



New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit

Te Wāhanga Tātari

Monitoring and enhancing academic quality in New Zealand universities since 1993

NZUAAU Series on Quality

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**A thematic overview of institutional audit
2000 – 2010**

July 2011

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Introduction

The New Zealand Universities Academic Audit Unit (NZUAAU) was established by the New Zealand Vice-Chancellors' Committee in 1993 and carried out its first cycle of institutional audits of New Zealand universities between 1995 and 1998.

Subsequent audits were carried out in 2000 and 2001 (with a focus on research and another theme selected by the institution) and between 2002 and 2007 (with a focus on teaching and learning). The current cycle of audits is focused on the academic quality of the whole of the institution; the audits of five universities have been completed since the cycle commenced in 2008 and the remaining three will be completed in 2011 and 2012.

Nearing the end of its fourth cycle of academic audits, NZUAAU has been considering the nature and value of audits undertaken, along with national and international developments in the area of academic quality, and thinking about how best NZUAAU can continue to meet its objective of monitoring and enhancing academic quality in New Zealand universities. This report forms part of that reflective process.

NZUAAU audit reports consist of commentary and a series of affirmations, commendations and recommendations made by an independent panel of 4 – 5 academic auditors. Trained auditors bring to the audit process their prior knowledge and experience of universities, of academic quality, and of quality assurance frameworks and processes. The audit report reflects the panel's collective view following consideration of:

- The self-review portfolio of the institution (based on the university's own strategic objectives and related to the nominated foci of the audit);
- Supporting materials and documentation provided by the university; *and*
- Interviews and discussions with staff, students and other university stakeholders.

Because of the change in focus of each of the audit cycles, along with differences in the strategic objectives of universities and the varying emphases of audit panels, it is not possible (nor necessarily relevant) to compare and track commendations and recommendations across the universities. What does emerge, however, is a picture of the advent and progression of themes common to some or all of the eight universities over a decade.

This *Series on Quality* report brings together the 21 audit reports completed since 2000. It is designed to provide a snapshot of common issues, challenges and successes characterising the academic quality of New Zealand universities over the past 10 years. Building on these findings and integrating information gained from NZUAAU's engagement with the international academic quality community, the report also suggests themes which might emerge or continue to occupy New Zealand's universities' attention in the area of academic quality in the coming years.

Key findings

- Twenty-one audits of New Zealand universities were conducted between 2000 and 2010, resulting in more than 650 recommendations, commendations and affirmations on matters of academic quality.¹ Although Cycle 4 will not be completed until 2012, it is nevertheless apparent that the number of recommendations made by audit panels is decreasing in each cycle. It is NZUAAU's view that this trend is most likely to be attributable to a general maturing of the universities' quality assurance processes over this time.
- The role of audit panels is increasingly one of affirming and commending good practice, and fine-tuning the implementation of recommendations previously adopted by the institutions. The narrowing of recommendations and a proportional increase in commendations suggests there is good practice going on in most areas in most institutions most of the time. Thus, the focus of audit for NZUAAU and the universities might be best characterised now as a drive for continuous improvement rather than the exposure of significant risks to academic quality.
- Teaching and learning within a research environment remains the primary focus of audit commentary. However, the proportion of recommendations and commendations related to management and governance has grown in each audit Cycle. Whether this change in focus has occurred on the part of the audit panels, NZUAAU, or the universities themselves is uncertain, although it is likely to be at least in part a reflection of greater university differentiation, increased compliance responsibilities, and growth in the complexity of institutional decision-making.
- Universities received many commendations from audit panels for the development of student information technology and library services, and improvements in student services and campus/student life. This reflects significant redevelopments by several New Zealand universities in these areas over the last decade. Commendations also focused on universities' approaches to programme development and approval, and evidence of interaction between teaching and research.
- Evaluation of teaching (including responding to student feedback) was the most prominent theme of recommendations about teaching and learning made to New Zealand universities over the past 10 years. Each university received recommendations relating to the need to improve the way in which they sought feedback from students on the quality of teaching, and on the mechanisms through which they acknowledge and respond to that feedback. This continues to be a theme in Cycle 4, along with affirmation of actions underway in several institutions to address this issue.
- Institutions were commended on the support services they provided to students, with individual institutions reminded of the particular needs of students with disabilities, students based on satellite campuses, and international students. Audit panels highlighted the importance of systems designed to identify and support students at risk.
- Audit panels found a level of divergence between some institutions' stated strategic objectives in the use of technology in course delivery, and visible outcomes. Institutions were reminded of the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of new technologies to ensure improved success and outcomes for learners, including students learning from a distance.

¹ Audit reports make **recommendations** for further improvement, **commend** good practices, and **affirm** activities recently initiated by universities to enhance academic quality, but for which evidence of outcomes is not yet available. Audit panels do not normally commend practices that, while good, are already common practice across the university sector.

- Internationalisation of the curriculum received some attention throughout the decade, and continues to feature in universities' strategic intentions, but appears not to be fully embedded within the teaching and learning and other activities of most institutions. Audit reports suggest that there is not yet a clear understanding of what internationalisation means nor a consensus within universities about the implications for teaching and learning.
- University frameworks for commercialisation have been commended, as have the establishment of research institutes and centres.
- Universities received many commendations and recommendations for quality enhancement in the areas of postgraduate student supervision and examination, and postgraduate student enrolment and support. The same challenges identified in Cycle 2 continued into Cycles 3 and 4; namely, the need to develop university-wide standards expected of supervisory arrangements, to ensure adherence with these standards is monitored, and to provide staff and students with the training and resources they require to ensure that the supervisory relationship is supportive of students and their progress.
- Institution-wide quality assurance frameworks have been a focus of academic audit panels in Cycles 3 and 4, and recommendations suggest universities could do more to meet their stated objectives in this area. Recommendations have reinforced the need for quality assurance systems that make a strong link between strategic objectives, policies, and practices, and provide ways of integrating results into professional development and departmental enhancement initiatives.
- Most universities appear to be actively involved in national and, to a lesser extent, international benchmarking of a variety of activities across the institutions. A focus remains on the identification and application of appropriate benchmarks to assist in the enhancement of research-led teaching and learning.
- Audit panels have found much to commend in universities' commitment to the advancement of Māori students and staff over the last 10 years. They also found areas where further action was desirable to give effect to strategic objectives, particularly in the development of meaningful and effective relationships with Māori.
- Over the course of the decade, audit panels began to highlight the need for greater commitment and visible actions in pursuit of the advancement of Pacific students and staff.
- Audit panels have highlighted the need for better integration of staff training and development activities across the university, including clear links between strategic priorities, faculty and departmental guidelines, staff teaching and research development activities, and professional development and review policies. A particular focus of more recent audit panels has been on the need for leadership and management training and development.
- Community engagement and partnerships which impact on teaching and learning received relatively little, but largely positive, attention throughout the audit cycles. Universities were commended for their close ties with the cities and regions in which they are located and delivering services, and for their efforts to build positive and effective working relationships with local communities.
- Levels of international engagement and collaboration grew during the decade, and institutions were commended for initiatives that involved tangible opportunities for teaching and research collaboration, and that embraced both academic and administrative/management staff.

