory function. Although the Vice-Chancellors have statutory responsibility for quality assurance in New Zealand universities, quality assurance has not functioned in a regulatory manner.
- Quality assurance activities are underpinned by ten principles (UNZ and AQA, 2013). They are that quality assurance is:
    1. Developed by universities,
    2. Evidence-based,
    3. Enhancement-led,
    4. Founded on self-review,
    5. Assured by peer review,
    6. Collective and collegial,
    7. Individually binding
    8. Internationally endorsed
    9. Independently operated
    10. Publicly accountable.

Academic audit, as part of the quality assurance processes for New Zealand universities, takes place within a broader (although somewhat disaggregated) reporting and accountability framework. New Zealand universities participate in and undertake a range of other quality assurance processes, for example, processes for programme approval, institutional reviews and initiatives, professional

accreditations, external examining networks, peer benchmarking activities and international quality rankings. Other requirements and processes, for example, annual reporting and financial audit, performance-based research funding, and government funding processes (arguably) include a quality assurance element or intersect with quality assurance processes. The development of Cycle 6 needed to recognise and leverage (and make visible) the entirety of the accountability and reporting framework as it relates to academic quality.

Quality Assurance in NZ Universities
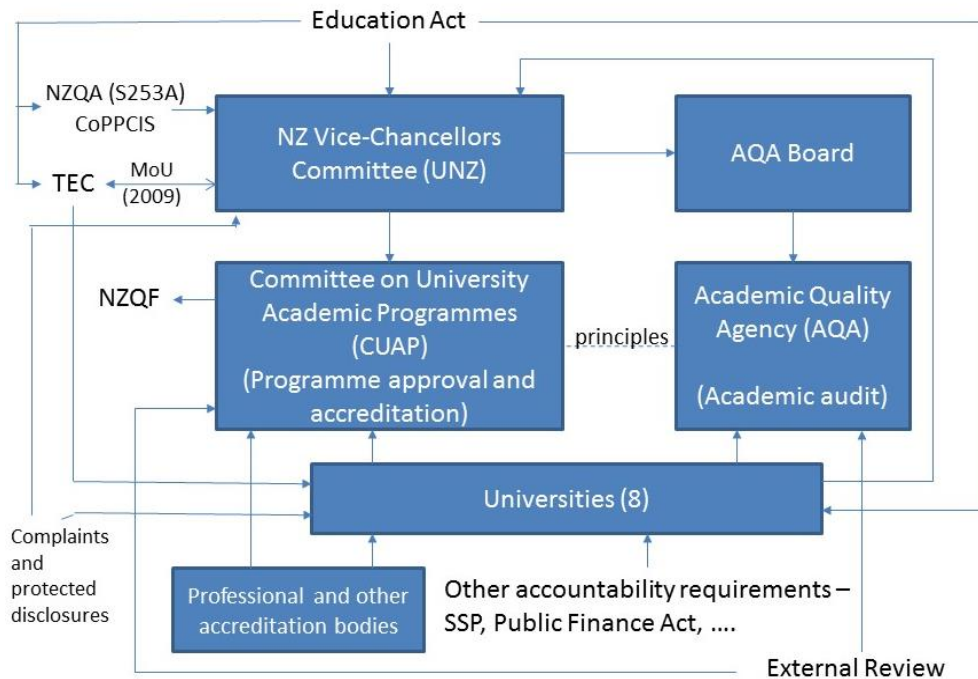
Context aside, key features of the AQA academic audit relative to other systems are:

- The size of the systems – the New Zealand university system is among the smallest in terms of number of institutions and students.
- All New Zealand universities are ranked in the QS World University rankings and the Times Higher Education World University rankings (EducationCounts, 2018).
- AQA is not a regulator and it places high levels of emphasis on peer review.
- Enhancement through quality assurance activities has been a feature of the New Zealand approach.
- New Zealand universities are not individually self-approving and self-accrediting institutions. This is in contrast to most other mature systems.
- AQA and the New Zealand universities have experienced less change than other systems.

