

Report of the 2015 Academic Audit of National University of Samoa

Audit undertaken on request by the Academic
Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities

April 2015

*Te Pokapū Kōunga Mātauranga
mō ngā Whare Wānanga o Aotearoa*

AQA

Academic
QualityAgency
For New Zealand Universities

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This audit report was prepared by the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities at the request of the National University of Samoa. The audit used a modified version of the Cycle 5 Academic Audit Framework adopted for the New Zealand universities for the period 2013 – 2016. Cycle 5 academic audits are framed around academic activities related to teaching and learning and student support.

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Foreword

In 2013 the National University of Samoa (NUS) approached the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) with a proposal for AQA to carry out an academic audit of the University. This would be the first such audit undertaken by the University since its establishment in 1984. The arrangement was confirmed by both parties via the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement in 2014.

It is important to note that the methodology and audit framework adopted for the audit of NUS is similar to that used for New Zealand universities in the fifth cycle of New Zealand academic audits. The New Zealand universities have long-standing and mature academic processes which have benefitted from regular scrutiny over twenty years. The National University of Samoa is a relatively young university and it could be expected that many of its academic processes might still be in a developmental stage given the structural evolution of the institution.

The focus of this audit of NUS is on teaching and learning and student support. The methodology is founded on a framework of 23 Guideline Statements which were developed after extensive discussion with New Zealand university stakeholders, including Vice-Chancellors, staff, students and auditors. The Guideline Statements are informed by comparable frameworks in other jurisdictions, in particular the QAA (UK). They are expressions of the qualities or standards which a contemporary university of good standing internationally might be expected to demonstrate.¹

The University's Self-review Portfolio, including a report and key supporting documentation, followed the general guidelines for self-review provided by AQA for New Zealand audits.² The Self-review Report included references to a number of policy documents and reports. Further documents were provided on request as needed.

The Chair of the audit Panel and the AQA Director visited the University for a pre-audit planning meeting in December 2014. In addition to reviewing the logistics of the site visit, the planning visit provided opportunity for the Chair of the Panel to meet with some members of the Senior Management Team. The audit site visit commenced on 24 February 2015.

Audit analysis is based on the documentation provided by the University and available on its public website, and on the information gained during interviews on site. While this audit does not include any evaluation of leadership, management or socio-political context, auditors have been mindful of the impact of these matters on academic quality and the areas which have been evaluated. Where relevant to the University's ability to meet its teaching and learning objectives, reference is made to these aspects of the University's experience.

The AQA's audits are not accreditation or compliance audits but are intended to assist universities with their own objectives towards enhancement of academic activities and outcomes. The AQA's

¹ The New Zealand version of the framework has 40 Guideline Statements. The NUS audit did not include some areas which are included in the New Zealand audits, in particular those related to management and leadership and a more extensive review of postgraduate research.

² Academic Audit Handbook: The National University of Samoa. AQA, 2013.

conclusions regarding improvements which might be made are thus phrased as recommendations, not requirements. AQA defines recommendations, affirmations and commendations, as used in this report, as follows:

Recommendations - refer to areas where the audit Panel believes the University needs to make some improvements. Recommendations alert the University to what needs to be addressed, not to how this is done. The Panel may indicate some priority for recommendations by noting a need for action as urgent.

Affirmations – refer to areas which the University has already identified for itself in its Self-review Report as requiring attention, and about which the University has already taken action but does not yet have sufficient outcome to evaluate impact. Affirmations are in effect a validation by the audit Panel that something needs to be done and that the approach taken is likely to be effective.

Commendations – refer to examples of exceptionally good practice, or to examples of effective innovative practice, in areas which have or should result in enhancements to academic quality or to processes underpinning academic quality and which should produce positive impacts on teaching, learning and student experience.

AQA is pleased to have been able to assist NUS by undertaking this audit.

Dr Jan Cameron

Director

Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities

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List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AQA	Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities
ARTENA	NUS's student management information system
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
EFTS	Equivalent Full-Time Students
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IT	Information Technology
MESC	Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture
Moodle	NUS's learning management system
NUS	National University of Samoa
Oloamanu Centre	Oloamanu Centre for Professional Development and Continuing Education
Panel	Unless otherwise specified, "the Panel" refers to the Academic Audit Panel engaged by AQA to conduct the audit of NUS.
PSCC	Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate
QAA (UK)	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK)
SQA	Samoa Qualifications Authority
SR	Self-review Report
SSLC	Samoa School Leaving Certificate
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training

Introduction

The National University of Samoa was established in 1984 with a single programme, the University Preparation Programme. The first degree programme, a Bachelor of Education, was offered (briefly) in 1987, followed by a Bachelor of Arts in 1988. Since then the University has grown by accretion:

- Classes administered by the Samoa Society of Accountants became the Faculty of Commerce;
- In 1993 the School of Nursing of the National Health Department became the Faculty of Nursing (later included in the Faculty of Applied Science as a School of Nursing);
- In 1997 the Western Samoa Teachers' College became the Faculty of Education;
- In 2006 the Samoa Polytechnic, which included Trades training, the Maritime School, and a range of vocational studies, merged with the University;
- In 2013 the former Oceania University of Medicine became the NUS Faculty of Medicine.

These various acquisitions have led to integration of programmes into different faculties and the integration of administration, personnel and financial services. A vital part of the development was the transition of the Teachers' College and the Polytechnic as Institutes of Higher Education and Technology respectively, prior to the final recent step towards Faculty status.³ The Panel was told that the implications of these mergers are still being worked through.

The National University of Samoa established in 1984 was in a compound at Malifa. The University moved in 1997 (after the merger with the Teachers' College) to its current campus at Le Papaigalagala in Apia. The Faculty of Medicine remains located in the Apia hospital.

In 2014 the University had 320 staff and 2793 students. Provisional student enrolments for 2015 were approximately 3500.

The University is governed by the National University of Samoa Act 2006 and the NUS Amendment Act 2010. The audit Panel explored this legislation in the context of the approval and accreditation of NUS higher education programmes and the deliberations the University has been having with the Samoa Qualifications Authority, whose Act the Panel also reviewed (see section 2.1).

University structure and roles

NUS has six faculties and a Centre, each faculty headed by a Dean and the Centre by a Director (number of schools/departments in parenthesis):

Science (3)
Arts (3)
Applied Science (5)
Business and Entrepreneurship (2)
Education (3)
Medicine
Centre for Samoan Studies.

³ Corporate Plan, pp15-16.

In addition to degree-level programmes and some postgraduate programmes, the University teaches TVET and Foundation Studies. TVET and Foundation teachers are located within the above faculties. In 2014 the student enrolments in the three areas included within the University were:

Foundation	776
TVET	659
Degree-level and postgraduate	1,358

Deans report to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. The Director of the Centre for Samoan Studies reports to the Vice-Chancellor and is also a member of the DVC and Deans Committee. The organisational structure also includes administrative sections and staff and Directors.

The University is governed by a Council. University committees include an Executive Committee, Finance Committee, Audit Committee (all committees of Council) and the Vice-chancellor's Committee which comprises all Deans, Directors and senior management. The University also has a Professional Development Leave Committee, Resource and Space Utilisation Committee, and Research and Ethics Committee, all of which are also chaired by the Vice-Chancellor.

The Senate is the peak academic body. In addition to the Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor and faculty representatives it includes the Librarian, Director of the Oloamanu Centre, President of the Students' Association and the Registrar.⁴

Vision, Mission and Values⁵

The Vision of the National University of Samoa is *to be recognized nationally, regionally and internationally as a vibrant and innovative centre of excellence in research, Samoan studies and quality teaching and training across all disciplines.*

Its Mission is *to be the provider of Samoan Studies, quality teaching, professional training and research to meet the human resource needs of the country.*

The Values underpinning all activities of NUS, and articulating ideals to which it aspires to hold itself accountable are:

- Dedication and commitment
- Respect for the integrity of Samoan culture
- Collaboration
- Entrepreneurship
- Innovation and creativity
- Integrity and accountability
- Diversity
- Financial stability
- Responsiveness
- Achievement and excellence.

⁴ 2014 Calendar, pp13-16.

⁵ Corporate Plan 2015-2017, pp4-5.

The core activities referred to are described as “pillars” which form the basis for the Strategic Plan:

- Research
- Teaching and learning
- Community engagement and international partnerships
- Resources and infrastructure
- Leadership and governance.

The University’s major Objectives as stated in the Strategic Plan 2010-2020 and re-stated in the Corporate Plan 2015-2017 include the desire to

- be recognized nationally and internationally as the premier research institute in Samoa (Objective 1);
- actively upgrade and maintain quality and creativity in teaching and learning (Objective 2); and
- transform its physical and IT infrastructure (Objective 4).⁶

The Corporate Plan is derived from the ten-year Strategic Plan and lists thirty strategies aimed towards achieving the University’s objectives. From its investigations during this audit the Panel could see that a number of these strategies will be a major challenge and are probably beyond the University’s current financial and human resource capability. Other objectives however, such as the promotion of staff development, should be feasible within current resources. Different sections of this report address a range of the strategies which are mentioned in the Corporate Plan.

Several interviewees described the Corporate Plan as a wish-list or collective dream, but not in any pejorative sense. This approach is consistent with what the Panel heard from a range of people, both internal and external to the University, namely that there is a cultural tendency towards ambitious goals, with the belief that at least some of these might be achieved. It was implied, given the University’s always fragile and uncertain funding provision from year to year, that it is difficult for it to plan to a reasonably anticipated income. It must therefore set its sights on an ideal desirable outcome. In the Panel’s view this approach to planning provides uncertainty at institutional level, as well as uncertainty in providing direction for the work of senior managers.

It is not the purpose of this audit to evaluate the University’s planning, leadership or governance. However some aspects of these are noted as they impact on teaching and learning and student support, which are the audit’s focus.

Developments identified in the Corporate Plan

The Corporate Plan lists four major capital projects for development:

- Construction of the Ocean Campus for Maritime Training and Research. The building (funded by a donor) is underway but the project does not include funds for outfitting the buildings or for essential technical equipment. A case is being made for donor funding for outfitting.
- A new ICT building
- A new Library
- A new Student Support Services Centre.

⁶ Corporate Plan, p6.

The new Samoan Cultural Centre for Samoan Studies is under construction.

Infrastructure developments listed are in ICT improvements and an upgrade of the student management system, ARTENA.

Programme developments, including three postgraduate programmes, are listed in the Corporate Plan.

Other projects listed in the Corporate Plan as desirable but not currently economically feasible include the expansion of laboratories to manage student growth. The Panel had concerns about the matching of key infrastructure provision with the current growth in student enrolment, where the pressure is most likely to be felt in the availability of specialist facilities.

The Panel discussed financing strategies and understands the difficulty the University experiences in being dependent on a combination of internal and community fund-raising and donor support for developments which are not funded within the capital and operational allocation provided by government. Currently the Samoan government provides approximately 60% of the University's income. The University has a three year rolling financial plan which secures salary and operational costs but includes nothing for capital works. The actual amount received from government is negotiated annually. NUS states that "the National University of Samoa does not foresee a 'self-sustaining' status in the near future and as such its dependence on government for financial assistance will remain as the inevitable and indefinite situation for the NUS".⁷ This situation has meant particular efforts by NUS to develop flexible facilities which can earn external income (in particular the gymnasium and the fale, but the Panel also notes the external revenue earned by the Oloamanu Centre – see section 4.5).

The Education Sector Plan

Along with the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC) and the Samoa Qualifications Authority (SQA), the University is a partner in the government's Education Sector Plan 2012-2016. The sector plan states that it is intended to involve stakeholders "in tackling the developmental needs of the education sector in Samoa".⁸ It sets out the expectations for the whole sector and provides a framework for the development of post-secondary education. The Panel was interested in this plan in part because it has been the source of discontent within NUS by aligning the University with other providers who are not engaged in degree-level ("higher") education. NUS is one of three universities operating in Samoa;⁹ the Panel understands it would prefer to be recognised for its higher education status rather than being aligned with providers operating at sub-degree level. The Panel's interest in the Education Sector Plan was also because it makes some specific comments about teacher education which the Panel expected would impact on NUS (see section 2.3).