Technical notes

- The chapter headings in this report reflect the broad themes covered in the institutional audit reports (grouped here as Teaching and Learning, Research Environment, Management and Governance, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Pacific, University Staff, and Community Engagement and Partnerships). Narrow themes have been allocated for the purposes of this report only. Commendations and recommendations have been assigned once only to a narrow theme of best fit, but could potentially span more than one theme. In some instances, some narrow themes received only minor attention and so were 'rolled-up' into larger themes for analysis. e.g. academic policy includes assessment policies and academic honesty/plagiarism policies.
- Cycle 1 (1995 – 1998) has been omitted from this report because the structure of the audit reports differed from that produced in subsequent cycles. In addition, limiting this overview to Cycles 2, 3 and those audits completed to date in Cycle 4 allowed exploration of a defined period of time (2000 – 2010) that included the establishment of AUT as a university in 2000, and might be characterised by government policy changes intended to increase access to, and minimise the personal costs of, university education. It is also a period during which public accountability, in particular via compliance reporting, became entrenched within universities.
- Audit report recommendations and commendations vary in their level of specificity. Some are very broad² while others are more specific³. As a result, the raw number of recommendations and commendations made in each cycle does not necessarily reflect a change in academic quality. Rather, the quantitative analysis accompanying each chapter is intended to provide a visual depiction of areas of focus throughout the decade.
- This is an historical snapshot, with 16 out of the 21 audits occurring between 2000 and 2007. As a result, areas identified for recommendation may have already received attention from the universities or might no longer be relevant. In addition, as Cycle 4 is not yet completed, the recommendations and commendations of the three remaining audits could potentially change the analysis presented within.
- Affirmations were excluded from the narrow theme quantitative analysis as they are a feature of Cycle 4 audit reports only.
- The broad themes of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Pacific have been combined in this report because university strategic objectives and activities in these areas were often jointly directed towards Māori and Pacific students and staff, and could not be easily separated for the purposes of analysis. Several audit panels recommended universities consider these two groups separately in their performance objectives and in the design and delivery of services.
- This report is intended to be a general overview, drawing out overarching themes and trends. As such, individual recommendations and commendations included here for illustrative purposes have been anonymised. However, the final Cycle 3 and 4 audit reports of all universities are available on the NZUAAU website (www.nzuaau.ac.nz) and earlier reports can be requested from NZUAAU.

² e.g. "The Panel commends the Vice-Chancellor's leadership and commitment to stakeholder engagement."

³ e.g. "The panel recommends that the University ensures that signed contracts are in place prior to commencing delivery of offshore programmes and that each includes a definitive clause on teachout strategies."

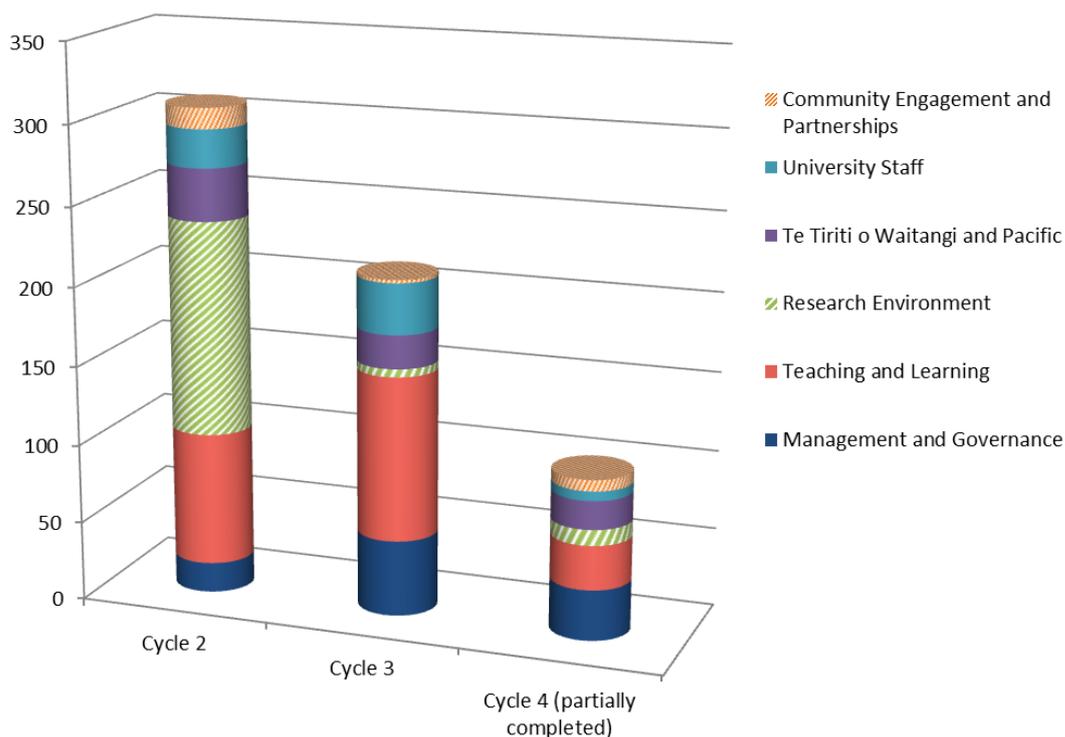
Chapter One: Overview

The mission of the NZUAAU is to contribute to the New Zealand university education system by engaging as a leader and advocate in the development of universities based on high-quality, internationally acceptable, academic practices; and by providing assurance and quality enhancement services which assist universities in excellent student experience and learning outcomes. Fulfilling its quality assurance role, NZUAAU undertook a total of 21 university audits between 2000 and 2010, resulting in more than 650 recommendations, commendations and affirmations on matters of academic quality.

NZUAAU academic audit panels focus their attention on areas of particular importance to universities. They are guided by university delivery and learning outcomes, along with stated objectives and plans for quality enhancement, rather than a pre-determined set of standards.

Because of the change in focus of each of the audit cycles, along with the differing objectives of individual institutions and audit panels, drawing conclusions from an analysis of broad themes is difficult. For example, over half of all recommendations and commendations made by audit panels between 2000 and 2010 were related to either teaching and learning or universities’ research environment. This is an unsurprising result given the mission and purpose of New Zealand universities and the focus of Cycle 2 (research) and Cycle 3 (teaching and learning) audits.