The Development of Cycle 6 Academic Audit for New Zealand Universities

Preparation for a sixth cycle of Academic Audit for New Zealand universities began in early 2016. This preparation was informed by:

- A 2015 External Review of AQA,

- Analysis of audit findings from Cycle 5,
- Feedback from universities and auditors on their experiences of Cycle 5,
- Discussions with universities regarding their needs and expectations for a sixth Cycle of academic audit,
- International and national trends and developments in education, and
- Analysis of trends in external quality assurance.

Each of these is briefly outlined below, with references to where further details may be found. This section also provides an overview of the key steps in the development of Cycle 6.

2015 External Review of AQA

As part of its own commitment to quality enhancement, AQA undergoes regular external review. The 2015 External Review of AQA (Crawford et al., 2015) recommended that AQA "consider, in consultation with universities and other stakeholders, how cycle 6 might be more focused". This was "to ensure that universities can derive the most benefit from the audit process and ensure alignment with each university's strategic goals, including what it means to be a university, and an academic, in the 21st century".

Analysis of Cycle 5 Academic Audit Findings

The development of Cycle 6 was informed by a preliminary analysis of the commendations, affirmations and recommendation made by Cycle 5 audit panels. The full analysis was published in June 2018 (Matear, 2018b).

The fifth cycle of academic audit took place between 2013 and 2016 and utilised a framework of 40 guideline statements across seven academic activity themes:

(1) Leadership and management of teaching and learning;
(2) Student profile: access, admission and transition processes;
(3) Curriculum and assessment;
(4) Student engagement and achievement;
(5) Student feedback and support;
(6) Teaching quality; and
(7) Supervision of research students.

Overall, results indicate that New Zealand universities have maintained high academic quality standards and there are no issues of systemic concern.

Feedback from universities and auditors

For Cycle 5, feedback was sought from panel members and universities after an audit report had been released, using templates of structured questions. This feedback and other analysis found the coverage of the Cycle 5 Audit Framework to be appropriate and no major gaps were considered to exist. It was also found to be a robust means of enabling audit panels to provide a fair assessment of the quality of a university's processes. Nonetheless, opportunities to enhance the framework, and its support of a coherent narrative of university quality processes, were identified. They included further attention being paid to evidence within self-reviews and strengthening the self-evaluative nature of self-review reports.

The review of audit processes (Matear, 2018a) reinforced the importance of the self-review component of academic audit and the ongoing importance of site visits. Site visits are a demanding

part of the audit process for both universities and audit panels and the insight and conduct of panel members was valued in Cycle 5. Other panel processes, including communication of findings to universities were found to be appropriate and effective. Opportunities to enhance audit processes, so that site visits are most effective, included changing the meeting schedule for audit panels and considering the purpose of different categories of questions to be asked in site visit interviews.

University needs and expectations

A series of discussions with individual universities took place between April and June 2016 and involved the Deputy Vice-Chancellors or other senior university leaders responsible for academic quality and senior quality managers.

The comprehensive nature of the cycle 5 framework was generally seen as useful, both in terms of directing a university's attention usefully and in terms of prompting whole of institution discussion and engagement with quality assurance. The existence of an external framework for quality assurance continues to be a useful prompt for internal change and mechanism to achieve change.

Other comments relevant to the design of the framework included concerns that the level of detail and specificity in the guideline statements made it more difficult to maintain an overview perspective and coherent narrative and risked 'atomisation' of quality assurance activities. Auditors and universities also cautioned that the level of detail in the framework has the potential to reduce everything to being of equal importance.

Although universities suggested that the comprehensive framework had worked well, they also indicated that there were a number of areas where a more focussed, or thematic, approach might be valuable.

Developments in education

This paper does not attempt to capture the highly dynamic nature of higher education worldwide. A number of dedicated commentaries exist on this topic. However, it does recognise that education and its students is undergoing substantial change and that this level of change is likely to continue into the future.