⁷ Corporate Plan, p18.

⁸ Samoa Education Sector Plan July 2013-June 2018, p7.

⁹ The other two universities are the University of the South Pacific which teaches both by distance and face-to-face and has a campus at Alafua, and Amosa which teaches in Samoan and offers a strong Samoan culture and languages programme. (Corporate Plan, p27.)

The Education Sector Plan is ambitious and it is recognised by many that not all objectives are attainable in the timeframe of the Plan. This creates mixed expectations and no certainty about implementation which can impact negatively on the planning and decision-making required by NUS. NUS is in the relatively unusual position of being involved as a policy-setter in many areas of the Plan and is additionally the major provider of tertiary education in Samoa. While this arrangement is beyond the scope of this audit to comment on it might impact on delivery of teaching and on student learning.

The Academic Audit of NUS

In 2013 NUS invited the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities, AQA, to undertake an institutional audit focused on teaching and learning and student support. NUS and AQA negotiated an audit strategy which has been based on the methodology used for the current (Cycle 5) New Zealand university audits.¹⁰ The methodology incorporates a set of Guideline Statements which New Zealand universities have agreed express the qualities which might be expected of a contemporary university of good international standing. These Guideline Statements were developed after consideration of standards used internationally, in particular by the QAA (UK).

The Panel observes that most New Zealand universities have existed for over 100 years, and that this is the fifth audit cycle they have engaged in. To expose itself to such an audit as NUS has done is a courageous move for a university which has existed for less than thirty years and has not experienced a conventional institutional audit before. The Panel has been mindful of NUS's evolution. It has also endeavoured to be sensitive to local exigencies and cultural context.

The audit process involved the University undertaking a self-review and submitting a self-review report and supporting documents to AQA. This material has been examined in detail by the Panel and additional information sought as necessary. The Chair of the Panel and the AQA Director visited the University in December 2014 for planning meetings and to begin on-site understanding. The full Panel of three auditors visited the campus in February 2015 for four days. During that time Panel members met with and interviewed 43 staff, Council members, students, a number of stakeholders and graduates, as well as the Prime Minister and the Chair of the Education, Sciences and Technology Committee.

The Panel thus reviewed a considerable amount of information that included a range of views that were not always in agreement. The findings presented in this report represent the Panel's analysis of what it has read, heard and experienced, taking account of the context in Samoa and the experience of universities internationally. The Panel has endeavoured to be fair with its conclusions, recognising that NUS experiences constraints which might not be experienced by other universities with which it might wish to compare itself.

At the request of the University, this audit focuses mainly on degree-level (higher education) programmes, teaching and learning, and student support. It did not explore TVET programmes or

¹⁰ New Zealand university audits extend in greater detail into areas not included in the NUS audit, in particular in postgraduate research and student engagement, and areas such as risk management, delegations and strategic planning.

experience in any detail. However the Panel was interested in the Foundation programmes as suitable preparation for degree-level study. Foundation programmes are equivalent to NCEA Level 3 taken in year 13 in New Zealand high schools. The Panel recognised that students entering Foundation programmes may come from a diverse array of high school experiences and in turn may have a variable preparation.

When undertaking an academic audit, panels commonly benchmark a university's activities and processes against appropriate comparator institutions. In NUS's case, the Panel considered that the most relevant comparators are likely to be those institutions to which NUS loses its brightest Foundation students and from which NUS is most likely to recruit returning or expatriate staff in future. They include those universities where NUS staff are most likely to study for higher degrees as part of their development programme. To the Panel's knowledge, these universities are most likely to be the University of the South Pacific (USP), or universities in Australia or New Zealand.

1. Student Profile; Access, Transition and Admission Processes

The National University of Samoa in 2014 had 2,792 students, of whom just under half were higher education students¹¹:

	Headcount	
Foundation programme	776	
TVET ¹²	<u>659</u>	1,435
Degree	1,305	
Postgraduate	42	
Masters	4	
PhD	<u>2</u>	<u>1,358</u>
Total		2,793

In 2015 the enrolment increased to 3,500 students, predominantly representing an increase in the Foundation programme intake. Almost all students are Samoan nationals. There are slightly more women than men. The Panel was told this mirrors the gender trend in senior secondary school.

The University does not have any distance students or satellite campuses outside Apia.

The Panel learned that the University's funding from government is not related directly to enrolment numbers. This disjunction is potentially exacerbated by such a high proportion of students being non fee-paying and the occasional situation (reported to the Panel) of difficulty in extracting fees from the parents of students who are fee-paying. In the Panel's view, no university can expect to enhance quality in a systematic way if it is unable to predict or control its student numbers and associated funding. To protect itself from the risks to quality which flow from unexpected changes in student numbers or profile the University should negotiate a more appropriate funding formula and one that more clearly mirrors funding formulae in other jurisdictions that link student volume more explicitly to financial investment. Step-wise funding increments might reflect the real pressures on the University from significant volume growth. Alternatively, or in combination, the University should adopt measures which will ensure the student numbers do not rise beyond that which can be adequately resourced to provide these students with a high quality education (see section 1.1).

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that in consultation with the appropriate authorities NUS develop a formula for funding which ensures government grants include a component which directly relates funding to student numbers.

¹¹ SR, p9.

¹² Technical and Vocational Education and Training

1.1 Admission and selection

Universities' admission and selection policies and practices should be clear and publicly available to students.

The University provided the Panel with a flow chart which sets out clearly the different admission requirements for both degree-level programmes which require the Samoa Secondary Leaving Certificate as first point of admission into the University's Foundation programme, and other TVET and sub-degree programmes which require School Certificate for entry. Admission and selection policies are specified in the Calendar, in terms of results in the Pacific Senior Secondary Certificate (PSSC), as well as the Samoa School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) which has replaced it.¹³ To the extent that it is appropriate to regard results in the SSLC as equivalent to those in the PSSC, the admission and selection policies and practices for the Foundation programmes, and subsequently to higher education programmes, are set out clearly and are publicly available to those who can get access to the Calendar. These school examinations are administered by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESC). The Panel deduced that the introduction of the SSLC and the replacement of scaled marks in the PSSC by raw scores in the SSLC created considerable uncertainty for the University in terms of those who were eligible to enrol in the NUS Foundation programmes in 2015.¹⁴

The students interviewed by the Panel were mostly unfamiliar with the Calendar and tended not to use it. Students seemed more likely to use information provided by their Faculty, their Department, or by individual staff (academic or counselling). It follows that there is a need to standardise the enrolment, course, statute, and policy advice that Faculties and some Departments are currently providing to ensure consistency across the institution.

The University currently has no cap on numbers and no preferential selection, though there are prerequisites for enrolment in the different Foundation streams. The Panel heard a number of times of the issues emanating from admission of under-prepared students. The Panel also recognised the difficulty the University experiences in being the sole provider of Foundation programmes in Samoa. Since the funding is not linked to the number of full-time equivalent students (efTs), the Panel suggests consideration might be given to the introduction of additional screening to ensure students admitted to programmes have a reasonable chance of success, and that student numbers within programmes are maintained at manageable levels. Any such strategy must be accompanied by clear selection policies and procedures which are readily and publicly available and should be subject to monitoring and evaluation.

The self-review indicates that enrolment currently is a time-consuming paper-based process. The Panel was told that capability to introduce online enrolment is being explored. However the Panel also heard of the limited access that students have to computers, both personally and on campus.

¹³ For example, 2014 Calendar p82.

¹⁴ 2013-2014 Annual Report, p53. Scaling of some sort is a common method of ensuring year-to-year consistency of examination results in a school population. If the abandonment of scaling by the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture leads to wide variations from year to year within and between subjects, then the University may be faced with challenging enrolment decisions each year.

This constraint will need to be factored into any shift to an online enrolment system, and potentially a dual system will be required at least for a transitional period.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University consider introducing a selection system for admission to Foundation Certificate programmes, to ensure all those who are admitted have a reasonable chance of success and that the University admits only as many students as it can resource appropriately.

1.2 Access and Transition

Universities should use policies and/or procedures which are designed to assist the access and transition of equity groups or other priority groups.

NUS exhibits a desire to recruit broadly and to maximise access to its programmes in an inclusive way. The only priority group identified is students with a disability, of which the University had just two students.

Sponsorship by a range of organisations means that approximately 40% of students (1,069 in 2014) can access their education without the financial cost of tuition fees. A significant proportion of these students are in nursing (235 students in 2014) or education (268 students in 2014) programmes.¹⁵ This emphasis presumably reflects the requirement under the National University of Samoa Act 2006 that the University provides education and training which is “responsive to the needs of the people of Samoa”.¹⁶

The Foundation Certificate Programme provided by NUS is the main entry pathway for most students. Although requirements for entry to the different streams in the Foundation Certificate programmes are clear, it was suggested to the Panel that there was some variation across secondary schools in the access students had to subjects that could be regarded as essential for tertiary study. The NUS Foundation Programme is intended to bring final year school leavers up to the level of secondary schooling which would normally provide the pathway into degree level study. Graduates of the Foundation Programme would thus be expected to be of comparable standard to students entering university directly from secondary school in New Zealand or Australia. The Panel was told that there is scope for improving the interaction between NUS and schools, such that schools are better able to inform their students of the potential pathways available and what these would require in student preparation.

The Panel heard that the top students from the Foundation programme receive scholarships to study in New Zealand, Australia and Fiji. Scholarships decisions are made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The process inevitably deprives NUS of the highest performers from its Foundation Programme. The Panel was also told of students who sought admission to New Zealand universities having completed the NUS Foundation Programme who had been required to do the New Zealand Foundation Programme before being admitted to specific degrees. The Panel understands this is a particular problem in science and mathematics. It heard that there is a

¹⁵ SR, p15.

¹⁶ The National University of Samoa Act 2006, clause 5(a), p38.

credibility issue with the SSLC (as the entry route to the NUS Foundation Programme). The Panel appreciates that the standard of the secondary school entry point is outside the University's domain, but sees that this has a flow-on effect. The University also provides for mature-aged student admission. The University does provide bridging programmes in English and Mathematics but possibly closer attention needs to be paid to ensuring these address all groups of students needing assistance.

Various interviewees pointed out to the Panel that students were commonly unprepared in the kinds of personal skills which are fundamental to successful study. The Panel therefore suggests that the University also strengthens those components of the Foundation Programme that deal with life skills, confidence building, study skills, time management and other areas which are important for a successful transition to a higher education learning environment. The proposed Student Support Centre would enhance the ability to provide a wider range of support to students when it is implemented. Development of student support services is seen by the Panel as a priority.

The self-review states that the entire Foundation Programme will be reviewed in 2015.¹⁷ The Panel supports this review and in particular a review of admission requirements and exit standards and the impacts of the withdrawal of scaling of school grades. The review should also consider the learning support provided to students to ensure that successful completion of the Foundation Certificate provides them with a realistic opportunity of being successful in undergraduate study.

NUS has a very small number of international students – fewer than ten in 2015. A number of staff interviewed by the Panel recognised a need to do more to provide advice and assistance to students coming from outside Apia, including from Savai'i, rural Upolu and international students. While there is currently no need for a specific international section in NUS, staff must ensure that the needs of the relatively small number of international students are not overlooked. For instance, the Panel heard that while classes are formally taught in English (a second language for almost all students), informal explanations were commonly provided in Samoan. Faculties and Departments should be alert to the needs of students who are not Samoan, and in particular for those who do not speak the Samoan language. The Panel considers that inclusion of international students tends to be one of the characteristics of a good contemporary university. The issue of language of classroom communication will become more pressing if the University recruits more international students, especially at Postgraduate level.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University ensures that staff teaching or supervising students for whom neither Samoan nor English is a first language are aware of the challenges such students face and are sensitive to ensuring their effective participation in learning and student life.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University give priority to the development of a broad range of student support services to assist with gaps in both academic and personal skills and knowledge.