Figure 1: Academic audit recommendations and commendations by cycle and broad theme, 2000 – 2010

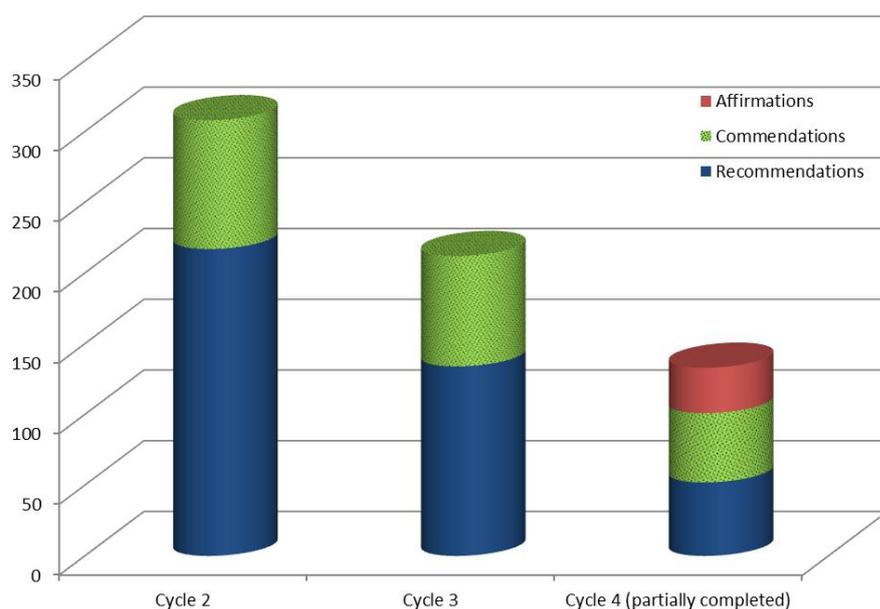


At the same time, Figure 1 appears to show a greatly reduced emphasis on university research since Cycle 2 (2000 – 2001). In reality, the chosen topic of research for the Cycle 2 audits coincided with preparation for the first Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) evaluation round in 2003. In latter cycles, in a desire not to duplicate the quality assessment activities of the PBRF, audit panels confined their comments to consideration of the extent to which the research culture, research environment and research activities enhance teaching and learning and impact on staff responsibilities.

The result is that analysis at this broad level is inconclusive. It is at the narrower level, as is explored in the following chapters, that a greater sense can be gained of the areas in which audit panels have found university successes and areas for further enhancement over a decade of academic quality activity. It is at this level that changes found are more reflective of university activities than the development of the audit process *per se*.

These caveats aside, there are two observations that can be made at this time. First, the proportion of recommendations and commendations related to management and governance, including strategic planning and internal structure and communication, grew in each audit cycle. This may be attributable to several factors that occurred over the decade, including a greater focus on university differentiation, an increase in compliance responsibilities, and the complexity of institutional decision-making in a rapidly shifting policy context. Whether the shift in emphasis within the audit reports occurred on the part of the audit panels, NZUAAU, the universities themselves or a combination of all three is difficult to unpack.

Figure 2: Academic audit recommendations, commendations and affirmations by cycle, 2000 – 2010



Secondly, and as shown in Figure 2, the number of recommendations made by audit panels has been decreasing in each cycle.⁴ It is NZUAAU’s view that this trend is most likely to be attributable to a general maturing of the universities’ quality assurance processes over this time. Academic audit was still relatively new in New Zealand in 2000. Since Cycle 2, the areas of focus and level of specificity of the audit reports have shifted. At the same time, universities have individually responded to recommendations in preceding cycles as well as to changes that have occurred in the external quality context.

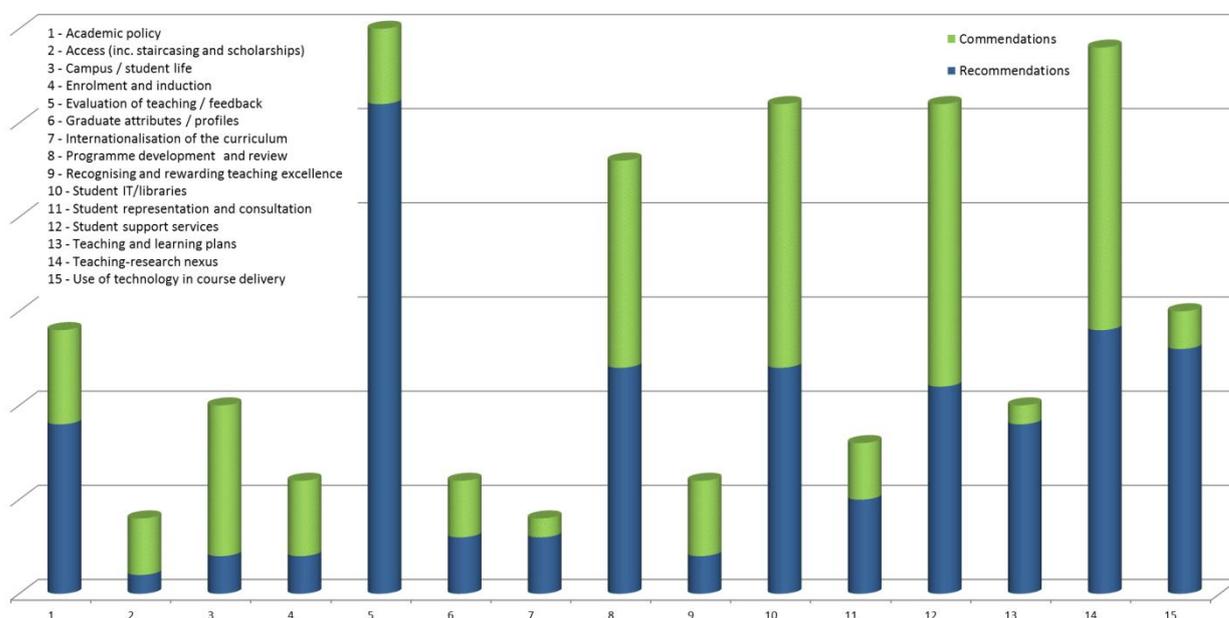
This means that while some areas remain challenging and others will emerge as the external context changes, the role of audit panels in Cycle 4 appears to be increasingly one of affirming and commending good practice, and fine-tuning the implementation of recommendations previously adopted by the institutions. The narrowing of recommendations and a proportional increase in commendations (along with the addition of affirmations in Cycle 4) suggests there is good practice going on in most areas in most institutions most of the time. Thus, the focus of audit for NZUAAU and the universities might be best characterised now as a drive for continuous improvement rather than the exposure of significant risks to academic quality.

⁴ While Cycle 4 is incomplete, with three audits remaining the number of recommendations and commendations made in Cycle 4 is very unlikely to exceed Cycles 2 or 3.

Chapter Two: Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning was the nominated focus of Cycle 3 audits undertaken between 2002 and 2007, but remains a fundamental component of all audits of academic quality undertaken by the NZUAAU. As shown in Figure 3, universities received many commendations from audit panels for the development of student information technology and library services, and improvements in student services and campus/student life. This reflects significant redevelopments and new initiatives by several New Zealand universities in these areas over the last decade. Commendations also focused on universities’ approaches to programme development and approval, and evidence of the teaching-research nexus (practical and effective ways in which research informs teaching and teaching informs research). Several areas to emerge during the decade included the development of graduate profiles, and greater use of technology in teaching and learning, including on-line delivery of courses. One area to remain a constant theme across the period was the evaluation of teaching (including how institutions respond to student feedback).