Trends in external quality assurance

As education changes, so too do the requirements for external quality assurance. Matear and King (2017) have attempted to develop a taxonomy of quality assurance systems. They suggest that quality assurance for the New Zealand tertiary education system reflects global trends of divergence between large, diverse systems that adopt a risk-proportionate approach and smaller, more homogenous, systems that are more enhancement oriented. The New Zealand universities system falls into the latter category.

Development process

The materials outlined above were used to develop a discussion paper "Options for a sixth cycle of academic audit for New Zealand universities". The paper was presented at an AQA "Support for Quality" conference in October 2016 and then released to universities for feedback. Feedback on the discussion paper then informed the development of a consultation paper released to universities in November 2016. The components of Cycle 6 Academic Audit were agreed in May 2017 and finalised in August 2017.

Cycle 6 Academic Audit for New Zealand Universities

Cycle 6 Academic Audit builds on Cycle 5 and preceding cycles of audit for New Zealand universities. In building on previous audit cycles, it recognises and leverages the quality assurance strengths and capabilities that New Zealand universities possess. Cycle 6 Academic Audit has 10 components and will be delivered over three main phases.

The ten components are:

A. Maintain an internationally referenced, cyclical, peer-review model of external quality assurance.
B. Maintain a high-trust, enabling, relationship between the universities and AQA that recognises and respects universities' responsibility and accountability for quality as well as AQA's Terms of Reference and independence.
C. Maintain the scope of academic audit on teaching, learning, support and outcomes for students.
D. Build on and refresh the Cycle 5 academic audit framework (guideline statements) and further emphasise outcomes and the use of evidence.
E. Incorporate a thematic enhancement topic agreed by all universities that will address an issue that is both a strategic priority for universities and of national importance.
F. Audit universities 7-8 years after their Cycle 5 audit.
G. Include students or recent graduates in audit panels.
H. Amend the audit delivery method so that Panels spend more time together initially and that time spent at the university can be more targeted and require meeting with fewer individuals.
I. Develop audit reports to comment on outcomes and enhancement initiatives, as well as processes.
J. Include a public report on a university's response to recommendations. A mid-cycle follow-up report on Cycle 5 recommendations will be introduced.

Each of the components is discussed further below, with particular attention paid to Components D, E and F.

A. Maintain an internationally referenced, cyclical, peer-review model.

This will retain commonality with smaller, high-quality, systems such as Scotland and Ontario and consistency with both the European Standards and Guidelines (ESG) for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (2015) and the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) Guidelines of Good Practice (2016). The potential to move to a minimum/threshold-standards approach was considered. However, a framework and approach that utilises cyclical review was preferred for the above reasons. The retention of peer reviewers is also preferred.

B. Maintain a high-trust, enabling, relationship

Academic audit does not exist in isolation and universities are subject to a range of reporting and accountability requirements. Where appropriate, Cycle 6 will seek to utilise these mechanisms and maintain the ability for academic audit to reflect an individual university's ethos and priorities.

C. Maintain the scope of academic audit on teaching, learning, support and outcomes for students.

The scope of Cycle 6 academic audit will remain on teaching, learning, support and outcomes for students; and key contributing processes. This is consistent with Cycle 5 (Cameron, 2013) but differs from earlier cycles which also included research. Research quality for New Zealand universities is considered to be assured by other systems including the performance-based research funding system.

D. Build on and refresh the Cycle 5 academic audit framework

This section is extracted from the Guide to Cycle 6 (Matear, in prep.)

The over-arching objectives of the Cycle 6 audit framework are:

1. to provide a set of guideline statements that a university will gain value from evaluating itself against and from the assessment made by the audit panel, leading to enhancement; and
2. to provide assurance of the quality of New Zealand universities.

The guideline statements set out expectations of outcomes and standards that a university of good international standing would be expected to demonstrate. They are not fixed, minimum, standards but are relative and dynamic.

