



Self-review for Academic Audit

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Academic
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For New Zealand Universities

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



Why is self-review necessary?

Emphasis on *self*.

Ensures audit process recognizes and respects the autonomy and individuality of the institution/university.

Provides opportunity for the institution/university to identify *for itself* what it does well, what could be improved and what challenges need to be addressed.



Some benefits flowing from self-review

- Verifying that processes are in place, and whether these are operating effectively;
- Determining whether existing policies & procedures are effective in meeting institutional objectives, and identifying any gaps;
- Enhancing staff and student understanding of organisational processes and outcomes;
- Uncovering “local” examples of good practice which might not be evident at institutional level;



Some benefits flowing from self-review, ctd

“Reality testing” whether achievements and processes are in line with strategic goals;

Encouraging benchmarking, internally and/or externally; providing a base for ongoing benchmarking;

Promoting a culture of quality within the institution;

Encouraging participation in and engagement with that “culture of quality” by all staff and students;




Some benefits flowing from self-review, ctd

Promoting an evidence-based approach to development and implementation of policies and procedures;

Promoting learning;

Identifying (and celebrating) good practice and effective innovative practice;

Enabling self-identification of improvement gaps and exploring strategies to address these.



Focus on existing quality assurance strategies and procedures

“A self-review for audit should provide opportunity and incentive for staff ... to reflect on the effectiveness and outcomes of their *existing* quality assurance procedures.”

(Handbook, pg 14, emph added)



Key Self-review Questions

What are we doing?

Why, and how are we doing this?

Do we achieve what we want to achieve?

Do we meet the AQA Guideline?

How do we know?

What, if anything, are we going to do to improve or sustain our achievement?

(Handbook pg 14).



Key Self-review Questions, ctd.

What is our objective? **Plan**

What are we doing? **Do**

How are we doing this? **Do**

Do we achieve what we want to achieve? **Check**

Do we meet the AQA Guideline? **Check**

How do we know? What is the evidence? **Check**

What, if anything, are we going to do to improve or sustain our achievement? **Act**

(AQA Audit Handbook 2013, pg 14).



Approaches to Self-review

There is no one model for self-review

Possible strategies include:

Surveys

Workshops

Semi-structured discussions

Analysis of existing data

Key informants



Approaches to Self-review – Main steps

- Design the review process
- Identify and collate the information
- Develop the assessment tool(s)
- Undertake the assessment;
- Analyse the results;
- Identify strengths, weaknesses, enhancement opportunities
- Report
- Reflect
- Act – develop or consolidate enhancement initiatives
- Evaluate the review process and outcomes – was it fit for purpose?



Approaches to Self-review

Include multi-perspectives if possible;


Ensure a student perspective is canvassed for any activity which affects or involves students;

Encourage academic buy-in and ownership – these are *academic* audits.



Some potential pitfalls in Self-review

- Unclear purpose; non-alignment with objectives.
- Putting a public relations “spin” on the outcome (losing genuine opportunity for improvement);
- Having a “bureaucratic” perspective (tick box - reduces genuine opportunity for improvement)
- Over-reliance on surveys; review/survey fatigue
- Duplicated processes (from poor planning)
- Information overload (from unclear purpose)
- Inability to identify what evidence is robust
- Misinterpretation of outcomes (eg causal relationships)
- Unrealistic recommendations
- Overreliance on small number of individuals to conduct the self-review and/or implement outcomes.



Some key features of successful (ie useful) self-reviews

- Leadership – heads of organisational units recognize value, provide vision, set the scope, encourage buy-in.
- Planning – units need adequate time to prepare, collate data. Time is needed to facilitate collective ownership.
- Clear intention of purpose – compliance or improvement?
- An intrinsic part of institutional quality management.

(AUQA analysis 2008)



Successful self-reviews lead to useful audits

Institutions which adopt an open, inclusive, reflective and evaluative approach to their self-review are more likely to achieve an audit outcome which they find useful.

Institutions which consciously use the self-review as part of their ongoing quality assurance strategy are more likely to see audit outcomes as useful.

(see AQA Audit Handbook 2013, pg 16).



Evidence

Triangulation

Never draw a conclusion based on a single piece of evidence.

- Multiple sources of data
- Multiple methods of data collection
- Different types of data



Useful references

- R. Adams, et al. *Self-Review for Higher Education Institutions*. Australian Universities Quality Agency, December 2008.
- The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. *Good Practice in Reflective Analysis when Preparing for Enhancement-led Institutional review*. Universities Scotland Teaching Quality Forum Project, 2009.



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