Figure 3: Teaching and learning recommendations and commendations, 2000 – 2010



Evaluation of teaching/feedback

As shown in Figure 3, evaluation of teaching (including responding to student feedback) was most prominent theme of recommendations about teaching and learning made to New Zealand universities over the past 10 years. Each university received recommendations relating to the need to improve the way in which they sought feedback from students on the quality of teaching, and on the mechanisms through which they acknowledge and respond to that feedback. This continues to be a theme in Cycle 4, along with affirmation of actions underway in several institutions to address this issue. In Cycle 4, recommendations have moved to making greater use of information technology in the appraisal of teaching and course quality, and the tracking and dissemination of the results of evaluation.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The panel recommends that the University develops ways to ensure timely feedback to students on the outcomes of teaching and course evaluations.”

Teaching-research nexus

The teaching-research nexus received a considerable amount of attention in Cycle 2, when several institutions selected it as their chosen topic for audit (alongside the sector-wide theme of research). Many commendations were received for university initiatives to encourage debate about the nexus, and to support staff in practical ways to link teaching and research. Recommendations were made to universities to reinforce the interdependence of research and teaching in academic policies, and in teaching and research activities. The nexus has not been a prominent feature of either Cycle 3 (which focused on teaching and learning) or Cycle 4 (whole of institution audits), but this may reflect a shift away debate towards more established practices across the sector.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 2 (2000 – 2001):

“It is recommended that, as a means of enhancing the teaching/research nexus [the University] consider including mention of the need for the link in relevant [University] staffing policies and documents such as academic staff promotion criteria and position descriptions.”

Student IT / libraries

In Cycle 2 (2000 – 2001), several universities received recommendations related to the depth of, and user access to, their library collections. By Cycle 3, recommendations and commendations moved to focus on the relationship between library services and information technology, with a number of universities commended for initiatives designed to increase access and meet students’ expectations of learning within a technology-rich environment. In Cycle 4, these actions have again been endorsed, with universities commended on efforts to ensure the same quality of service and facilities is available to students regardless of where they are located.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel commends the University for the effectiveness and positive impact of the investment in the Library since the Cycle 3 academic audit with the enhancement to the physical environment, to electronic and other resources, and to the services in support of staff and student research, teaching and learning activities as evidence by the overall positive comments on those interviewed.”

Student support services

Student support services received a large number of recommendations and commendations over the decade. Across the three Cycles, most institutions were commended on the support services they provided to students, with individual institutions reminded of the particular needs of students with disabilities, students based on satellite campuses, and international students. Several institutions were commended on the development of English language support services and related initiatives designed to prevent or address issues associated with inadequate preparation for university-level study. Audit panels also highlighted the importance of systems designed to identify and support students at risk.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The panel commends the University for the commitment and competence of student support staff.”

Programme development and review

In Cycles 2 and 3, universities received many commendations for the systematic way in which they planned and undertook programme or qualification development and approval. The role of stakeholder participation (including students and community groups) was endorsed in some institutions and reinforced as an area for improvement in others. Audit panels highlighted the need for regular review integrating the views of students.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The University is commended for the strength of the processes related to the reviews of programmes and departments.”

Use of technology in course delivery

In Cycle 2 (2000 – 2001), recommendations emerged that universities needed to take a proactive and strategic approach to the development of web-based courses and the integration of information technology into the curriculum. By Cycle 3, there were some commendations for initiatives in the development and implementation of flexible learning and teaching, but the need for adequate training and support for affected staff was being reinforced by several audit panels. Audit reports during this time stressed the need for institution-wide leadership to support pedagogical change, and also highlighted the importance of monitoring the impact and effectiveness of increased use of information technology and related changes in course delivery mechanisms. In Cycle 4, audit panels have found a level of divergence between some institutions' stated strategic objectives in this area and visible outcomes. Institutions have been reminded of the need for adequate investment (including academic staff training and support), and of the importance of monitoring the effectiveness of this investment to ensure improved success and outcomes for learners, including students learning from a distance.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel recommends that the University provides greater clarification about the strategic role of media-rich technology in teaching and learning and that more focused effort be put into getting and helping academic staff to make optimum use of the opportunities afforded by such technology.”

Teaching and learning plans

The need for an institution-wide teaching and learning plan that includes operational priorities, accountabilities and measures emerged as a strong recommendation to several universities during the decade. Audit panels stressed the need for oversight of the plan, linkages to budgets, well-defined performance indicators and clear processes to monitor the impact of teaching and learning plans on the student learning experience.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 2 (2000 – 2001):

“It is recommended that a revised Learning and Teaching Operational Plan be developed that reports systematically against the objectives of the Learning and Teaching Plan and includes a process for delineating and implementing priority areas for action.”

➤ Looking ahead

Finding new and more effective ways of responding to student feedback will continue to feature in universities' work plans over the coming years, along with better-integrated and smarter use of technologies, particularly for students studying from a distance.

Internationalisation of the curriculum received some attention throughout the decade, and continues to feature in universities' strategic intentions, but appears not to be fully embedded within the teaching and learning and other activities of most institutions. Audit reports suggest that there is not yet a clear understanding of what internationalisation means nor a consensus within universities about the implications for teaching and learning.

Several new themes have emerged during the decades. The issue of graduate profiles, or graduate attribute descriptions, rose to prominence and most universities received commendations for the determination of, and emphasis they placed on, describing graduate attributes. Internationally, many universities are moving (some willingly, some reluctantly) towards programme-specific profiles, geared to match student expectations and employer needs. New Zealand universities are likely to face issues building consensus on this matter, as well as the challenge of ensuring these graduate profiles are collectively representative of graduates. Describing and measuring how universities 'add value' to students are likely to be recurring themes.

Several universities received commendations for their efforts to acknowledge and reward teaching excellence. This is likely to be an on-going area of work for all universities given the need to maintain and improve the quality of research-led teaching in an era of Performance-Based Research Funding. As discussion of the role of 'teaching-only' positions continues internationally, the nature of the interrelationship between teaching and research may re-emerge as a theme.

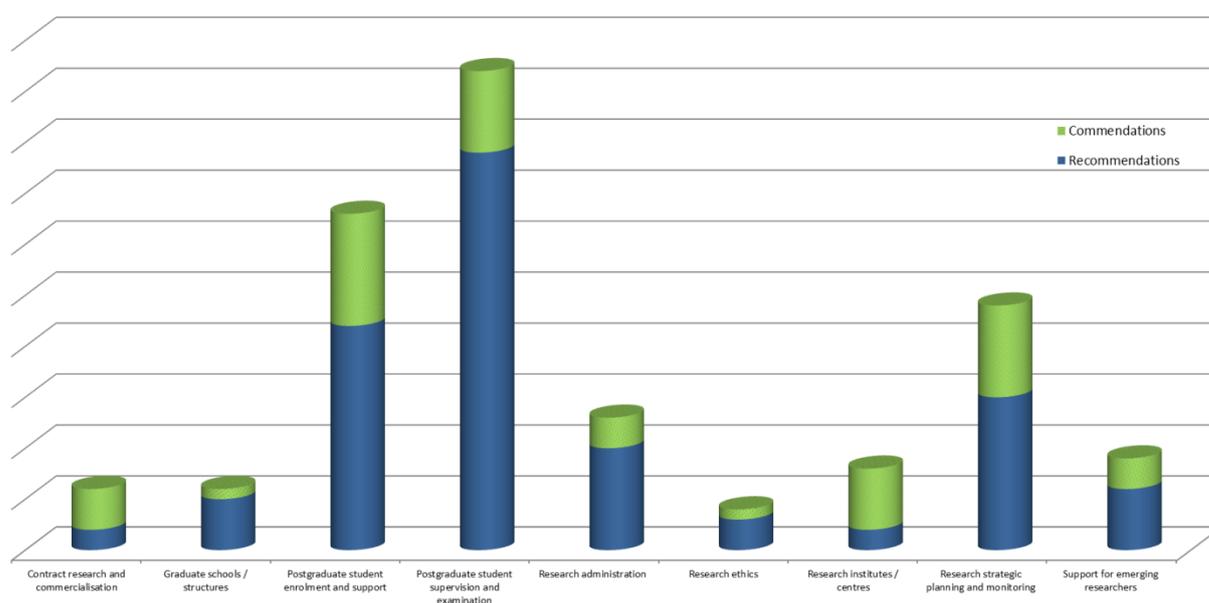
Identifying and supporting students at risk is an increasingly high-profile area internationally and the audit reports suggest further enhancement could occur in New Zealand universities.