The Cycle 6 Audit Framework is based on the framework that was considered to be effective in Cycle 5 (Matear, 2018a). It has been refreshed through workshops with academic quality professionals in New Zealand universities. These workshops considered:

- Feedback from universities and audit panels on the coverage of the Cycle 5 framework, including where overlaps may have been found in practice to occur within the Cycle 5 framework. This is detailed in a Process Review of Cycle 5 (Matear, 2018a).
- The extent to which the Cycle 5 and Cycle 6 audit frameworks aligned with other frameworks, in particular the UK Quality Code (QAA, 2015), the Australian Higher Education Standards Framework (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017) and NZQA's Key Evaluation Questions (2017), and
- Patterns of commendations, affirmations and recommendations in Cycle 5 audit reports (Matear, 2018b).
- The ability of the framework to address current and likely future issues in academic quality assurance, such as 'employability, information and advice for students, academic integrity, for example.

The Cycle 6 framework contains 30 guideline statements, organised into 5 sections (Figure 1) plus an introduction/preface:

1. Leadership and management of teaching and learning and academic quality,
2. Student profile, life-cycle, support and well-being,
3. Curriculum, assessment and delivery,
4. Teaching quality,
5. Postgraduate students.

The sections/parts of the audit framework are inter-connected. Students are placed at the 'top' of the framework as it is the experience and achievement of students and having confidence in the standards achieved that is the focal point of academic quality assurance. Student experience and achievement is delivered through good quality curricula and teaching; and all are underpinned by

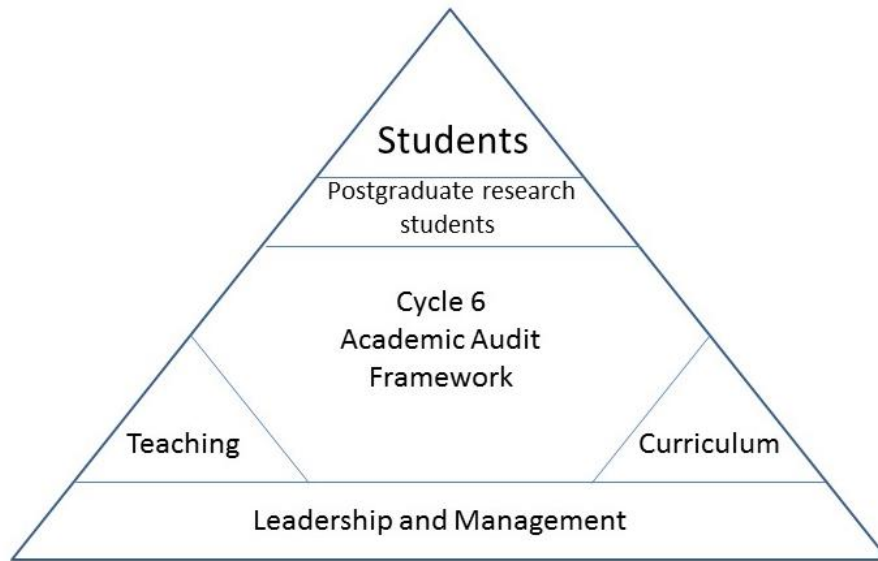good quality university-level processes and systems in the leadership and management of teaching and learning.

Figure 1: Cycle 6 Academic Audit Framework (1)

In addressing the guideline statements, universities will be expected to consider **all students, all delivery** and **all staff** who teach or supervise or support teaching or supervision and give emphasis to specific groups as is appropriate to their priorities, student body and delivery profile. Therefore, the scope of Cycle 6 academic audit extends to:

- All students, reflecting diversity and inclusivity. Taught postgraduate students should be included in sections 1-4, section 5 focuses on postgraduate research students.
- All modes and forms of delivery, including flexible, blended, online, distance, offshore, other campuses, with partner universities or other providers.
- All staff who teach or supervise or support teaching or supervision.

The Cycle 6 academic audit framework is also underpinned by relevant New Zealand legislation and constitutional framework (as was the case for Cycle 5 (Cameron, 2013)). In addressing the Cycle 6 guideline statements, universities and audit panels will be expected to reflect:

- university obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (New Zealand Government, 1989; Jennings, 2004),
- the close interdependence of university research and teaching and most university teaching being undertaken by people who are research-active (New Zealand Government, 1989), and
- universities' role as critic and conscience of society (New Zealand Government, 1989; Jones et al., 2000).