¹⁷ SR p14.

1.3 Academic advice

Universities should use processes for providing academic advice and course information to both new and continuing students.

Prior to enrolment the University provides a two-day programme for students to gain academic and career advice, provided mainly by faculties. An orientation programme following this addresses administrative aspects. From its discussions, the Panel concluded that advice subsequent to the initial enrolment period is given to students in a somewhat *ad hoc* manner. Both counsellors and individual academic staff provide academic advice to students, and academic staff sometimes provide the kind of advice that might more appropriately be provided by counsellors. The Panel heard of staff copying sections of the Calendar relevant to their particular programmes and creating handbooks for students.

The efforts taken by staff are no doubt sometimes helpful but the informal and *ad hoc* nature of this means there is no central oversight and a risk that academic integrity of advice might be compromised. The University has identified a problem with advice not always being accurate or complete with consequences for students which on occasion disadvantages them.¹⁸ An institutional protocol (policy and procedures) for giving academic advice is needed, to ensure (for instance) that advice is given only by those who are qualified to give it. Such a protocol might formalise faculty responsibilities, in which case it would be appropriate for each Faculty to provide a clear structure or resource to provide curriculum and other advice to students to help them deal with academic problems. The proposed faculty course advisers would be a good initiative¹⁹; they must have formally-articulated areas of responsibility, decision-making routes and communication to students to advertise their availability. Additionally, it must be clear who holds delegations, with the ultimate responsibility within a faculty being with the Dean. Counsellors and administrative staff should be made aware of structures and procedures so that they could advise students of the most appropriate referral route.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University develop an academic advice protocol, addressing:

- the distinction between “advice” and “information”;
- qualifications required of staff giving advice (i.e. who may give advice about what);
- the roles with delegated authority for making decisions related to academic advice;
- the form or process of official recording advice given (for instance, whether records are maintained centrally or at faculty level);
- the avenues for addressing student hardship emanating from incorrect or incomplete advice;
- the appropriate channels for referral for additional advice, counselling or support.

¹⁸ SR, p17.

¹⁹ SR, p17.

2. Curriculum, Assessment and Delivery of the Curriculum

In its review of a range of matters pertaining to programmes, students and teaching the Panel explored the role, membership and activity of Senate. Conventionally, Senate is the peak academic committee in a university, with oversight of the quality of programmes, student experience, teaching quality and examination outcomes. Related to this, the Panel investigated the staff roles and responsibilities of the proposed Academic Quality Unit. The Panel notes that the current proposal for the Academic Quality Unit is ambitious relative to the size of the University and perhaps a more phased implementation would reduce immediate cost and yet achieve positive outcomes.

A number of the Guideline Statements which follow are relevant to these two organisational units of the University and several of the evaluative comments in these chapters allude to them. The Panel makes the following recommendation and affirmation as umbrella conclusions, drawing on its assessment of particular activities.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that there is a complete review of the functions of Senate and how it conducts its business. The review should include consideration of the establishment of new sub-committees that deal with academic programme development and academic administration issues. The latter would centralise the resolution of student academic issues. In addition, the Senate should be more directly involved in receiving Faculty and academic programme reviews and in determining subsequent actions.

Affirmation: The Panel *affirms* the willingness of NUS to introduce new initiatives that will enhance academic quality and, in particular, the proposed Academic Quality Unit scheduled for introduction in 2015. The University should ensure that the work of the Academic Quality Unit is fully integrated into the operations of the Senate.

2.1 Programme approval

The University should have consistent and robust internal course and programme approval processes which meet any national and professional expectations and which include opportunity for input from stakeholders where appropriate.

The University has a formal procedure for the approval of new programme developments. On paper the process is similar to that used internally by New Zealand universities. The Panel notes that there is opportunity for student input via representation on Senate and Council. External stakeholder consultation is required for all new programme proposals. The normal avenue for this is via Faculty Curriculum Committees and Industry Advisory Panels (as appropriate). Currently this consultation is fed directly into Senate deliberations.²⁰

The Panel had concerns in two areas, in particular.

Firstly, while Senate assesses a concept paper for any new proposal prior to the proposal proceeding to programme design, the role of Senate in the final approval process appears to be unduly focussed

²⁰ SR, p20.

on word-smithing and formulation, tasks which might more effectively be undertaken administratively. Any academic proposal has several dimensions to be assessed, in particular:

- market and/or national demand and whether the programme fits within the University's strategic direction;
- employer demand;
- curriculum adequacy;
- proposed methods of assessment and moderation;
- conformity to rules or definitions related to the programme (e.g. whether course objectives are at an appropriate standard; whether the programme structure conforms to expected degree structure; provisions for admission requirements or pre-requisites, cross-credit etc. if relevant);
- feasibility and sustainability from a resourcing point of view.

These different dimensions might be assessed by people with different kinds of expertise or responsibilities, with all factors being conveyed in a Senate proposal.

The University does not have any subcommittee of Senate which might deliberate on the academic merits and adequacy of proposals. An academic programmes committee of Senate, comprised of senior academics (normally Deans) but also including a student member and possibly such roles as the Librarian, could give proposals close scrutiny before progressing them to Senate if the committee deems them worthy of University approval.

Secondly, the placement of the resource consideration by the Resource Space and Utilization Committee *after* the Senate approval process, in the Panel's view, is inefficient. This risks a proposal occupying considerable staff time and energy through the academic approval processes when it was never going to be viable from a resourcing perspective. The Panel suggests the resourcing analysis should be conducted at an earlier stage in the approval process, prior to the proposal going to Senate. If the above suggestion of an academic programmes committee is adopted then the resourcing report could form part of the documentation considered by that committee.

The proposed Academic Quality Unit might have oversight responsibility for managing an approval process and for ensuring the documentation eventually tabled at Senate is complete and in the appropriate form.

The Panel learned that NUS is considering seeking international review of its programme proposals. The Panel supports this initiative as it believes comment by international reviewers would be useful in helping the University ensure its programmes are internationally comparable, in particular with USP and New Zealand and Australian universities (see section 2.4). However care must be taken to ensure such review is not confused with international endorsement or accreditation.

The Panel was reminded on a number of occasions of the requirements of the Samoa Qualifications Authority (SQA) for accreditation of programmes, and spent considerable time endeavouring to understand the impasse which appears to have arisen between NUS and SQA with respect to accreditation of degree-level qualifications and programmes. The University has said that it accepts SQA's role in accrediting TVET programmes. However it disputes the authority's obligation to also accredit degree-level and postgraduate qualifications.

The Panel has reviewed and explored the implications of relevant legislation.²¹ It has also considered customary practice of universities wishing to benchmark themselves with other universities and with relevant professional bodies, both nationally and where possible, internationally. The Panel is reluctant to propose a direction for either NUS or SQA on this matter but does wish to convey its belief that the matter must be resolved urgently, and this must be done in a way which does not compromise the integrity of either organisation or the credibility of NUS programmes.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University seek a rapid conclusion to the current impasse with the Samoa Qualifications Authority over accreditation of higher education qualifications. Resolution of this issue must include future accreditation arrangements that are robust, internationally recognised and involve an agency or agencies qualified to judge the quality of specific NUS higher education qualifications, including those at postgraduate level. The Panel recommends that the parties agree to engage an external authority or expert to assist with this process.

2.2 Graduate Attributes and Graduate Outcomes

Universities should have clearly-defined intended graduate outcomes (graduate attributes) which are publicly available and accessible to students and staff, and should ensure students have opportunities to acquire those graduate attributes.

NUS requires all programmes and courses to have learning outcomes. Graduate attributes are expected for new programmes being proposed. However the self-review report indicates that graduate profiles for programmes are not uniformly communicated. The Panel endorses the suggestion that graduate profiles be included within programme regulations.²²

The University does not have a single institutional graduate profile. That is, there is no statement of characteristics which might make NUS graduates distinctive, or of skills or experiences that graduates might have in common. However the University's own Mission makes reference to meeting "the human resource needs of the country".²³ Such a statement implies employability of graduates and might also have other implications with respect to the attributes one might expect in an NUS graduate. The University's stated Values might also translate into specific graduate attributes, for example "collaboration", "innovation and creativity" and "respect for the integrity of the Samoan culture".²⁴

Employers who were interviewed had some clear expectations of the University's graduates. The Panel was told of some areas where employers believed graduates were not adequately prepared in discipline knowledge. More generally, employers referred to an inability to work effectively using English language as the medium of communication and about graduates not being able to progress from a simplistic acquisition of skills to being well-informed in a general sense of being well educated, and having the life skills to be able to translate their academic qualifications into work-

²¹ National University of Samoa Act 2006; Samoa Qualifications Authority Act 2010.

²² SR, p23.

²³ SR, p5.

²⁴ SR, p5.

relevance. Recent graduates reiterated the need to be able to transfer knowledge into practical application in the workforce.

From the above discussions the Panel deduced that two specific gaps exist with respect to graduate attributes. Firstly, there is a need to enhance English language acquisition by students. Secondly, in several areas there appears to be a need to provide opportunity for graduates to experience the practical application of their knowledge, for example with internships or field work. The Panel is aware that internships or work placements occur for professional degree-level programmes. It was told that some employers would be pleased to discuss opportunities to provide internships in other areas.

The University in its Corporate Plan cites as a reputational risk the quality of its graduates.²⁵ While part of this “quality” undoubtedly refers to disciplinary knowledge and skills, it might also imply more general attributes. The Panel suggests that the University community, including graduates and employers of graduates, engages in a discussion about the generic attributes which might be expected of an NUS graduate and explore the opportunities which the University and its stakeholders might provide for students to acquire these attributes. If a graduate profile is adopted then the University will also need to develop means of assuring itself and its students that the attributes are acquired.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University develops a statement of the general attributes expected of all NUS graduates, as well as articulating the specific attributes expected for graduates of each discipline and programme area.

2.3 Programme review

Universities should have regular reviews of programmes and courses, including external accreditation reviews, which include input from students and other stakeholders and which are used to ensure curriculum quality.

From its reading and interviews the Panel noted that NUS places significant reliance on programme reviews as its quality assurance mechanism for academic quality.²⁶ The Panel heard that responses to the Science Faculty Review had played an important role in implementing components of the Corporate Plan, and a similar role was expected from the Arts Faculty Review.

The University has a schedule of five-yearly programme reviews and has a formal policy for the conduct of reviews. The Panel believes the current five year interval between reviews is challenging in that it is putting significant pressure on University staff resources. The introduction of the proposed Academic Quality Unit should add much needed professional resources to the review process. The Panel read recent review reports and explored how the University addressed recommendations made by review panels. It noted that review reports are made to Council, which deliberates on recommendations. The dean of the faculty of a programme which is reviewed is required to present an Action Plan which addresses Council’s resolutions. Faculty is then expected to

²⁵ Corporate Plan, p28.

²⁶ SR, p25.

report to Council every six months until all resolutions have been implemented.²⁷ This process appears to bypass Senate, though Senate must approve any changes to courses or programmes which arise out of the review process.

The Panel was satisfied that a strong review process is in place but believes that Senate should be included in the initial reporting process so that findings or recommendations with implications for other areas can be identified and given consideration (see recommendation page 12). The enhancements proposed in the audit self-review report are sensible.²⁸

The Panel had some concerns about what happens subsequent to a review. In particular, the Panel believes NUS needs to give special consideration to those components of a review that reflect on its international standing in terms of academic practice and quality. The Panel recognises that in some cases recommendations have resource implications that present great budgetary challenges, but much can be achieved by advancing some of the recommendations in recent reviews that would put less pressure on the University budget. For example, the Panel learned from the Arts and Science Faculty reviews that teaching practice in some areas requires refreshing and updating to recognise contemporary pedagogies. In particular teaching should seek to enhance skills in rational enquiry, rational examination of evidence, efficient processing of data, critical analysis, informed debate and fluent and articulate communication in verbal and written form. Some teachers are emphasising content and fact-based approaches in their teaching that would not conform to good international practice. Up-skilling of teachers to address these challenges need not be hugely resource-intensive from a budgetary point of view.