Academic policy developments over the decade focused on the movement to course equivalence for papers across degree programmes and campuses, and the need to ensure student assessment policies kept pace with those changes. The development and integration of academic honesty/plagiarism policies into the curriculum and into assessment practices emerged in Cycle 4 and universities are likely to continue to explore new and effective ways of dealing with this issue, which is an international concern.

Chapter Three: Research environment

As shown in Figure 4, audit panel comment on the academic quality of universities’ research environment was largely concentrated on postgraduate student supervision and examination, followed by postgraduate student enrolment and support. Universities received many commendations on these topics, but many more recommendations for quality enhancement. Other themes of focus for the audit panels were the development and monitoring of universities’ research strategic plans, and the quality of research administration. University efforts in commercialisation have been commended, as have the establishment of research institutes and centres. Changes in the number and focus of research environment recommendations and commendations over this period directly reflect the introduction of the Performance-Based Research Fund in 2003 (and a deliberate NZUAAU decision not to duplicate the quality assessment activities of the PBRF) as well as the significant efforts made by universities in this area since 2003.

Figure 4: Research Environment recommendations and commendations, 2000 – 2010



Postgraduate student supervision and examination

Cycle 2’s focus on the research environment brought an in-depth consideration of universities’ processes and policies for ensuring quality in postgraduate student supervision and examination. The same challenges observed in Cycle 2 continued into Cycles 3 and 4; namely, the need to develop university-wide standards expected of supervisory arrangements, to ensure adherence with these standards is monitored, and to provide staff and students with the training and resources they require to ensure that the supervisory relationship is supportive of students and their progress. Examples of systematic approaches were commended, along with university initiatives designed to collect and respond to feedback from postgraduate students.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The panel recommends that the University monitors supervisory relationships and the provision of resources for postgraduate students in departments across the University and takes appropriate action where these are not meeting University expectations.”

Postgraduate student enrolment and support

Student handbooks, statements of minimum resources, and the quality of written materials provided to prospective and current postgraduate students dominated recommendations and commendations in Cycle 2. Several universities were commended for the robustness of their procedures for monitoring progress and for reviewing and improving administrative processes. Cycle 4 recommendations and commendations have focused on developing student-centred enrolment and transition processes, along with affirmations of universities' plans to make further improvements in this area while growing postgraduate student numbers.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel commends the orientation, induction and mentoring processes for PhD students.”

Research strategic planning and monitoring

The Cycle 2 audit cycle was held in the years just prior to the first Performance-Based Research Fund evaluation in 2003. The recommendations made by audit panels in 2001-02 focused on the need in some universities for a well-articulated research plan that described a long-term strategic vision, identified priority research areas and installed the mechanisms to monitor results. Commendations were made to universities with plans and evaluation mechanisms already in place. By Cycle 4, the focus of audit panel commentary had shifted to commendation of the evident commitment of institutions to building research productivity, and to reminding institutions of the need for succession planning.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel recommends that the University responds to the risk it faces in some areas of being unduly dependent for research productivity on a small number of high performing research staff.”

Other

Outside of the above themes, most of the recommendations and commendations on research were limited to Cycle 2 (2000 – 2001). The creation of research institutes and centres was a theme at most universities in Cycle 2, with several universities commended for their plans and initiatives for the establishment of institutes and centres. At the time, audit panels pointed out the need for regular monitoring and review. There has been little discussion of research administration, research ethics policies and processes, and graduate schools/university-wide structures for postgraduate student administration since Cycle 2. This might suggest these areas are not a major feature of universities' current strategic objectives, or they are so well embedded as to be taken for granted.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 2 (2000 – 2001):

“It is recommended that the Postgraduate and Research School continue to monitor developed Research Centres, Institutes and Units, and future proposals for such entities, to ensure that they are consistent with and will work to enhance the specified Research Platforms and Themes.”

➤ Looking ahead

Growing postgraduate student enrolments and completion rates are strategic objectives common to many New Zealand universities. As postgraduate student numbers increase, assuring the quality of supervisory arrangements and of postgraduate admission and enrolment procedures is likely to be a focus for some universities. Meeting student and staff expectations of resources is likely to be an on-going issue, particularly as greater numbers of postgraduate students exert further pressure on facilities, academic staff time, and department and university finances.

For all universities, the monitoring of research strategic plans occurs, in part, through their participation in the Performance-Based Research Fund. Responding to the results of that evaluation will be a focus for universities after the 2012 round. Universities are likely to be looking closely at their approach to identifying and promoting strategically determined areas of research strength, fostering emerging researchers, succession planning, and examining the quality of their research policies and administrative practices.