The conceptual model of the Cycle 6 Academic Audit Framework (Figure 1) can be extended to show these scoping and underpinning components (Figure 2). In their self-review processes universities would reflect on the framework as a whole and consider where they would give particular attention to the underpinning components. A summary statement outlining how the university has done this could be included in the Preface/introduction section.
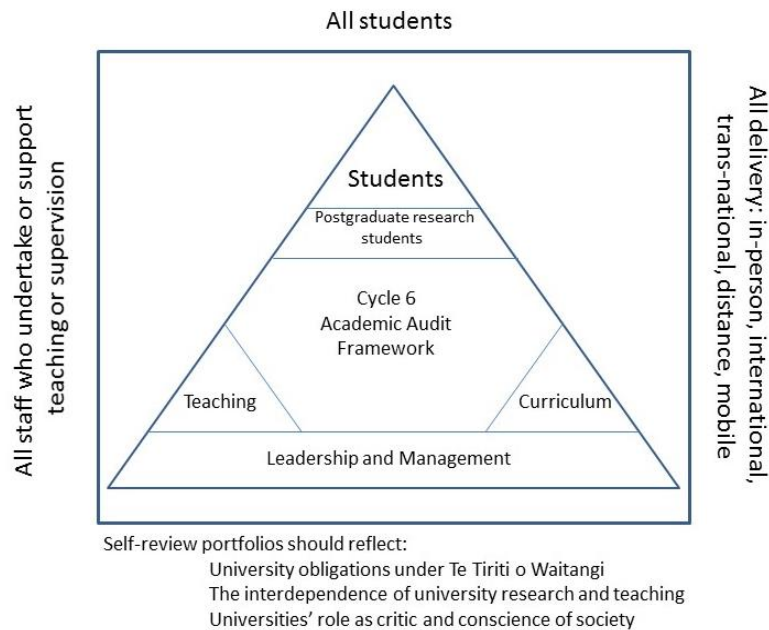
All students

Students

Postgraduate research students

Cycle 6
Academic Audit
Framework

Teaching

Curriculum

Leadership and Management

All staff who undertake or support teaching or supervision

All delivery: in-person, international, trans-national, distance, mobile

Self-review portfolios should reflect:
University obligations under Te Tiriti o Waitangi
The interdependence of university research and teaching
Universities' role as critic and conscience of society

Figure 2 Cycle 6 Academic Audit Framework (2)

The guideline statements that have been re-developed through this process are more 'outcomes' oriented than the Cycle 5 framework of guideline statements on which they were based.

E.   Incorporate a common thematic, or focus, enhancement element

Enhancement is a long-standing feature of quality assurance for New Zealand universities and has previously been evident as an under-pinning principle (UNZ and AQA, 2013) and in enhancement initiatives identified by universities as part of their self-review processes (Cameron, 2103). These aspects of enhancement will continue to be present in Cycle 6 Academic Audit and are supplemented by the introduction of an enhancement theme. In developing an enhancement theme, AQA has drawn on the experience of QAA-Scotland. Scottish universities have been participating in enhancement themes since 2003 (Bamber, 2017).

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 are not all 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.

The enhancement theme topic for Cycle 6 is "Access, outcomes and opportunity for Māori students and for Pasifika students. This topic is a strategic priority for all universities and is an issue of national importance. It will complement work already underway in and across universities.   AQA (then NZUAAU) has previously undertaken work and produced a report on "New Zealand Universities and Te Tiriti o Waitangi" (Jennings, 2004) as part of its 'Series on Quality'.

F.   *Audit universities 7-8 years after their cycle 5 audit.*

Extending the period between academic audits beyond five years reflects the maturity of New Zealand universities with respect to their own quality assurance processes, the wider reporting and accountability framework for universities that academic audit contributes to and recognises that

major academic quality initiatives in response to audit recommendations can take some years to become embedded.