The Panel explored the involvement of stakeholders in programme reviews. From University staff it heard much of the role of Curriculum Development Committees and Industry Advisory Panels in assisting the University with programme development. However stakeholders were less convinced about the role they actually played. The Panel concluded that the current Curriculum Development Committees are not providing suitable and consistent advice and do not fully recognise the importance of direct connection to employers to ensure that future graduates meet their needs. Several stakeholders indicated they would welcome more engagement with the University in this context.

The Education Sector Plan makes some specific comments about the failure of NUS to align its teacher education programmes with the new primary school curriculum. The Panel heard from stakeholders in the school sector that they would like more interaction with the University so that both parties are aware of developments in each other's sectors. NUS academic staff appeared unaware of the implications of the Sector Plan. A related issue concerns the national need for science and mathematics teachers against arguments by the University that students coming to them are not sufficiently well prepared in maths and science to succeed at university in these subjects. An impasse thus emerges whereby the University is also unable to produce sufficient graduates to become school teachers in these subjects. Resolution of this difficulty, which Samoa is not alone in experiencing, probably requires a national strategy which could be promoted by NUS.

²⁷ SR, p24.

²⁸ SR, pp25-26.

Commendation: The Panel *commends* the University on its commitment to a cycle of external reviews of Faculties and Departments and the open and transparent way in which the reviews are conducted and published. While the University appears to show a willingness to grapple with the recommendations from reviews, a more systematic mechanism for implementing accepted recommendations would be desirable.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University's faculties and departments should seek enhanced two-way engagement with employers, employer groups and professional bodies to assist in ensuring programmes are relevant to professional and employment needs and to assist with the preparation of graduates for employment.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that Senate should be directly involved in receiving faculty and academic programme reviews, in determining subsequent actions and in monitoring progress towards fulfilment of responses to recommendations.

2.4 Benchmarking programmes

Universities should use processes for benchmarking curriculum and assessment standards, including the assessment of theses, to ensure they are internationally appropriate.

The University relies on its programme reviews for benchmarking curriculum and assessment of taught courses. It includes overseas academics in its programme review processes to assist with ensuring appropriate curriculum quality and relevance. For postgraduate degrees there is an external examiner for master's theses and NUS examiners normally have had experience in an overseas university.²⁹

Where appropriate, NUS programme reviews may also serve as accreditation reviews. However the opportunity for such professional accreditation currently appears limited, in part constrained by the limited presence of internationally recognised professional bodies in Samoa. For instance, the Panel was told that the Faculty of Medicine had gone to the Philippines to explore how medical programmes might be accredited. NUS also has established links with both the University of Otago and University of Auckland medical schools.

The medium term objective of NUS should be to ensure that its curriculum design and assessment standards and teaching delivery at all levels have parity with, or are benchmarked against, those of its regional neighbours, particularly USP and Australian and New Zealand universities. Wherever possible, efforts should be made to recruit support from those jurisdictions to assist in this process. Substantiated systematic benchmarking against universities in these other jurisdictions should add significantly to the overall external credibility and reputation of NUS programmes and graduates. The Panel suggests the University should seek further external international relationships that enhance the quality of academic programmes at NUS.

²⁹ SR, p26.

2.5 Delivery of the Curriculum - Teaching

Universities should use processes for ensuring the teaching methods used and modes of delivery are appropriate for the objectives of the taught curriculum.

Teaching at NUS is predominantly face-to-face classroom or lecture based. In its self-review report the University documents a variety of teaching methods and uses of technology which support its curriculum and comments on possible future developments.³⁰ The medical faculty appears to be the most advanced in the use of online access, Moodle and applications such as podcasts. The Panel is mindful that electronic and digital technologies are constrained by student access and, to a large extent, by overall infrastructure capacity. While the self-review report records that many staff have been trained in the use of open education resources for online course development, the Panel received no information about such on-line courses being offered by NUS.³¹

Several field sciences engage in practical field work and other professional programmes and TVET programmes have work experience placements. The University has appropriate policies in place to ensure such activity supports the curriculum and to address safety concerns.³²

The Panel observes that the programme reviews currently undertaken are a useful tool for the University to assure itself of the fitness-for-purpose of teaching approaches. The Panel encourages the University to continue to engage external disciplinary experts in its reviews, to keep its teaching strategies under ongoing systematic evaluation and development.

It was difficult for the Panel to assess the appropriateness of teaching methodologies for the objectives of the taught curriculum across all the University's programmes. There were, however, a number of specific instances drawn to the Panel's attention, which suggest attention needs to be given to this activity. For instance, the Panel learned of rote learning in some courses, which it considers inappropriate for degree-level learning. It also heard about forms of assessment which did not seem appropriate for the discipline (for instance multi-choice assessment in disciplines where critical thinking and analysis are normally a key characteristic)³³. The Panel was told that there is a significant problem in laboratory subjects where inadequate resourcing means students are unable to practise themselves and practical experience is limited to observation of a teacher's demonstration. It also heard that there are gaps in the knowledge of accounting practices compared to what would be expected of accounting graduates elsewhere. Some of the above issues reflect curriculum inadequacy but all imply weaknesses in delivery. The above issues and other issues identified in the Arts and Science Faculty Reviews must be addressed if the University is to gain parity of educational outcome with other contemporary universities.³⁴

The Panel notes elsewhere that there are opportunities for inclusion of more work-based learning in degree programmes; that use of Samoan language to explain material disadvantages students who

³⁰ SR, pp27-29.

³¹ Training has been provided by the Commonwealth of Learning, CoL; SR p28.

³² Workplace/Industry Based Learning Policy; Regulations for Fieldwork and Excursions.

³³ Arts Faculty Review, p34.

³⁴ Review of Science Faculty, 2013; Faculty of Arts External Review 2014.

do not understand Samoan; and that local students need to develop their ability to work within the discipline in an English language medium.³⁵

The Panel discussed thesis supervision with staff involved in postgraduate research. The small number of thesis students are currently all located in the Centre for Samoan Studies, though in some cases their work crosses disciplinary boundaries and involves supervisors in other parts of the University, or overseas. The Panel is satisfied that supervision is undertaken in a manner which accords with practices in universities with which the Panel is familiar. The Panel was told that the Postgraduate Committee receives regular reports on thesis student progress from the senior supervisor. The small number of thesis students implies that formal processes for reporting and recording might currently be unnecessary, but if the number of thesis students increases and/or extends beyond the Centre for Samoan Studies, then the University should develop scalable institutional processes for oversight, reporting and, if necessary, addressing any problems related to thesis supervision and postgraduate student experience. The University also needs to consider the risk attached to current reliance on a small number of academic staff to provide supervision leadership and explore possibilities for succession planning.

Issues related to teaching development are explored in section 4.5 of this report.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University pay urgent attention to the recommendations related to curriculum, teaching and assessment in the recent Arts and Science Faculty reviews and assesses the fitness-for-purpose of teaching and assessment strategies in other faculties. In the latter case the assistance of an external person with expertise in teaching methods in comparable university environments would be helpful.

2.6 Delivery of the Curriculum - Resources

Universities should use processes for ensuring the facilities (including IT and library resources) and learning spaces are appropriate for the objectives of the taught curriculum and satisfy the requirements for postgraduate research.

The Library's budget is very small given the cost of journals, books and electronic resources.³⁶ The contributions made by a range of donors, both individuals and organisations (including Australian and New Zealand universities) are commendable and no doubt appreciated by the University. However this does not ensure the University provides the material which is most appropriate and current for the courses it teaches. In addition to interviewing staff, the Panel visited the Library and it observed for itself the inadequacy of library and study space, and noted a very limited and dated library stock. The University accesses an interloan service but this is not highly used because of the transaction cost.

Access to text books is a problem for students at NUS. The Panel heard several times that most students cannot afford to buy textbooks and thus rely on the Library to provide these. Staff

³⁵ The official language of instruction at NUS is English.

³⁶ The Panel was told the total library operational budget is in the region of Tala\$60,000- 70,000 of which about Tala\$20,000 is spent on acquisitions.

sometimes assist by photocopying relevant sections within the provisions of normal copyright conventions, which the Library can loan to students. A reserve loan system alleviates the problem in a minor way. It would not be reasonable to expect the Library to provide large class sets of text books. Also, allocation of Library resources to purchase of textbooks diminishes the funding available for building contemporary material across disciplines in a way which will support advanced study and staff and student research. The Panel was also told that students sometimes request references recommended to them by staff but these are actually owned by the staff member and are not held by the Library. Postgraduate supervisors rely on their own personal resources and access to research material via their own connections to staff overseas. Purchase of e-books or e-journals appears to be beyond current resource.

The issue about text books is a serious one and will not be solved easily by the Library alone. The Panel suggests that some responsibility lies with teaching staff to consider alternative supporting material for their courses such that expensive text books are not the main or only resource that students are expected to use. The Panel was told that some staff do produce readers for students and that copies of such readers may be held by the Library. An additional concern expressed by the Panel is whether such heavy reliance on textbooks is necessarily appropriate for students beyond the introductory levels of a discipline. The Panel is concerned that students are not exposed to a sufficiently wide range of contemporary resources to enable them to develop the critical awareness and analytical skill which is expected in degree-level study.

The inadequacy of laboratories and resources for carrying out practical work has already been noted (see section 2.5; also Science Faculty Review). The Panel reiterates the concerns of the Science Faculty review panel, which documented a range of issues related to laboratory space, equipment and chemicals. In addition to compromising the ability of students to achieve the learning outcomes pertaining to practical subjects, these shortages potentially place huge pressure on staff who endeavour to provide a meaningful scientific education for their students.

The Panel was shown some of the University's teaching buildings and heard about future plans. While the University has some new buildings and others in train, the state of existing facilities also needs addressing to facilitate effective teaching and learning. It heard about some classrooms having insufficient space for all students attending a class (a situation which might be due mainly to the unexpected increase in enrolments in 2015). It read that the design of laboratories was not what might be expected for a University but was more like those found in an Australasian secondary school.³⁷ There was no evidence of building design being planned or adapted to meet contemporary pedagogical styles (e.g. to facilitate problem-based learning or collaborative investigation). The Panel also heard about timetabling clashes, reportedly a result of teachers changing their teaching times, and it learned that because local bus services stop at 6.30pm there is little teaching after dark. Inadequate external lighting on campus was said to be a hazard.

Together, the problems with space provision are significant and there is no easy solution. The Panel has made some comments regarding possibility of managing enrolment (see Chapter 1, p8). The Panel was fully briefed on the budgetary constraints faced by NUS and the impact this has on teaching delivery. The Panel appreciates that the University cannot quickly address its building

³⁷ Science Faculty Review, 2013, p8.

stock but it suggests a stocktake might be useful in allowing the University to identify areas of greatest need and areas which might most easily be remedied.

Computing and IT resources appear to be another significant challenge for NUS. The Panel was told that students' computing skills are generally poor, that few students own personal computers and there is insufficient access to University computers. Internet is slow and has not been upgraded since 2006. Broadband access is expensive, both for individuals and for the institution, and Samoa as a whole has difficulties with both the cost of provision and with providers unable to supply demand satisfactorily. The Panel understands that price constraints require the University to rely on an inadequate submarine cable.