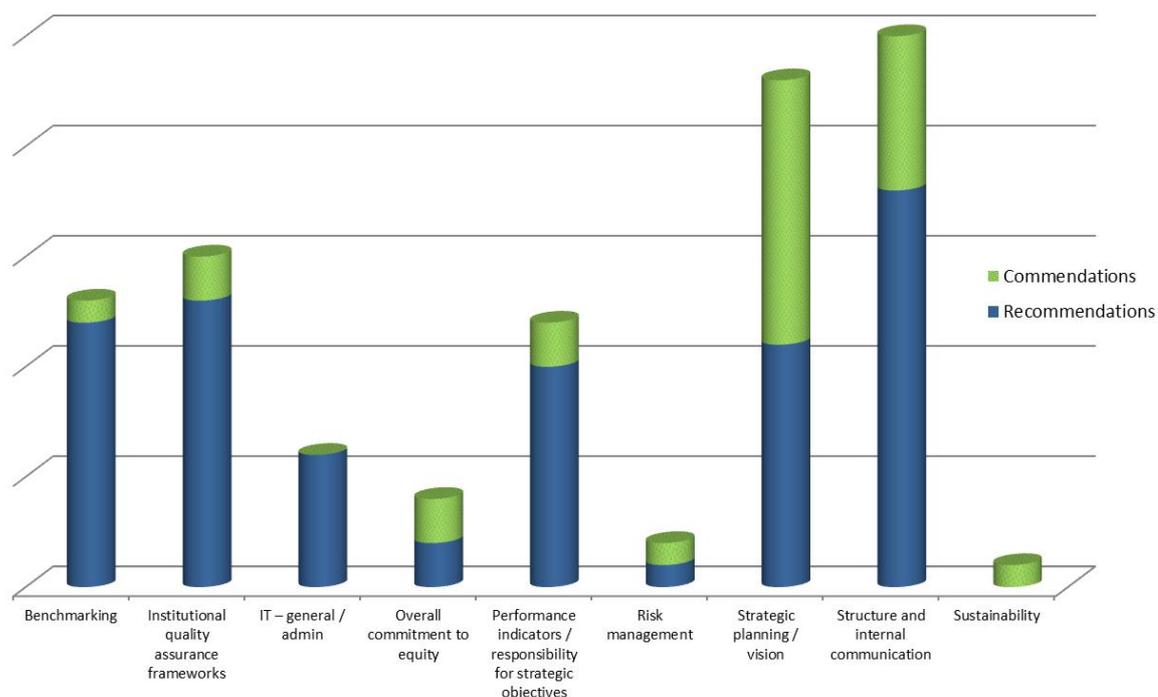
While several universities were commended for their commitment to high-quality contract research and commercialisation in Cycle 2, there has been little academic audit analysis of progress in this area since 2001. An area of focus for universities themselves is likely to be monitoring the success of these activities against their strategic objectives. Cycle 4 has seen reminders of the need for a clear framework for commercialisation activities that includes appropriate training for academic staff wishing to identify and exploit commercial opportunities.

Following the establishment of a number of research institutions and centres over the last 10 years, review of these units may be a feature of the coming decade.

Chapter Four: Management and governance

As shown in Figure 5, the key themes of structure and internal communication, performance indicators, institutional quality assurance frameworks, benchmarking and strategic planning/vision have dominated audit panel findings in the area of university management and governance over the past 10 years. To a lesser extent, universities’ information technology systems have also received some attention.

Figure 5: Management and governance recommendations and commendations, 2000 – 2010



Structure and internal communication

In Cycle 2, recommendations were made to five universities about their structure and internal communication, largely related to clarifying responsibilities across faculties and divisions, enhancing internal communication and ensuring consistency in service and quality for students. By Cycle 3 and into Cycle 4, the focus of recommendations had shifted toward the importance of effective two-way communication between senior management/leadership teams, and their Council, faculties, schools and administrative units. Several universities were commended on the way they had implemented changes in management structure over this period. The need for strong academic leadership and participatory decision-making emerged in recommendations in Cycle 4.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The panel recommends that the University review the roles and responsibilities of key committees, Deans and Heads of schools and departments with the aim of: confirming accountabilities, clarifying the understanding of roles and responsibilities and strengthening the alignment of committee work at all levels with the University’s goals, objectives and strategic priorities.”

Strategic planning/vision

The strategic planning and vision of universities has been the subject of many commendations and recommendations since 2000. In Cycle 2, recommendations focused on the need to develop an inclusive strategy that included the input of Council, senior managers and other university staff. By Cycle 3 and 4, audit panels were commending most universities on the consultation and communication that surrounded the development of strategies, and for the clear articulation of their institutional vision. The importance of coherence between institutional strategic objectives, and unit plans and policies, has been emphasised.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel commends the leadership of the Vice-Chancellor for articulating a far-reaching and ambitious vision for the University and the manner in which there has been extensive consultation and communication.”

Institutional quality assurance frameworks

Institutional quality assurance frameworks have been a particular focus of academic audit panels in Cycles 3 and 4, and recommendations suggest universities could do more to meet their stated objectives in this area. While commending examples of good practice, audit panels noted the need for a more systematic framework in almost all universities to enable the monitoring and review of quality in teaching and research, as well as of functional areas including service and support departments. Recommendations in Cycle 3, and particularly Cycle 4, have reinforced the need for quality assurance systems that make a strong link between strategic objectives, policies and practices, and provide ways of integrating results into professional development and the enhancement initiatives of administrative and teaching units.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel recommends that the University develops and implements an overarching quality assurance framework that not only includes qualification reviews but also the systematic external reviews of key functional areas such as Colleges, Schools, Departments and service and support departments.”

Benchmarking

Benchmarking was a strong theme of comments made by audit panels in Cycle 3. Initial efforts made by universities in this area were endorsed, with all universities receiving recommendations that a more robust and systematic approach be adopted to ensure the development of appropriate benchmarks and increased institution-wide understanding of their application. In Cycle 4, most universities appear to be actively involved in national and, to a lesser extent, international benchmarking of a variety of activities across the institutions. A focus remains on the identification and application of appropriate benchmarks to assist in the enhancement of research-led teaching and learning.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The panel recommends that the University develops an institution-wide understanding of benchmarking in teaching and learning and develops more formal processes to enhance national and international benchmarking of teaching and learning.”

Performance indicators/responsibility for strategic objectives

In Cycle 2 and, to a lesser extent, Cycle 3, a number of recommendations and commendations were made relating to the development of operational and strategic plans that sit below and are aligned with the University's overarching strategic plan (i.e. at faculty level, for teaching and learning, and for research). In Cycles 3 and 4, this moved progressively towards recommendations that institutions identify specific performance indicators and highlighted the need to develop effective, integrated datasets to monitor the achievement of stated objectives.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

"The panel recommends that the University ensures there is an institution-wide infrastructure for the collection and analysis of relevant quantitative as well as qualitative data in order to provide effective monitoring of progress towards institutional goals and objectives."

IT - general/admin

University administrative IT systems have been the subject of several recommendations in each cycle, reinforcing the need for coordinated systems that provide for the efficient sharing of information and resources and minimal duplication of effort, especially across multiple sites.⁵

➤ Looking ahead

Universities are encouraged to continue to develop and enhance institution-wide quality assurance frameworks.

Having developed benchmarking systems, and responded to the need for appropriate performance indicators linked to strategic objectives, the next challenge for some institutions will be the adequacy of institution-wide datasets. For universities more advanced in this area, a focus will be on application of these benchmarks and performance indicators to operational and strategic decision making in a meaningful way. Developing ways of measuring success, particularly with regard to teaching and learning, is likely to be an on-going challenge.

Sustainability, risk management and an institution-wide commitment to equity are themes that emerged in Cycle 4.⁶ All three of these areas remain topical and relevant in the national and international university context.