Internationally, 8 years is not without precedent, although it is at the longer end of a period between external reviews. In Australia, for example, TEQSA will re-accredit universities (and other providers) on a timeframe of up to seven years, although it does also undertake an annual risk assessment of all providers. As noted above, the New Zealand universities demonstrate mature quality assurance management capabilities. No systemic concerns about quality assurance are considered to exist and the potential value to universities (and students) of addressing a significant enhancement theme is considered to be greater than undertaking academic audit on a shorter timeframe.

While quality assurance is considered to be an ongoing process, international experts have commented that the pattern of engagement between universities and AQA over the 7-8 year period is important. A mid-cycle report on Cycle 5 will be introduced to assist in maintaining continuity of quality assurance activities. This will be in addition to the existing one-year follow-up report and the two-year informal follow-up meeting. It is anticipated that for the audit component, the pattern of engagement between a university and AQA would be as set out in Figure 3.

Year	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	Cycle 5 report	One-year follow-up report	Two-year informal meeting		Mid-cycle report (NEW)	Informal follow-up (NEW)	Planning meeting Audit		Cycle 6
Ongoing	CUAP (quarterly), Support for Quality conference (annual), Professional and other accreditations, internal quality assurance								

Figure 3 Pattern of engagement over the audit cycle

It should be noted that the current configuration of CUAP means that universities also have regular peer-review of academic activities with respect to academic programmes, including internal programme review cycles. AQA maintains a dialogue with universities and it is anticipated that universities would signal any major changes relevant to quality assurance. Provision exists for an academic audit to be conducted in a shorter time period, should the need to do so be agreed.

G. Include students or recent graduates in audit panels.

Cycle 6 will include students, or recent graduates, as full and equal members of audit panels. Efforts to ensure that students, or recent graduates, are available with appropriate experience are being progressed in conjunction with the New Zealand Union of Students' Associations (NZUSA). They include capability building and knowledge transfer activities and are governed by a Memorandum of Understanding between AQA and NZUSA.

H. Amend the audit delivery method

One of the components of Cycle 6 is that panel members will have a longer first meeting, with the objective of being able to reach conclusions on a number of guideline statements and need less, but more targeted, time at the university and need to meet with fewer individuals. An option is to consider that three types of interview sessions may be needed in Cycle 6:

1. Strategic framing interviews, typically with the Vice-Chancellor and senior management, to allow the panel to appreciate the strategic context and priorities of the university and how these have shaped their approach to academic audit.
2. Triangulation/validation questions to allow the panel to confirm that the self-review portfolio is a fair reflection of the reality of the university. These would include interviews with academic staff (new, established, professorial), students (undergraduate, postgraduate, residential, distance), heads of department, student support professional staff including learning support and possibly others.
3. Specific, probe, interviews where the panel has insufficient evidence to form a conclusion or has questions. The topics for these interviews should be able to be provided in advance and the university would determine the most appropriate people for the panel to meet with.

Scope needs to be left in the schedule of site visit interviews for emergent issues. If these are significant, it may be that a supplementary visit would be required. This would not be the intent of any change to the audit processes for Cycle 6, which will continue to draw on a mature, constructive and transparent relationship between the university and the panel.

I. *Develop audit reports to comment on outcomes and enhancement initiatives, as well as processes.*

Reframing the guideline statements (Component D) will allow audit reports to also be more outcomes-oriented.

However, audit panels and audit reports do not endeavour to reach summative judgements as it is considered that the audit methodology would not support summative judgments being reached.

The model of audit panels making commendations, affirmations and recommendations will be retained, and audit panels will comment on the enhancement initiatives identified by universities in their self-review reports.

J. *Include a public report on a university's response to recommendations.*

The public availability of audit reports is another longstanding feature of the quality assurance system for the New Zealand universities. In more recent cycles, universities have provided a one-year follow-up report on their progress in addressing recommendations and progressing their own enhancement initiatives. However, these follow-up reports have not been public reports.

This situation will change with cycle 6 with the follow-up reports also being public reports. Universities are encouraged (but not required) to make the mid-cycle report, introduced as part of maintaining engagement over the longer period between audits, public.