The University provides some digital and electronic facilities. Staff are required to be computer literate and students are expected to have an email address, though the Panel understands the University does not provide email addresses for students. Some staff use video-conferencing and Skype for interaction; there are some Wi-Fi hot spots and the University is planning more. Staff seek improved computing and IT support but so long as computing resources are limited, the University will be constrained in the extent to which it can pursue contemporary teaching and learning methodologies, as well as in the use of online administrative processes (e.g. enrolment). The Panel supports the University's efforts to upgrade its internet provision and also its attempts to recruit specialised technical personnel from Australian volunteers. It is clear though that greater investment is needed in infrastructure, skilled support, and student facilities if the University is to be able to provide for its staff and students a learning environment that is appropriate for degree-level teaching and learning and comparable to a modern university.

The Panel was impressed by the commitment of NUS to increase the number of students in postgraduate and thesis programmes. However resource constraints will have an impact on capacity to provide adequate support for their research. The Panel was told how staff adjust their research interests to work around existing constraints, for example, investigating social impacts of technological developments, rather than researching the developments themselves. The Panel envisages similar formulations being likely for postgraduate research, resulting either in a loss of students wanting to do "hands-on" research to other institutions or a bias away from some of the kinds of practical topics which could be of real academic or national benefit. It may be the case that the University has to take strategic decisions about the areas in which it can afford to support staff research, or has the capacity to support postgraduate research for the medium term.

The strategic documents of NUS, including the Corporate Plan, are commendably aspirational and the Concept Plans for building development are ambitious. The University refers to the current building phase as a "mega-million dollar development", funding for which is yet to be approved by Cabinet.³⁸ The Panel was pleased to note endeavours to ensure planned new spaces would have flexible use, and it noted the opportunities provided by the fale and gymnasium to generate external income.³⁹ However many of the current and proposed developments are also resource-heavy and some capital developments are dependent on external donors. This situation requires the University to establish a clear hierarchy of priorities in terms of directing resources to achieve the greatest impact on quality. As the primary measure of the international standing of NUS will be the quality of

³⁸ SR, p32.

³⁹ At the time of the audit the fale was being used to host an international conference.

its students (i.e. graduates), there is an argument for focussing scarce resources in the areas in teaching and learning, curriculum development and assessment to achieve the biggest impact and cost effectiveness. In this respect the Panel believes that investment in teaching and learning space and in IT access and facilities should have high priority.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University undertakes a careful and detailed analysis of its current capital needs and costs, including Library stock and computers as well as space needs, adequate provision of laboratory equipment and extended internet, and prioritises these against its teaching and learning priorities as the basis for a systematic, progressive improvement plan. Such improvements will need to be supported by appropriate provision of consumables (e.g. laboratory reagents) and adequate technical skill as appropriate.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University encourages and supports staff in exploring alternative kinds of material to support teaching and learning beyond that provided by textbooks, including e-resources, and in ensuring this material is appropriate to the levels of degree study and accessible to students.

Commendation: The Panel *commends* the University on the development of the fale and, in particular, its determination that the facility shall be used widely by the community as well as for university-related functions.

2.7 Assessment

Universities should use documented procedures for monitoring and moderating assessment processes and standards of undergraduate and taught postgraduate work.

The Panel understands that the paucity of library resources and availability of computer access is likely to impact on the kinds of assessment students can undertake. It also appreciates that not all students have living environments conducive to study and producing assessment work, while at the same time study space on campus is limited. Such restrictions might influence the kinds of tasks teachers set their students. Some staff might need assistance to develop assessment regimes which take account of widespread constraints while at the same time ensuring that students are evaluated fairly and by tasks which are appropriate to the level of study. The University should ensure that assessment methods are crafted to measure the aptitudes expected of university graduates (see section 2.2) as well as the knowledge content appropriate to each discipline. This should be a strong element in staff development and programmes provided through the Oloamanu Centre, including the Certificate of Adult Teaching.

The University has a Statute on Assessment and Examinations (including the grading system), a statute on the percentage of coursework and examination or competency for each course, and a statement requiring course co-ordinators to inform students of the assessment requirements within 14 days of the start of a semester.⁴⁰ Senate has overall responsibility for ensuring the integrity of

⁴⁰ 2014 Calendar pp342-350.

assessment outcomes. Each faculty is required by Senate to formally confirm grades and the Dean of the faculty is required to explain to Senate any pass rate lower than 67% for a particular course.

The processes for managing assessment decisions appear sound. The role of external standards for competency-based assessment in TVET courses and some professional programmes is helpful for assuring quality. Given comments made about the quality of graduates in some other programmes (see previous sections), the Panel does have concerns about whether assessment standards are appropriate to degree-level study in all programmes. This implies a need for some benchmarking against comparable degrees elsewhere, as has happened in the Science Faculty Review. The Panel is also concerned about whether there is parity across different programmes. The Panel heard from some staff about concerns regarding the consistency of assessment practice and outcomes in degree programmes.

The self-review report comments that the opportunity for formal external moderation is curtailed by lack of expertise in Samoa in many disciplines.⁴¹ NUS has a moderation policy for examination marking. These existing procedures of moderation and monitoring need to be reinforced and extended to other forms of assessment, with the objective of ensuring parity of standards with comparable programmes in other universities in the region. With judicious selection of work samples, moderation need not impose huge workloads on external partners. The Panel endorses the University's proposed enhancement to provide periodic training and re-training in learning and assessment to equip staff to moderate effectively.⁴²

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the medium term objective of NUS should be to ensure that its curriculum design and assessment standards and teaching delivery at all levels have parity with, or are benchmarked against, those of its regional neighbours. Wherever possible efforts should be made to recruit support from those jurisdictions to assist in this process.

2.8 Academic misconduct

Universities should use procedures for addressing academic misconduct, including plagiarism and other forms of cheating.

The University provides instructions to examiners and for students with respect to examination cheating. It relies primarily on academic staff to ensure students are made aware of issues related to other forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism. Information on proper referencing is reportedly available for students, but there is no formal educative process for either students or staff on the wider aspects of academic integrity.

⁴¹ SR, p33.

⁴² SR, p34.

While staff who were interviewed were aware of risks to academic integrity, the Panel considered that most would benefit from clearer advice on the nature of possible dishonesty, ways of discouraging and detecting dishonest practice, and clear directions on penalties or redress. Staff told the Panel of deducting marks for infringements. There appeared to be no guidance as to the most appropriate response to infringements, of differentiation of careless referencing from dishonest intent, of approaches to such activities as collusion or external assistance or of identification of and response to repeat offenders.

The self-review report states that there have been “minor failings in following procedures”.⁴³ It also reports that a small number of students have been charged with cheating or assisting someone to cheat.⁴⁴ Because most cases are dealt with informally by teaching staff and the dean there are no institution-wide statistics. There is a risk that matters are dealt with inconsistently and that repeat offenders cannot be identified. Furthermore, the Panel is concerned that the small number of identified offenders could indicate not that the incidence is necessarily low but that means of detection are not strong.

The Panel understands that electronic detection software is expensive and probably not a high priority for University expenditure, given that many assignments are still written by hand. However the Panel suggests a more intensive briefing for staff and an educative module for students could offer other insights to detection and prevention. For staff, such a briefing might pay attention to assessment design which is effective in minimising opportunity for plagiarism or other dishonest practice (e.g. fabrication of data). That the University refers to the potential for more in-class assessment being a potential enhancement to address academic misconduct reassures the Panel that the University is open to developments which will assist it in meeting this Guideline more effectively.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University explores examples of good practice in educating staff and students in the prevention and detection of academic dishonesty and develops a culturally-appropriate programme for NUS. The Panel also recommends that the University develops an institutional protocol for managing alleged dishonesty to ensure consistent responses across the faculties and to facilitate identification of repetitive dishonest practice.

⁴³ SR, p35.

⁴⁴ SR, p34.

3. Student Feedback and Support

The University is aware that it needs to pay close attention to the development of student support services. The Panel was briefed on a proposal to develop new dedicated space for this purpose. This section focusses on the kinds of support and services that students in a modern university most commonly need; it does not address specifically either the space or facilities, much of which has been discussed in section 2.6.

3.1 Academic appeals and grievances

Universities must have policies and/or procedures which they use to address academic appeals and grievances.

The processes described in the University's documentation for hearing and addressing student appeals and grievances are very informal. The University notes only two requests for a review of assessment in the last six years. It indicates that grievances from students might be heard by Senate or Council and that student "issues" may be brought to the Vice-Chancellor. There does not appear to be any advocacy or support role for the Students' Association. Given instances reported to the Panel of staff not being fully aware of regulations, there is a risk that students could be mis-advised and/or suffer academic hardship, which would subsequently be the basis for grievances or appeals.

The Panel believes the University does not serve its students well if the possibility of making appeals and grievances known is left to students to initiate informally. The Panel understands a prevailing cultural reticence in students which inhibits them from airing grievances or appealing decisions made by elders.⁴⁵ Given such challenges, the Panel believes the University might benefit from formalising processes, by appointing designated staff, independent of faculties, to receive and consider academic appeals and grievances. Such procedures must be confidential. People receiving appeals and grievances may be existing senior staff; given the sensitivities possibly involved, there might need to be at least one male and at least one female filling this role. They would need to understand academic processes. If the University introduces an Academic Quality Unit the people responsible for receiving appeals and academic grievances would appropriately be located in this unit.

It is noted that processes for seeking consideration for aegrotat assessment and compassionate grounds are clearly formulated in the NUS Calendar.⁴⁶ A similar approach to academic appeals and grievances could assist in addressing these. For academic appeals which are determined to have sufficient merit to proceed to a formal hearing, that hearing could be by an academic administration committee if such was established (a subcommittee of Senate which could appropriately be a committee of Deans) (see Chapter 2).

⁴⁵ SR, p36.

⁴⁶ 2014 Calendar pp345-346.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University formalises its procedures for receiving academic appeals and grievances, and for hearing and resolving appeals. The University might appoint two people (one male and one female) independent of faculties to receive appeals and grievances in a confidential process. Academic appeals which proceed to a formal hearing might be heard by an academic administration committee or similar.

3.2 Learning support

Universities should provide opportunity for all students to access appropriate learning support services, including specialised learning support services for students with particular needs.

NUS has introduced an “at risk” students programme whereby staff are encouraged to identify and help students who don’t come to class, don’t complete assessment, or are otherwise at risk of disengagement with their study. The programme is intended to identify reasons for absences and refer students to counsellors if appropriate. Staff who were interviewed were very familiar with this expectation though some said the programme was “resisted” by staff. Mid-semester “at risk” reports are produced by HoDs and students with academic issues are dealt with by the faculty dean. The Panel heard of a range of reasons that students struggled and might become designated as at risk, including such problems as lack of access to printed material and the cost of photocopying, either of which might lead to late submission or non-submission of an assignment. In the Panel’s view the “at risk” programme is a good initiative but might need to be more proactively managed within a framework which also addresses the reasons that students become at risk, if it is to be as effective as the University desires.

The University does not have specialised learning support staff but relies on academic staff and student counsellors to assist as student needs are presented to them. As already noted, the Panel heard on a number of occasions about the need for English language support for both undergraduate and postgraduate students, and about the need for help with numeracy and such academic skills as time management, referencing and computer literacy. The Panel learned of the particular needs of Foundation students in developing life skills and the ability to transition to a university culture. This was a particular concern for those students who would gain scholarships to study overseas. Staff with specialised expertise in these areas need to be factored in to student support developments to ensure that the infrastructure being proposed is used to best advantage. There is a risk otherwise that investment in the new student support centre facility will not achieve the kinds of outcome for students that the University needs.

The self-review report states that provision of student support services has been prioritised but will occur incrementally.⁴⁷ The Panel supports the systematic appraisal of immediate needs which is intended. It suggests that the idea of faculty-specific staff appointments should be evaluated for cost-effectiveness given that much of the support required by students is not discipline-specific.

⁴⁷ SR, p37.

The Panel observes that the University apparently has no student-based academic support services. It suggests that the NUS explores effective practices in other universities, such as peer mentoring or buddy programmes which involve successful senior students providing study and personal support for more junior students. Peer mentoring also provides opportunity for senior students to gain experiences which might contribute to their overall achievement. Peer mentoring requires some staff initiative to establish and oversee but can be facilitated for little financial cost. The Panel notes that the Arts Faculty Review also recommended the University consider developing a peer assisted study scheme.⁴⁸

Commendation: The Panel *commends* the University on the introduction and use of processes to identify and assist students considered to be at risk of under-achieving.