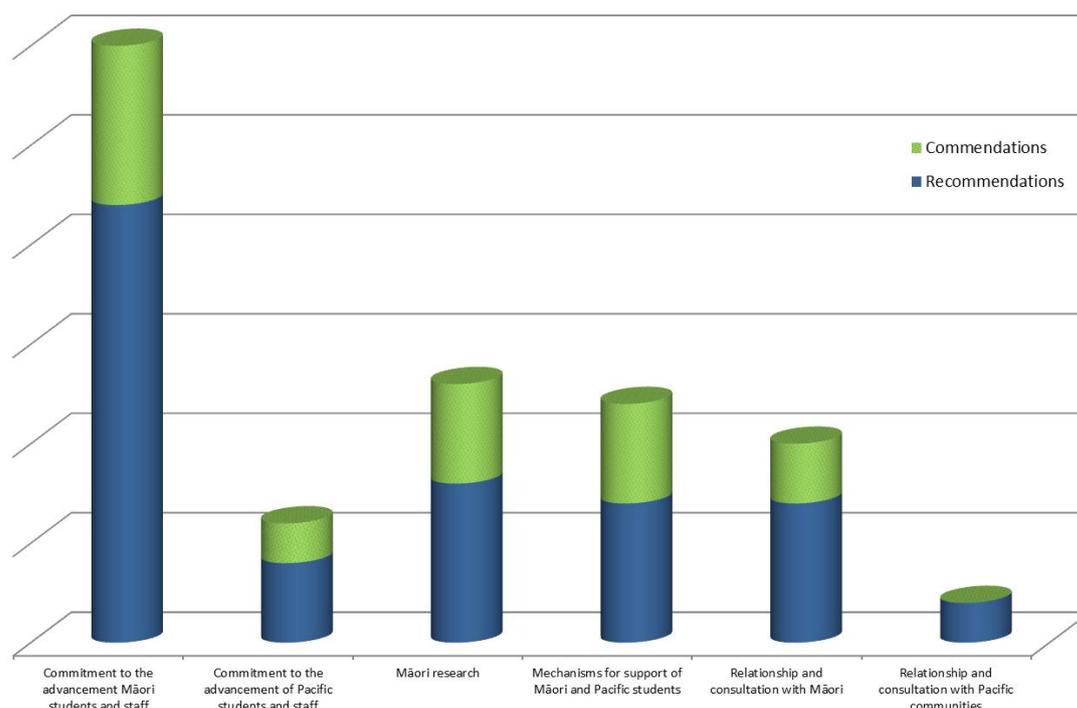
⁵ Student IT systems are covered in Chapter Two: Teaching and learning

⁶ Equity initiatives related to Māori and Pacific students and staff and are covered in greater detail in Chapter Five: Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Pacific.

Chapter Five: Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Pacific

As shown in Figure 6, audit panels found much to commend in universities’ commitment to the advancement of Māori students and staff over the last 10 years. They also found areas where further action was desirable to give effect to strategic objectives, particularly in the development of meaningful and effective relationships with Māori. Over the course of the decade, audit panels began to highlight the need for greater commitment and visible actions in pursuit of the advancement of Pacific students and staff.⁷

Figure 6: Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Pacific recommendations and commendations, 2000 – 2010



Commitment to the advancement of Māori students and staff

While commitment to the advancement of Māori has been a strong focus of audit reports over the past decade, what cannot be readily seen in Figure 6 is the progress of universities during that time, along with the level of variability that remains within the sector. In Cycle 2 (2000 – 2001), all New Zealand universities received recommendations related to improving their active commitment to the advancement of Māori students and staff; by Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007) several universities were being commended for their plans and progress. In Cycle 4, several universities have been commended for the visible and practical ways in which their commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi has been embedded and is expressed throughout the university.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel commends the extent to which the principles of the Treaty and the values underlying it are embedded and expressed within the culture of the University including Māori student support, community engagement, campus culture and the overall distinctiveness of the University.”

⁷ The term ‘Pacific’ (ie., Pacific students and staff, and Pacific peoples) has been used throughout this report reflecting the language used in NZUAAU audit reports during the period under review, and as a collective term for all peoples from, or self-identifying with, the Pacific region.

For other universities, recommendations in Cycle 4 have highlighted the need for greater institution-wide awareness and commitment to the Treaty. Audit panels have commented on the role of well-defined objectives and effective mechanisms for monitoring to ensure institutions retain a focus on building Māori capability and leadership.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel recommends that the University includes a goal regarding Māori student retention and achievement in the Strategic Plan and associated actions and targets in the relevant operational plans which would bring the issue to the attention of the University community and which would support and direct the responses of Faculty and Schools to this issue.”

Māori Research

Several universities received recommendations and commendations surrounding the establishment and funding of Māori research units and activities in Cycles 2 and 3. Into Cycle 4, the focus of some of the universities has been on creating Māori research professorships, with an aim of increasing research productivity, as well as heightening visibility and providing leadership within the university.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel commends the University for appointing a Professor of Māori Research with responsibilities across the University and for the proactive approach taken by the appointee to engage with the University community.”

Mechanisms for support of Māori and Pacific students

In conjunction with an increasingly active commitment to the advancement of Māori students and staff, the past decade saw the emergence of a number of practical initiatives intended to support the success of Māori and Pacific students. Universities have been commended on academic provisions and support structures specifically geared to the needs of prospective and current Māori and Pacific students. Audit panels commented particularly favourably on initiatives that are being delivered by, and tailored to, the departments, schools and programmes in which the students are enrolled.

Commitment to the advancement of Pacific students and staff

Commitment to the advancement of Pacific students and staff is a theme that has emerged over the course of the decade, focused almost entirely in the universities based in the North Island of New Zealand. In Cycle 4, audit panels have reinforced university objectives in this area, highlighting the need for specific targets and planning activities that recognise Pacific peoples as a distinctive stakeholder group.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The panel recommends that the University develops and implements a strategy to facilitate and manage possible growth in numbers of Pacific Island and Pasifika students if the University is to fulfil its Charter commitment to build and enhance the Pacific dimension of the University’s special character.”

➤ Looking ahead

For some universities, the next period will see consolidation of strong progress they have made with regard to their commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and advancing the needs of Māori students and staff. For others, there is still more to be done to give effect to stated objectives and to instil an institution-wide commitment to the Treaty.

Audit panels have highlighted the building of meaningful and productive relationships with Māori, and with Pacific communities, as being crucial to achievement in this area. This includes exploration of opportunities for collaboration and joint provision of teaching and research programmes.

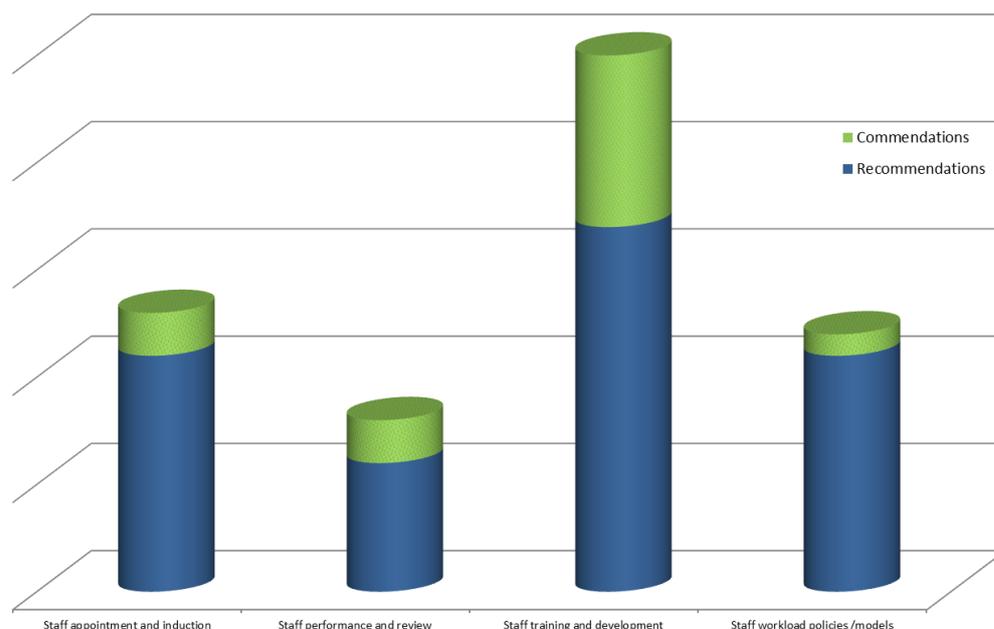
Evaluating the success of Māori research initiatives, including research units and professorial appointments, is likely to be a theme for universities over the next few years, prompted in part by the 2012 Performance-Based Research Fund evaluation.