Phases

These components will operate over three main phrases (periods) of the Cycle (Figure 4). The phases are:

1. The enhancement phase (2017 – 2019);
2. The audit phase (2020 – 2023); and
3. The review, evaluation and planning phase. (2024)

Figure 4 Cycle 6 Phases

Although there are different components and phases in the Cycle, they are mutually reinforcing and are not expected to operate totally in isolation from one another. The phases may be more appropriately viewed as emphases rather than discrete components. For example, during the enhancement phase/emphasis period, universities will be continuing to progress recommendations and affirmations from Cycle 5 academic audits. They will also be developing mid-cycle reports from Cycle 5 academic audits. Given that the quality culture of New Zealand universities is mature and that audit is part of ongoing quality assurance activities, it is expected that self-review activities will also carry on during the enhancement phase. Work to develop students, or recent graduates, as auditors will also occur in the enhancement period.

Reciprocally, during the audit phase, universities will continue to progress enhancement initiatives and the enhancement theme itself is expected to give rise to specific guideline statements and may re-frame others.

Conclusions and implications

Cycle 6 academic audit for New Zealand universities very clearly builds on Cycle 5. It has learnt from Cycle 5 and sought to retain aspects that were considered to work well and respond to aspects where opportunities for improvement were identified. It has utilised the Cycle 5 audit framework as a basis for developing the audit framework for Cycle 6 and it retains longstanding features of self-review and peer review as key elements of the audit process, and academic audit itself as its quality assurance tool.

Cycle 6 has also responded to the 2015 External review of AQA (Crawford et al., 2015) and incorporated elements from other jurisdictions. The major reflection of this is the inclusion of an enhancement theme and enhancement phase in Cycle 6. However, the more outcomes-oriented framing of guideline statements, seeking to gain a systemic view of quality in a university, the inclusion of students, or recent graduates, as auditors and increased public reporting all reflect developments in other jurisdictions.

In developing Cycle 6, AQA has learnt from jurisdictions which are more similar to it and those which are very different. In all cases however, it has appreciated how the context of those jurisdictions has shaped the quality system that has developed. This is also the case for New Zealand and the context for New Zealand universities, particularly their level of maturity, established quality, and size of the sector, has shaped the sixth Cycle of Academic Audit for New Zealand universities.

The composite model for Cycle 6 Academic Audit of New Zealand models reflects both continuity and change. None of the elements of the model are new in themselves, although some are new to New Zealand. However, together they are a novel configuration for Cycle 6.

The more novel aspects that have received more attention in this paper have implications for universities, audit panels and the Academic Quality Agency. The enhancement theme has implications for the ways in which universities work together and being prepared to share initiatives and approaches to the enhancement theme topic. It also brings a wider set of university functional areas into direct contact with academic quality processes. The audit framework which takes an embedded or systemic approach to academic quality in setting its scope as all students, all delivery and all staff who undertake or support teaching or supervision has implications for universities with respect to the sorts of evidence they will need to provide to demonstrate this embeddedness. It will also have implications for audit panels who will need to assess whether the evidence presented meets the guideline statement. The change in the audit delivery method and the inclusion of students, or recent graduates, as members of audit panels will also have implications for audit panels and for AQA which needs to recruit and develop auditors for Cycle 6.

In developing Cycle 6, the Academic Quality Agency has worked closely with universities. This is appropriate as Cycle 6 needs to deliver value for universities and the audit framework should be prompting the sorts of questions that the university would want to know for itself. It needs to be beyond question however that the audits themselves are undertaken by an independent panel of auditors.

The purpose of the AQA (AQA, 2018) is to contribute to the advancement of New Zealand university education by:

- engaging as a leader and advocate in the development of academic quality,
- applying quality assurance and quality enhancement processes that assist universities in improving student engagement, academic experience and learning outcomes, and
- supporting confidence in the academic quality of New Zealand universities.

The development of Cycle 6 Academic Audit as a composite model that includes explicit (and related) enhancement and assurance components will allow it to continue to fulfil its purpose.

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