Affirmation: The Panel *affirms* the University's intention to develop a Student Support Centre and urges the University to ensure that within the planning for the Centre priority is given to computing facilities and the appointment of specialised staff to provide learning support, in particular for English language and academic writing, numeracy and study skills.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University strengthens the components of its Foundation Certificate programmes which deal with life skills, confidence building and issues related to the transition to a university learning environment.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University consider implementing a peer support and/or mentoring scheme based on good practice elsewhere and which is appropriate to the University's students.

3.3 Personal support and safety

Universities must provide safe and inclusive campus environments and should provide opportunity for all students to access appropriate pastoral and social support services.

The University has security officers and an Occupational Health and Safety Officer, as well as a Health and Safety policy and reporting requirements. The self-review reports relatively few incidents of misconduct or unsafe activity or accidents each year.⁴⁹ The Panel was not alerted to any instances where students felt unsafe on campus, whether physically or socially. As noted in section 2.6, there is a concern about adequacy of external lighting but this was not something reported to the Panel as an urgent matter.

The Students Association provides opportunities for both social and sporting activities. It does not appear to have a role in providing pastoral support. The Panel was told of other forms of support provided by external organisations. The Panel considers there is an element of risk in relying on external providers. Irrespective of the source of pastoral support for students, the Panel believes

⁴⁸ Arts Faculty Review, p14.

⁴⁹ SR, p39.

that the University should ensure that all students have access to support which is appropriate to their needs.

Pastoral and social support services which are currently provided by the University are limited to a nurse from the School of Nursing who is at the clinic at least three days a week and two full-time counsellors (one male, one female). The Panel was impressed with the commitment of these three staff, and by their initiatives to try and address the most critical student needs, in particular sexual and reproductive health and antenatal needs and, for the counsellors, taking on the responsibility of providing a voice for students through reintroduction of a student newspaper and being an advisory service on an array of issues. Counsellors also endeavoured to support students who came from outside Apia. The Panel heard that the living conditions of such students were often not conducive to effective study and they were sometimes not well-treated in their host families.

The Panel was told that in 2014 over 1,000 students saw a counsellor and that assistance included such non-counselling matters as help with assignments and help with using computers. Counsellors had introduced pamphlets for enrolment packs. However students who were interviewed did not know where to find the counsellors. Some also commented that in Samoan culture people are often reluctant to tell other people their problems. They also suggested that if they needed help they tended to go to family members. While the student comments and the counsellors' client usage appear contradictory, it is possible that the discrepancy can be explained by many of the client visits being about matters which are not deemed to be personal. The Panel also concluded that the figure of 1,000 pertained to visits, not to individual students.

The School of Nursing provides a free health clinic. The nurse is available one day a week. In 2014 she saw around 200 clients. The Panel did not explore what other health and wellbeing support students are able to avail themselves of off campus but it is aware that university health clinics commonly provide assistance with such issues as infectious disease and vaccination, diet and diabetes, stress management as well as general illness. The University might review whether there is such a need at NUS and, if so, what kinds of arrangements might be explored to address these needs. The Panel is also mindful that here appears to be no, or limited, support within the University in the event of a serious accident or mental health incident.⁵⁰ If the Panel is correct in this observation then it encourages the University to develop a plan to enable it to manage such events if they arise.

The Panel heard that there is a need for hostel accommodation for students from outside Apia but this is currently beyond the financial resources available.

The Panel concludes that the University is making a concerted effort to support its students within the confines of its limited resources. The Panel endorses the University's proposal to include personal support services and safety in a comprehensive student evaluation of all non-academic services.⁵¹

⁵⁰ The University's Corporate Plan (p62) and Annual Report (p53) refer only to earthquake and fire responses including, for example, provision of back-up generators. The Facilities and Equipment Maintenance Policy (p90) has a hierarchy of responses for dealing with environmental crises and loss of teaching and research capacity.

⁵¹ SR, p39.

Commendation: The Panel *commends* the University’s commitment to student support evidenced in the creation of a second counsellor position. It also commends the two counsellors and the University nurse for their commitment and initiatives in endeavouring to meet the health and pastoral needs of students. The Panel encourages the University to explore how these services might be extended, both in scope and in time available for student consultation.

Affirmation: The Panel *affirms* the University’s proposal to carry out a comprehensive student evaluation of all non-academic services, including personal support services and safety, and urges the University to ensure that the outcomes of such a survey are analysed both for relevance and for development of a feasible action plan to address the most common or serious needs.

3.4 Feedback from students

Universities should use processes for gaining feedback on student satisfaction with teaching, courses and student services and should be able to demonstrate that feedback is used to inform improvement initiatives.

The Panel heard that some faculties have student groups who meet with the dean, and that in others there are class representatives who meet with each other and also meet with the dean. Students said that every faculty includes student representatives. However they also said that communication is a problem, both with other students and with “the University”. The Panel gained the impression that student representation was not a strong avenue for either gaining or giving feedback.

The University conducts surveys of students with the intention of gaining feedback about courses and teaching. The Panel heard of a number of problems related to these surveys. Staff said there is a problem with students “ticking the best answers” so overall responses might not be a genuine representation of student opinion. Staff also said that the time taken to return results to them was too long and students commented that they got no feedback on what had happened with survey responses or as a consequence of surveys. Students also told the Panel though that some deans were very good at giving them feedback from the surveys. The Panel heard that at least one School had devised its own survey, one result of which was an uncovering of lecturer absenteeism.

Institution-wide surveys are managed by Academic Administration. At the time of the audit the University had a backlog of surveys that had not been analysed because the staff member who did this was on leave. No surveys had been conducted in recent years on support services, but an evaluation is planned (see section 3.3). Survey analysis is a task which might fall within the proposed Academic Quality Unit’s responsibilities.

The Panel considers that the current state with respect to student surveys is unsatisfactory. It recognises that evaluating courses at every offering might be unrealistically onerous but suggests there are other ways of being systematic with evaluations (for example, requiring evaluations of new courses and thereafter at least every three years). If the University is to continue to use institutional surveys to gain feedback from students then it must ensure that the responses are analysed and fed

back to staff in a timely manner, and that staff respond to outcomes of the surveys and advise students of actions taken or not taken. If it is not possible to provide this service then staff must be encouraged and assisted to undertake alternative activity to gain student feedback and respond to it (for example: focus groups; confidential comments boxes or feedback in classes).

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University assesses the most effective and feasible means of gaining systematic and sustainably programmed feedback from students on courses, teaching and services, ensuring that the processes adopted include appropriate analysis and avenues for feedback both to teachers and the service providers and from those staff to students.

3.6 Feedback from graduates

Universities should use processes for gaining feedback from graduates regarding their satisfaction with their university experience and learning outcomes and should be able to demonstrate that this feedback is used.

NUS surveys graduands at the point of graduation but comments that uptake of surveys has been poor.⁵²

The Samoa Qualifications Authority has conducted tracer studies of TVET graduates and the Public Service Commission has surveyed graduates.

The University cites its interaction with organisations such as the Nursing Council and Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture and with staff of the Public Service Commission, the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Labour and the Samoa Shipping Services as being avenues for gaining feedback on employer satisfaction with graduates.

All of the surveys or feedback activities cited above tend to focus on graduate destination and employment status. There do not appear to be any formal methods for gaining information about graduate satisfaction with their university experience. The Panel gained the impression that the external surveys are not used by the University.

The University comments that it has twice tried to establish an alumni group but has not succeeded.⁵³ The Panel encourages the university not to give up on this as graduates who are engaged with their *alma mater* can provide ongoing support for its endeavours as well as input to strategies to enhance the experience of current students.

⁵² SR, p40.

⁵³ SR, p41.

4. Teaching Quality

In 2014 NUS had 320 staff categorised as⁵⁴:

Academic	70
Teaching (TVET and Foundation)	93
Comparable (senior managers; professional)	37
General	115
Volunteers	<u>5</u>
Total	320

Academic (degree level) and teaching staff (TVET and Foundation) were distributed by grade as:

	Academic	Teaching
Professor	3	
Associate Professor	3	
Senior Lecturer	16	1
Lecturer Grade 1	33	7
Lecturer Grade 2	15	7
Lecturer Grade 3		77
Lecturer Grade 4		1

The discussion in this chapter refers primarily to academic staff teaching at degree level.

4.1 Staff recruitment and induction

Universities' processes for recruitment and induction should ensure that all teaching staff are appropriately qualified, according to the level(s) at which they will be teaching (i.e. degree level; postgraduate; sub-degree) and that all teaching staff receive assistance to become familiar with their university's academic expectations.

The Panel explored the contractual requirements for academic staff in some detail. The University has an initial probation period of six months. The Panel understands all staff are appointed on three year contracts but heard varying views of the grounds for this period. The Panel understands that Cabinet sets the Vice-Chancellor's contract at three years but that the three year period for other staff is in fact a University Council decision.⁵⁵ The Panel also learned that staff appointed initially for three years normally have the contract renewed for a second three year period, though the grading is dependent on performance (see section 4.2). Most staff can therefore anticipate a six year employment period from the time of first appointment. Staff appointed at grades up to Lecturer Grade 1 are subject to a contract renewal process at the end of every odd numbered contract (i.e. after 3 years; 9 years) with these positions advertised for a new contract at the end of each even

⁵⁴ SR, p9

⁵⁵ The NUS Act s25 provides for the University Council to make statutes on the terms and conditions of university staff.

numbered contract (i.e. after 6 years; 12 years).⁵⁶ Contract renewal processes include an appeal provision. The Panel is of the view that a three year contract period is a disincentive to the recruitment of staff and does not sit easily alongside the publication requirements for contract extension at the same grade. The Panel encourages the University to keep the contract period and conditions under review, in particular to ensure it does not disadvantage itself with respect to other employers of qualified graduates who might be potential academic staff.

Position descriptions for all positions are included in the Academic, Research, Teaching and Comparable Staff Manual.⁵⁷ Selection criteria are laid out clearly. The Manual states that on appointment, if an applicant for an academic position does not hold a relevant Master's degree then the appointment can be only at Grade 3 level. Furthermore, all existing staff who did not hold a relevant master's degree by January 2015 would revert to lecturer Grade 3.⁵⁸

Of current academic staff, only 12 hold doctorates but another ten staff are on professional development leave studying for doctorates:

Staff currently holding		Staff on Study leave undertaking	
Doctorate	12	Doctorate	10
Master's	35	Master's	12
PGradDiploma	1		

NUS experiences challenges in recruiting appropriately qualified staff, not just because of (internationally) relatively low salaries and contractual arrangements but also because of relocation costs, living arrangements, constrained research opportunities and limited availability of teaching resources. The University has therefore focussed on developing local staff. Its provision for staff to upgrade their qualifications is generous. If staff are studying overseas they are paid full salary for the first year and 50% thereafter. The Panel was told that in addition to upgrading the qualifications of academic staff to postgraduate level, the University intends to have upgraded all TVET staff to first degree qualifications by 2018.

The above professional development strategy has been in place for ten years and the University states that it has achieved its objective on staff qualifications.⁵⁹ It would appear to be an effective method for the University to grow its own appropriately qualified staff. One cost associated with this strategy is that at any time approximately a third of academic staff are absent, resulting in some elective courses being not offered or replacement staff being hired. The University needs to be vigilant in ensuring this strategy does not result in an increased workload on remaining colleagues or such downstream effects as increased staff:student ratios and/or additional costs of appointing relieving teachers.

The recruitment of senior academics who have returned to Samoa from overseas is a good strategy for introducing expertise and experience to the University.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Academic, Research, Teaching and Comparable Staff Manual, p5; pp70-74.

⁵⁷ Revised December 2014.