Finding practical and effective ways of supporting the advancement of Pacific students and staff is a focus of several universities and may emerge as a challenge for other institutions. As part of this, universities may need to look at their frameworks for monitoring the quality and effectiveness of department-led student support initiatives.

Chapter Six: University staff

University staff – particularly, but not exclusively academic staff – have been the topic of many audit panel recommendations and commendations over the past 10 years. Staff training and development have received the most recommendations and commendations, followed by appointment and induction policies and initiatives. Staff workload policies and models have been a constant theme throughout the three audit cycles since 2000.

Figure 7: University staff recommendations and commendations, 2000 – 2010



Staff training and development

Staff training and development have been a focus of all cycles of audit since 2000. The quality and effectiveness of the training and staff development units of universities have received many commendations over the decade, with audit panels particularly impressed with efforts to deliver high-quality, relevant courses and individual assistance to staff. Recommendations for further enhancement have focused on the need to ensure staff are encouraged to make use of these services, including casual and fixed-term staff and those located on satellite campuses. Audit panels have also stressed the need for better integration between staff training and development and other areas of the university, including the strategic priorities of the university, faculty and departmental guidelines, and research development activities.

In Cycle 3 and, particularly, Cycle 4, a focus of audit panel comment has been the need for leadership and management training and development, both for academics and for administrative members of staff. Audit reports have affirmed current and planned initiatives of several universities in this area.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The University is commended for the reputation of the Teaching and Learning Development Unit and for the quality and relevance of its professional development work.”

Staff appointment and induction

In Cycle 2, audit panels made many references to the need for obligatory induction programmes, along with processes for assessing the teaching competence of applicants and new members of staff. In Cycles 3 and 4, this focus shifted to the need for induction processes and courses specifically tailored to the needs of new staff. Audit panels suggested these should take into account prior teaching experience, anticipated academic duties, and interactions with students. Recommendations have also been made related to the use of induction programmes to increase understanding of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, and promote diversity and cultural awareness.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The Panel recommends that the University requires mandatory and timely participation by all new appointees to the academic staff of the University in induction and orientation programmes that are strongly linked with the academic duties and responsibilities to students, the University and the discipline.”

Staff workload policies and models

Academic staff workload policies and models have received attention throughout all cycles of audit since 2000. Most universities received recommendations during this time, with audit panels particularly keen to see the development of institution-wide guidelines about maximum numbers of postgraduate students per supervisor, administrative demands, and ensuring the Performance-Based Research Fund and the cultural leadership roles undertaken by some staff do not negatively affect the time available for staff to enhance the quality of teaching. The need for monitoring of staff workload has been emphasised, with efforts underway in some universities affirmed by audit panels in Cycle 4.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel recommends that the University implements some form of on-going University-wide monitoring of staff workload with stronger University guidelines which facilitate equity of workload across cognate areas and with approved mechanisms to allow divergences.”

➤ Looking ahead

Staff performance and review is an area that has received only limited attention by audit panels over the last decade, but recommendations suggest there is further work to be done by some universities to ensure reviews are improvement-focussed and incorporate the wide range of activities undertaken by staff. This may be particularly topical after the 2012 Performance-Based Research Fund evaluation, with debate likely to continue about how universities can best structure staff appointments, departments and workloads to ensure high-quality teaching within a research-led environment.

Guidelines and monitoring frameworks for staff workloads are likely to continue to be a focus for audit, particularly as universities endeavour to balance research and postgraduate-intensive strategic objectives alongside the need for quality teaching, strong academic leadership and succession planning. The heavy workload borne by some Māori academics has been highlighted by audit panels, and could continue to be a challenge for some individuals, departments and institutions.

Induction and training programmes that are relevant to the needs of staff, as well as linked to the strategic and operational plans of the university, will continue to be a focus for institutions. For some universities, particularly those that have made significant structural and strategic changes over the past decade, balancing staff development needs and commitments (such as doctoral study) will be an issue for several years to come.

Chapter Seven: Community engagement and partnerships

Community engagement and partnerships is a topic that has received relatively little, but largely positive, attention throughout the audit cycles. Several universities have been commended for their close ties with the cities and regions in which they are located and delivering services, and for their efforts to build positive and effective working relationships with local communities.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 3 (2002 – 2007):

“The University is commended for (i) the strength and depth of relationships and mutual support between the University and the City (ii) the pride in the University held by the community”

The decade saw many universities strengthen their links with secondary schools, and with Crown Research Institutes (including co-location in some instances). Several audit panels highlighted the importance of effective stakeholder engagement, with universities encouraged to find systematic mechanisms for gaining input from employers, professional bodies and alumni.

Audit Report extract, Cycle 4 (2008 – 2012):

“The panel affirms the University’s intention to undertake a study of best practice in employer input into the curriculum, teaching and learning and to develop an implementation plan in areas where this is currently missing or inadequate.”

In Cycle 2, some institutions were looking at or had advanced plans for franchised or inter-institutional delivery of programmes, including outside of New Zealand. Institutions were reminded then, and in Cycle 4, to include these activities in institution-wide monitoring of the quality of teaching and research activities, and to ensure that involved staff are provided with appropriate levels of training and support.

Levels of international engagement and collaboration grew during the decade, and institutions were commended for initiatives that involved opportunities for teaching and research collaboration, and that embraced both academic and administrative/management staff.

➔ Looking ahead

Universities will continue to maintain and build their engagement with relevant communities and individual stakeholders, consistent with their strategic objectives and operational needs.

Greater employer input into programme development is a trend emerging internationally, and some New Zealand universities have foreseen a task ahead to work out how best to reconcile employer and alumni input with professional bodies’ needs, student expectations and academic imperatives.

With the capping of funded students restricting the number of places offered throughout the country, the coordination of advice to prospective students with secondary schools will remain of high importance, and universities will continue to work closely with schools. The restriction of funded places may also see some universities looking closely at how they spread resources and services across multiple locations.

With Government funding of research looking to continue to favour joint initiatives, monitoring the quality of joint initiatives, nationally and internationally, will be an on-going focus for universities.

Efforts to expand the international profile and activities of universities are likely to continue, with increased focus on connections that result in tangible opportunities and benefits to staff and students, including opportunities for international research funding.