⁵⁸ Academic, Research, Teaching and Comparable Staff Manual, p5.

⁵⁹ SR, p43.

⁶⁰ SR, p45.

The University has a principle that any teaching staff member must hold a qualification which is at least at a level higher than the programme being taught. This is an acceptable position to take given the relatively small number of postgraduate students and the difficulty in recruiting doctorally-qualified staff.

The Dean and Head of Department are responsible for inducting new staff. The activities expected are itemised clearly in the Academic, Research, Teaching and Comparable Staff Manual.⁶¹ The Panel was pleased to read that staff appointed in 2013 and 2014 had been surveyed about their induction experience and although only half of those surveyed responded, the University was nevertheless able to identify areas which needed further attention, including the possibility of a further induction session at the end of the probation period.⁶²

The Panel explored University induction processes with staff it interviewed. Their experiences varied. One suggestion that emerged was advice to the University that it should not assume that because an appointee had previous experience he or she does not need induction support.

The Panel is satisfied that the University is endeavouring to provide appropriate induction for new appointees. Given that this is the responsibility of deans and heads there might be a case for some central oversight to ensure all who are eligible for induction support actually have the opportunity to receive it.

Commendation: The Panel *commends* the University on its commitment to increasing the quality and strengthening the qualifications and experience of its teaching staff through its support of their higher degree study.

4.2 Research-active staff

Universities' workload management processes should ensure that degree-level students are taught mainly by staff who are research-active.

In 2014 twenty-two of the 70 academic staff were on professional development leave.⁶³ These staff were those with lower level qualifications (12 of the 22 did not yet hold a master's qualification and 10 did not yet hold a doctoral qualification). Of the remainder, at least those with doctoral qualifications (12 staff) could be assumed to have had research experience.

The University has been making concerted efforts to reinforce the need for all staff to be engaged in research activity or (for TVET staff) other forms of reporting and analysis. The University has a Workload Policy which includes a 40/40/20 workload allocation model as a "notional guideline".⁶⁴ The Panel heard differing views on what the 20% allocation referred to: i.e. whether administration

⁶¹ Pp 41-43.

⁶² SR, p44.

⁶³ SR, p42.

⁶⁴ Academic & Teaching Staff Workload Policy, 2014, Academic, Research, Teaching and Comparable Staff Manual, p48.

or community service, or both. It was told that there is a research “push” and that all faculties have research committees which are intended to help junior researchers, provide workshops etc. However the Panel also heard that courses on research skills are not very successful. Some staff indicated that new staff might give priority to developing the material for their teaching. For senior staff, administrative and community responsibilities were said to eat into time for preparing publications; some spoke of an ability to do the research but a lack of motivation to write (for publication).

Progression through Grades imposes an expectation of at least three publications over a three year period for senior lecturers, and one and two publications per three year contract for Grades I and II staff respectively. If the expectation is not achieved a staff member might be demoted. The University advised that the definition of “publication” is broad currently; for instance it might include such items as ministerial reports.

The publication requirement was raised by staff in several interview sessions. The Panel also has some concerns. It notes the difficulty experienced by a number of staff in undertaking research. For instance, in some areas facilities are lacking or unreliable; all staff experience the challenges of limited Library resources and internet connectivity; in some areas such as bench sciences NUS does not have the opportunity to develop the research teams that are common elsewhere. The Panel also notes conventional differences across disciplines, with some disciplines needing much longer lead time to develop and conduct research than do others. Furthermore, peer review and publication itself is not commonly achieved within such a short time frame and there is a risk that staff opt for low prestige journals in order to deliver an output. The University advised that it differentiates between locally, regionally and internationally recognised journals and that while publication in a recognised peer-reviewed journal is a requirement for senior lecturers, this is not expected of Grade 1 and 2 lecturers.

The Panel understands and supports the rationale for placing such a strong emphasis on research output. However it urges the University to take a more qualitative approach to research progress, possibly exploring a formula or set of criteria that take account of the type of research and the status of journals where publication is sought.

Recommendation: The Panel *recommends* that the University monitors closely the impact of its publication requirements, including the quality of the publication outputs, impact on research choices and research quality, on individual staff development in research expertise, and the impact on staff workloads and morale. The Panel encourages the University to explore a more flexible formula which takes account of some of the challenges as well as the opportunities that NUS staff experience.

4.3 Thesis supervision

Universities should have formal mechanisms to ensure that theses are supervised and examined by staff who have appropriate experience, discipline knowledge and qualifications.

NUS currently has very few research postgraduate students, almost all of whom are in the Centre for Samoan Studies. The Panel learned that formal processes are in place in that the Postgraduate Committee of Senate is responsible for appointing supervisors and all requirements for doctoral study are set out in the Requirements for Higher Degrees Manual and the Calendar Regulations.⁶⁵ Requirements for research Master's degrees are also in the Calendar.⁶⁶

Assistant supervisors may be appointed to gain experience in the role if they have relevant qualifications and experience. For the current group of doctoral students in the Centre for Samoan Studies supervision is led by experienced senior staff with overseas supervision experience. Because some of these theses are interdisciplinary they provide opportunity for staff from other faculties to also gain supervision experience. The Panel suggests the University considers appointing appropriately experienced external staff as co-supervisors, to provide support in a discipline area or mentoring support for relatively new supervisors. There is currently a risk to the University in being reliant on a very small number of staff for supervision.

Given the small number of research students, the Panel is satisfied that arrangements for PhD supervision are appropriate currently. However if there is growth in PhD numbers, and/or these extend to other faculties, the University may need to initiate more structured training for all supervisors and monitoring of supervision activity. External support (from other universities) might also be sought in future to help provide training for staff in supervision and thesis examination. The University also needs to be mindful of the potential impact of short term contracts and any flow-on effects these might have on continuity of supervision, especially if it envisages enrolling research students part-time since a part-time doctorate could take five years or longer to complete.

4.4 Teaching quality

Universities should use processes for assessing teaching quality and for monitoring and enhancing individual teaching capability of all teaching staff.

The Panel acknowledges the attempts by the University to establish a strong basis for teaching quality. It notes the contractual requirement that staff will gain the University's Certificate in Adult Teaching if they do not already hold a relevant teaching qualification. The University comments that because courses for the Certificate are offered during teaching hours it is a challenge to schedule classes in the certificate programme to suit all staff. The University proposes to deal with this by reducing the number of courses and/or teaching outside normal student hours. These options have merit if they assist staff to manage their contractual obligation.

⁶⁵ Requirements for Higher Degrees Manual 2013; 2014 Calendar pp323-327.

⁶⁶ 2014 Calendar pp319-323.

Deans and heads are responsible for monitoring staff performance and staff are required to present an annual self-appraisal on their teaching.⁶⁷ Supervisors are expected to use student evaluations as part of their assessment. However, as noted in section 3.4, student surveys which provide evaluations of teaching have been carried out routinely but currently the University is not able to process the information effectively. As noted previously, the Panel suggests the University explores other methods of giving feedback on teaching, ideally in a real time mode. Other informal processes which are in place in parts of the University include the use of GoPro cameras to record staff performance, and the use of student “at risk” assessments to monitor course progress and delivery. The Panel heard that staff are reluctant to use in-class peer mentors. This reluctance might be challenged. If such processes were put in place they might not only assist in providing support for teachers but might also assist in reducing staff absence or lateness which has been reported to the Panel as a problem in some areas (though in the student evaluation forms it saw this was not a common complaint). The Panel was told of the need to ensure that any strategy for managing under-performing staff needs to be sensitive to cultural mores.

The Panel acknowledges some of the constraints noted by the University, in particular the shortage of experienced teachers who might provide supervision or mentoring for new staff.⁶⁸

The Panel reiterates its concern that unexpected and unplanned for increases in student numbers can impose significant strain on space and resources which, in turn, puts teaching (and learning) quality at risk. This has been addressed in Chapter 1.

4.5 Teaching development

Universities should provide opportunities for staff to develop their teaching practice, including application of contemporary pedagogical research, supervision skills, use of learning management systems and use of new technologies. (See also section 4.3).

The Oloamanu Centre provides professional development and continuing education for University staff. The Panel heard of courses and workshops the Centre runs. It noted that approximately half the Centre’s work is for external agencies. The Centre teaches the Certificate in Adult Teaching. The Panel was told it rarely offers any one-on-one assistance to staff. The Panel gained little indication from the staff it interviewed as to how effective they found Oloamanu’s offerings to be, though the Panel noted that the areas covered seemed appropriate. A formal evaluation of effectiveness of activities could assist the Centre with long term planning.

As indicated in earlier sections, the Panel identified several areas where teaching and assessment strategies need refreshing and updating to recognise contemporary pedagogies. In particular teaching should seek to enhance skills in rational enquiry, rational examination of evidence, efficient processing of data, critical analysis, informed debate and fluent and articulate communication in

⁶⁷ SR, p50.

⁶⁸ SR, p50.

verbal and written form. Some teachers use content and fact-based approaches in their teaching that would not conform to good international practice. The University should ensure that assessment methods are appropriate to each discipline. This should be a strong element in staff development and programmes provided through the Oloamanu Centre and programmes such as the Certificate of Adult Teaching.

The Panel suggests stronger direction might be given to encourage staff to avail themselves of the expertise available on campus, both in the Oloamanu Centre and in faculties, to help with their teaching and assessment. This is particularly important for staff who have limited experience of teaching at university level and are new to the university research environment.

4.6 Teaching recognition

Universities' reward processes (promotion; special awards) should recognize teaching capability.

The Panel was pleased to note that the criteria for promotion between Grades include reference to special teaching achievements. The list of possible grounds for consideration of teaching achievement is extensive.⁶⁹ Staff advised the Panel that outstanding teachers who are able to provide evidence of achievement may advance up to two increments. A staff member completing a PhD advances up to four increments; the Panel was told that this promotion might take place as soon as the PhD is confirmed instead of having to wait until there is a promotion round.

The Panel was also pleased to hear that the University has recently acknowledged good teaching practice by identifying those performing at the highest level and with the presentation of special awards. It heard that those identified as good teachers were willing to share their expertise to help others. The Panel suggests the University might publicise the achievements of such staff more widely than currently appears to happen.

Commendation: The Panel *commends* the University on recognising teaching excellence in its promotion criteria and by the introduction of special awards.

⁶⁹ Staff Internal promotion. Academic, Research, Teaching and Comparable Staff Manual, pp64-70.

Conclusion

In the course of the site visit to the University the Panel talked to about 40 staff and eight students. Staff and students were universally friendly, dignified and helpful. Those interviewed were generally frank and direct but at the same time committed to the institution and its mission in Samoa. Students spoken to were enjoying their time at the University and were grateful for the opportunities afforded them. The Panel also talked with graduates, Council members, employers and other stakeholders, including the Prime Minister.

NUS is to be commended on initiating this academic audit at a time when the University is developing its strategies to develop degree-level study to a standard befitting a contemporary university in the wider Pacific region. Since its establishment the University has grown by accretion. It has thus had to accommodate not only increases in staff and student numbers but also different academic practices and cultures which had evolved in the institutions it acquired.

While the campus provision has expanded to provide for the increased numbers of staff and students, the Panel nevertheless concluded that student and staff achievement are potentially constrained by teaching and learning resources which are not appropriate for degree-level or postgraduate study – for example, library resources; laboratory space; technical equipment; IT infrastructure. The Panel's overarching concern is that future development of NUS will continue to be restricted by resource and funding limitations such that NUS will not be able to meet its own expectations, those of various communities in Samoa, and international equivalence with peer institutions.

The Panel urges the University to negotiate with government a funding arrangement which more directly reflects enrolment numbers. At the same time, a system of managed enrolment would not only help ensure enrolments do not outstrip resources, but would also reduce the risk of admitting students who do not have a reasonable chance of academic success.

The Panel notes a number of excellent initiatives at NUS: for example, the commitment to cycles of external reviews; the commitment to strengthening staff qualifications and enhancing their experience; the determination to develop key facilities which are available for community use while at the same time potentially generating some revenue for the University. The Panel notes the very positive comments it heard about the contribution NUS is making to the development of Samoa. The recommendations the Panel has made are intended to reinforce the University's commitment to continuous improvement and to developing into an institution which should aspire to stand alongside longer established universities in the region.

Commendations, Affirmations and Recommendations

Commendations

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| GS2.3 | C1 | The Panel commends the University on its commitment to a cycle of external reviews of Faculties and Departments and the open and transparent way in which the reviews are conducted and published. While the University appears to show a willingness to grapple with the recommendations from reviews, a more systematic mechanism for implementing accepted recommendations would be desirable. |
| GS2.6 | C2 | The Panel commends the University on the development of the fale and, in particular, its determination that the facility shall be used widely by the community as well as for university-related functions. |
| GS3.2 | C3 | The Panel commends the University on the introduction and use of processes to identify and assist students considered to be at risk of under-achieving. |
| GS3.3 | C4 | The Panel commends the University's commitment to student support evidenced in the creation of a second counsellor position. It also commends the two counsellors and the University nurse for their commitment and initiatives in endeavouring to meet the health and pastoral needs of students. The Panel encourages the University to explore how these services might be extended, both in scope and in time available for student consultation. |
| GS4.1 | C5 | The Panel commends the University on its commitment to increasing the quality and strengthening the qualifications and experience of its teaching staff through its support of their higher degree study. |
| GS4.6 | C6 | The Panel commends the University on recognising teaching excellence in its promotion criteria and by the introduction of special awards. |

Affirmations

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| GS 1 | A1 | The Panel affirms the willingness of NUS to introduce new initiatives that will enhance academic quality and, in particular, the proposed Academic Quality Unit scheduled for introduction in 2015. The University should ensure that the work of the Academic Quality Unit is fully integrated into the operations of the Senate. |
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GS3.2	A2	The Panel <i>affirms</i> the University’s intention to develop a Student Support Centre and urges the University to ensure that within the planning for the Centre priority is given to computing facilities and the appointment of specialised staff to provide learning support, in particular for English language and academic writing, numeracy and study skills.
GS3.3	A3	The Panel <i>affirms</i> the University’s proposal to carry out a comprehensive student evaluation of all non-academic services, including personal support services and safety, and urges the University to ensure that the outcomes of such a survey are analysed both for relevance and for development of a feasible action plan to address the most common or serious needs.

Recommendations

GS 1	R1	The Panel <i>recommends</i> that in consultation with the appropriate authorities NUS develop a formula for funding which ensures government grants include a component which directly relates funding to student numbers.
GS1.1	R2	The Panel <i>recommends</i> that the University consider introducing a selection system for admission to Foundation Certificate programmes, to ensure all those who are admitted have a reasonable chance of success and that the University admits only as many students as it can resource appropriately.
GS 1.2	R3	The Panel <i>recommends</i> that the University ensures that staff teaching or supervising students for whom neither Samoan nor English is a first language are aware of the challenges such students face and are sensitive to ensuring their effective participation in learning and student life.
GS1.2	R4	The Panel <i>recommends</i> that the University give priority to the development of a broad range of student support services to assist with gaps in both academic and personal skills and knowledge.
GS1.3	R5	The Panel <i>recommends</i> that the University develop an academic advice protocol, addressing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the distinction between “advice” and “information”; • qualifications required of staff giving advice (i.e. who may give advice about what); • the roles with delegated authority for making decisions related to academic advice;

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the form or process of official recording advice given (for instance, whether records are maintained centrally or at faculty level); • the avenues for addressing student hardship emanating from incorrect or incomplete advice; • the appropriate channels for referral for additional advice, counselling or support.
GS2	R6	The Panel recommends that there is a complete review of the functions of Senate and how it conducts its business. The review should include consideration of the establishment of new sub-committees that deal with academic programme development and academic administration issues. The latter would centralise the resolution of student academic issues. In addition, the Senate should be more directly involved in receiving Faculty and academic programme reviews and in determining subsequent actions.
GS2.1	R7	The Panel recommends that the University seek a rapid conclusion to the current impasse with the Samoa Qualifications Authority over accreditation of higher education qualifications. Resolution of this issue must include future accreditation arrangements that are robust, internationally recognised and involve an agency or agencies qualified to judge the quality of specific NUS higher education qualifications, including those at postgraduate level. The Panel recommends that the parties agree to engage an external authority or expert to assist with this process.
GS2.2	R8	The Panel recommends that the University develops a statement of the general attributes expected of all NUS graduates, as well as articulating the specific attributes expected for graduates of each discipline and programme area.
GS2.3	R9	The Panel recommends that the University's faculties and departments should seek enhanced two-way engagement with employers, employer groups and professional bodies to assist in ensuring programmes are relevant to professional and employment needs and to assist with the preparation of graduates for employment.
GS2.3	R10	The Panel recommends that Senate should be directly involved in receiving faculty and academic programme reviews, in determining subsequent actions and in monitoring progress towards fulfilment of responses to recommendations.

- GS2.5 R11 The Panel **recommends** that the University pay urgent attention to the recommendations related to curriculum, teaching and assessment in the recent Arts and Science Faculty reviews and assesses the fitness-for-purpose of teaching and assessment strategies in other faculties. In the latter case the assistance of an external person with expertise in teaching methods in comparable university environments would be helpful.
- GS2.6 R12 The Panel **recommends** that the University undertakes a careful and detailed analysis of its current capital needs and costs, including Library stock and computers as well as space needs, adequate provision of laboratory equipment and extended internet, and prioritises these against its teaching and learning priorities as the basis for a systematic, progressive improvement plan. Such improvements will need to be supported by appropriate provision of consumables (eg laboratory reagents) and adequate technical skill as appropriate.
- GS2.6 R13 The Panel **recommends** that the University encourages and supports staff in exploring alternative kinds of material to support teaching and learning beyond that provided by textbooks, including e-resources, and in ensuring this material is appropriate to the levels of degree study and accessible to students.
- GS2.7 R14 The Panel **recommends** that the medium term objective of NUS should be to ensure that its curriculum design and assessment standards and teaching delivery at all levels have parity with, or are benchmarked against, those of its regional neighbours. Wherever possible efforts should be made to recruit support from those jurisdictions to assist in this process.
- GS2.8 R15 The Panel **recommends** that the University explores examples of good practice in educating staff and students in the prevention and detection of academic dishonesty and develops a culturally-appropriate programme for NUS. The Panel also recommends that the University develops an institutional protocol for managing alleged dishonesty to ensure consistent responses across the faculties and to facilitate identification of repetitive dishonest practice.
- GS3.1 R16 The Panel **recommends** that the University formalises its procedures for receiving academic appeals and grievances, and for hearing and resolving appeals. The University might appoint two people (one male and one female) independent of faculties to receive appeals and grievances in a confidential process. Academic appeals which proceed

to a formal hearing might be heard by an academic administration committee or similar.

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| GS3.2 | R17 | The Panel <i>recommends</i> that the University strengthens the components of its Foundation Certificate programmes which deal with life skills, confidence building and issues related to the transition to a University learning environment. |
| GS3.2 | R18 | The Panel <i>recommends</i> that the University consider implementing a peer support and/or mentoring scheme based on good practice elsewhere and which is appropriate to the University's students. |
| GS3.4 | R19 | The Panel <i>recommends</i> that the University assesses the most effective and feasible means of gaining systematic and sustainably programmed feedback from students on courses, teaching and services, ensuring that the processes adopted include appropriate analysis and avenues for feedback both to teachers and the service providers and from those staff to students. |
| GS4.2 | R20 | The Panel <i>recommends</i> that the University monitors closely the impact of its publication requirements, including the quality of the publication outputs, impact on research choices and research quality, on individual staff development in research expertise, and the impact on staff workloads and morale. The Panel encourages the University to explore a more flexible formula which takes account of some of the challenges as well as the opportunities that NUS staff experience. |

Acknowledgments

The Panel thanks in particular Professor Asofou So’o, Vice-Chancellor of the National University of Samoa, for the invitation to conduct this academic audit and for his warm welcome to the University. Appreciation is also extended to Frank Walsh who managed the self-review and organisation for the audit and to the staff and students who gave their time to meet with the Panel in an engaging and informed manner. The Panel appreciated the opportunity to meet with several graduates and a number of the University’s major stakeholders, as well as the Prime Minister and the CEO of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture and University Council members.

Audit Panel

Emeritus Professor Roger Field

Chair of the Panel

Education Consultant. Formerly Vice-Chancellor, Lincoln University and former Chair of Universities New Zealand.

Emeritus Professor David Mackay

Immediate Past Chair of AQA Board. Formerly Deputy-Vice-Chancellor, Victoria University of Wellington.

Emeritus Professor Dugald Scott

Deputy Chair, Committee for University Academic Programmes, NZVCC. Formerly Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Dean of Education, Victoria University of Wellington.

In attendance

Dr Jan Cameron

Director, Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities.

About the Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities

The Academic Quality Agency for New Zealand Universities (AQA) was established by New Zealand universities in 1994, as the New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit. It is an independent body whose purpose is to contribute to the advancement of 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.

The AQA helps support universities in achieving standards of excellence in research and teaching by conducting institutional audits of the processes in universities which underpin academic quality and by identifying and disseminating information on good practice in developing and maintaining quality in higher education. Activities include a quarterly newsletter and regular meetings on quality enhancement topics.

The AQA interacts with other educational bodies within New Zealand and with similar academic quality assurance agencies internationally. The Agency is a full member of the Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN), and of the International Network for Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE). AQA has been assessed as adhering to the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice in Quality Assurance.

Further information is available from the AQA website: www.aqa.ac.nz.

AQA's Academic Audit Process

Key principles underpinning academic audits carried out by AQA are:

- peer review
- evidence-based
- externally benchmarked
- enhancement-led.

Audits are carried out by panels of trained auditors who are selected from universities' senior academic staff and other professionals with knowledge of academic auditing and evaluation. Each panel for a New Zealand university audit includes an overseas external auditor. An audit begins with a process of self-review leading to an audit portfolio that the university uses to report on its progress towards achieving the goals and objectives related to the focus of the audit. The audit panel verifies the portfolio through documentary analysis, interviews and site visits.

Final audit reports of New Zealand universities are publicly available. Reports commend good practice and make recommendations intended to assist the university in its own programme of continuous improvement. For New Zealand universities, progress on the recommendations is submitted to the AQA Board in a follow-up report 12 months later. A further report on progress in

implementing the recommendations of the previous audit also forms part of the self-review process in the next audit round.

NUS Academic Audit Framework

The academic audit for NUS is framed around academic activities related to teaching and learning and student support. The key **Academic Activity Themes** which have been identified and which form the framework for both the self-review and the academic audit are:

1. Student Profile: Access, Transition and Admission Processes
2. Curriculum, Assessment and delivery of the Curriculum
3. Student Feedback and Support
4. Teaching Quality

The audit framework covers activities and quality assurance processes which might be expected as fundamental in a contemporary university of good standing. The framework articulates these expectations in a series of Guideline Statements.

For each academic activity theme, the university is expected to address not just whether it undertakes the activities or processes identified in the guideline statements, but also evaluate how well it does so, and on what evidence it bases its own self-evaluation. From its own self-evaluation, areas and strategies for improvement might be identified. The Academic Audit Handbook for NUS provides more information on the kinds of evidence and indicators which might be appropriate for each expectation referred to in the guidelines.

Throughout the academic activity areas identified in the framework, attention should be paid to such features as different modes of delivery and acknowledgement of learner diversity (e.g., international students; on-campus/off-campus). Unless otherwise stated, all activities and processes relate to postgraduate as well as undergraduate study. Where appropriate, specific attention might be paid to special student groups (e.g., international students) but unless otherwise stated it is assumed processes discussed apply to all students similarly.

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